

An International Comparative Study on the Working Conditions of School Personnel

The study involved conducting surveys in England, Scotland, Finland, and Japan from January to May 2008 to explore the labour conditions of teachers working full-time at primary and secondary schools.

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(Full Report Published in November 2008)



National Foundation
for Educational Research

The study involved conducting surveys in England, Scotland, Finland, and Japan from January to May in 2008 to enquire into the labour conditions of school personnel working full-time at primary or secondary schools. We chose the UK as a data collection site with a particular interest in learning how the implementation of national academic tests might impact on the working conditions of school personnel; therefore we conducted surveys in England, which widely implements national achievement tests, as well as in Scotland, which does not employ a comprehensive system of national testing. We also wanted to be careful not to assume that the UK can be understood as one single country without having to pay attention to regional differences within it. Finland was selected because it was known for its students' high academic achievements measured by international assessment tests. We wanted to examine school personnel's working conditions of the country, that could enhance students' good academic performance. The survey included questions that asked about teachers' "working hours" not only in terms of teaching classes but rather that reflected a wide variety of teachers' duties, including attending various staff meetings and meeting with pupils outside of a class to provide them with academic, disciplinary, and other types of guidance and counselling.

The following are the summary of results with a central focus paid to comparing Japan with the other three international research sites. In conclusion, we proposed a set of recommendations on improving the working conditions of school personnel in Japan.

1. Teachers' Working Conditions in Japan

(1) Longer working hours at school and total working hours per week

Working hours at school were calculated as: (Average time of leaving school) – (Average time of arriving at school) – (Average minutes for breaks). Based on this formula, teachers in Japan had the longest hours of working at school per day.

	Work hours/day	Break	Hours of sleep
Japan	11 hrs 06 min	20 min	6 hrs 23 min
England	8 hrs 30 min	45 min	7 hrs 45 min
Scotland	7 hrs 36 min	50 min	7 hrs 47 min
Finland	6 hrs 16 min	45 min	7 hrs 43 min

Total working hours per week were also calculated as: (Working hours at school per day) x 5 days + (Hours of school-related work at home per week reported by respondents). In this, teachers in Japan also had the longest hours of working.

	Work hours per week	(At school + At home)
Japan	61 hrs 34 min	(55 hrs 30min + 6 hrs 04 min)
England	51 hrs 20 min	(42 hrs 30min + 8 hrs 50 min)
Scotland	45 hrs 09 min	(38 hrs 00min + 7 hrs 09 min)
Finland	37 hrs 34 min	(31 hrs 20min + 6 hrs 14 min)

Notably, the above calculation does not include the hours of working during weekends. In Japan, many teachers work on Saturdays and Sundays especially to supervise students' participation in extracurricular club practices and activities.

(2) Less time to prepare for classes

Following is an excerpt of results showing the average amount of time when teachers engage in non-teaching activities per month. Presuming that the average number of days to work per month is 21.5 days (5 days a week and 4.3 weeks per month), 21.5 in the below table would indicate that a teacher engaged in a particular activity once everyday.

	Preparing for a class	Paperwork	Teacher training
Japan	35.0	22.8	0.8
England	49.6	18.8	2.4
Scotland	48.1	13.4	1.6
Finland	34.0	5.7	2.2

(3) Pressures associated with changes to education policy and with the attitudes of students/families

The survey asked respondents to answer on a 5-point Likert scale regarding items to evaluate their work, schools, and working conditions, with 5 being a "strongly agree" on a given statement and 1 being "strongly disagree".

- A similar trend was seen in all four countries, to give a high score on the statement "I feel busier than before." However Japan had highest score among the four: Japan (4.3), England (4.1), Scotland (4.0), and Finland (3.3).
- Statements on which Japan scored markedly higher than the other three were "The work load is too much to continue the job" (Japan 4.0; England 2.2; Scotland 1.9; Finland 1.7), "Communicating with students and their carers is tiring" (Japan 3.7; England and Scotland 2.2; Finland 2.1), and "My current knowledge is not enough" (Japan 3.3; England and Scotland 2.0; Finland 1.9).
- Considering that numerous changes are being made to educational policy in Japan, such as a renewed system of teacher evaluation, modifications of national school curriculum, re-introduction of national academic assessment tests, and recent inauguration of Special Needs Education modifying its older special education system, the high score given on the last statement ("My current knowledge is not enough") by Japanese teachers may indicate that they are pressured and confused by frequent changes affecting their jobs.





(4) Teachers' perception of "teachers' duties" and what they actually do

The survey listed 16 tasks and asked teachers to mark the ones they considered as "teachers' duties."

- On average, Japanese teachers marked the most items (Japan 10, England 8.3, Scotland 8.2, Finland 8.0), suggesting that Japanese teachers perceive their job more broadly than the teachers in the other three countries.
- Tasks that were selected as teachers' duties significantly more often by Japanese teachers included "Supervising and directing the activities of students council" (Japan 92.1, England 45.1, Scotland 56.3, Finland 32.8) and "Providing students with guidance on after-graduation decisions" (Japan 82.4, England 26.6, Scotland 31.3, Finland 42.4).

For the same 16 tasks, the survey also asked what type of staff did them – teachers, non-teaching staff, educational administrative officers, parents/carers, people in the community, or others – and we calculated the difference between what the teachers considered to be their duties and what they actually did.

- Several items that were shown to be what Japanese teachers do although they do not believe to be their duties were "Supervising students' voluntary activities and community services," "Discipline," "Supervising students' eating habits," "Participating in community events," and "Supervising non-academic clubs and extracurricular activities."
- With regard to non-teaching interactions with students, such as playing with them during breaks and supervising students on their students' council activities, extracurricular activities, and safety, there was a tendency found in England, Scotland, and Finland that various staff other than teachers were involved, whilst in Japan the percentages of teachers involved in these aspects of non-teaching activities were high.

(5) Difficulties with taking breaks and days-off

On a 5-point Likert scale, Japanese teachers scored the highest (i.e., stronger agreement) on the statement “I don’t feel I can take breaks easily at school.” The scores were as follows: Japan (3.5), England (2.4), Scotland (2.2), and Finland (2.3). Reflecting such a response, on average Japanese teachers took the shortest breaks, only about 20 minutes a day, much shorter compared to 45 minutes a day (England and Finland) and 50 minutes a day (Scotland).

Japanese teachers also scored the highest on the statement “I don’t feel I can take days-off easily.” The scores were Japan (3.3), England (2.3), Scotland (2.1), Finland (2.3). Indeed, the average number of days-off that were consecutively taken as summer vacation was only 5.7 days in Japan, much fewer compared to 29.7 days (England), 36.2 days (Scotland), and 63.2 days (Finland).

2. Brief Pictures of Teachers in England, Scotland, and Finland

(1) England

- **Busy teachers** – On a 5-point Likert scale, teachers from England scored the second highest to the statement “The work is too busy to enjoy my life.” The scores were 3.3 (Japan), 3.2 (England), 2.7 (Scotland), and 2.2 (Finland). Similarly, 41% of English teachers marked “strongly agree” to the statement “I feel busier than before.” It was again the second highest next to Japanese teachers, 54% of whom indicated the strongest agreement to this statement.
- **High stress** – The survey included 18 items related to stress, for which English teachers showed the highest overall scores among the four: Japan (3.4), England (5.5), Scotland (4.9), and Finland (3.3). Particularly, the stress level in the area of communication (communication with students, carers, colleagues, etc.) was noticeably high.
- **Shorter summer vacation** – English teachers on average reported the second shortest days of summer vacation with an average of 30 consecutive days, which was shorter than Scotland (36 days) and Finland (63 days).
- **England’s implementation of a national academic testing system** may have contributed to these results, as well as its strict policy of defining the contents of the curriculum and at what speed it should be taught to all students in England.

(2) Scotland

- **Working hours** – Owing to the negotiation on teachers’ labour conditions made between the government and teachers’ union in 2001 (Resulting document titled “A Teaching Profession for the 21st Century”), the survey showed that teachers in Scotland spent on average 42 hours per week at school. Combined with the reported hours of working at home, about 7 hours per week, the total working hours of Scottish teachers still exceed what was agreed in the 2001 negotiation, which was 35 hours per week. However, it is much fewer than the working hours of Japanese teachers (about 61 hours) and also fewer than that of English teachers (about 51 hours).
- **How teachers use their time** – 71.1% of Scottish teachers said they used the time after all the classes were finished and before they left school to prepare for teaching five days a week, which was much greater than 54.1% of Japanese teachers who said the same thing. Teachers in both England and Scotland used their time more frequently on preparing for classes com-

pared to those in Japan and Finland. Approximate numbers of how many times teachers engaged in class preparation per month were Japan (35.0), England (49.6), Scotland (48.1), and Finland (34.0). But unlike England, teachers in Scotland did not spend as much of their time on paperwork: they engaged in paperwork 13.4 times per month, which was about two thirds of the time of teachers in England (18.8 times).

(3) Finland

- Much less paperwork – Teachers in Finland engaged in paperwork only 5.7 times per month, which was one fourth of the time spent by teachers in Japan (22.8 times).
- Not too busy – In addition to having less paperwork to deal with, the primary responsibilities given to Finnish teachers are only to teach classes. Everything other than teaching the required classes is considered participating in either “voluntary teacher training” or “extra teaching” for which teachers are paid separately. As teachers are allowed to engage in those activities anywhere, including outside of school, the hours for teachers in Finland to stay in a school building per day are on average 7 hours, which includes 45 minutes of breaks. The total working hours for teachers in Finland, including the work they do at home, are the lowest of the four countries studied – 37 hours and 34 minutes, less than two thirds of total working hours for teachers in Japan (61 hours and 34 minutes).
- This was clearly reflected in Finnish teachers’ evaluation of their working conditions. Only 3.3% felt that “The work load is too much to continue the job” while 78.6% of Japanese teachers felt this way. Those who felt that “The work is too busy to enjoy my life” were also the fewest in Finland (14.2%), compared to Japan (45.1%).

3. Recommendations on Improving the Working Conditions of Teachers in Japan

- Secure more time for teachers to prepare for classes and to work directly with students.
- For that, it is essential to secure more numbers of full-time school personnel, and to decrease the overtime working hours and the amount of work that teachers do at home by:
 - Promoting smaller classes,
 - Employing more professional staff other than teachers, and
 - Removing the supervising of lunchtime and of extracurricular club activities from teachers’ work responsibilities.
- Like the “Planning, Preparation and Assessment time” (PPA) system of England and a similar system in Scotland, install a policy that secures the time for teachers to do class preparation.
- Secure a long vacation, at least for 2 weeks, so that the teachers can engage in voluntary teacher training activities held in various places.
- The education Ministry, the prefectural and city education boards, and associations of school principals should carefully consider and limit the numbers of various model programs and projects. Limit also the number of study groups.