Teacher Workload in the Irish medium Sector
Evidential Insights

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Executive Summary

This mixed-methods research study set out to critically examine the nature and extent of teacher workload in the Irish-medium Education sector in Northern Ireland. Its aims were to quantify workload in respect of current workload agreements, to explore the causes and impact of the workload on teachers, and to suggest practical strategies to address any identified challenges.

The research was commissioned by Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta and carried out by a team from the Centre for Research in Educational Underachievement at Stranmillis University College, Belfast. The research design comprised three key strands: a review of the research and policy context relating to teacher workload with particular reference to Irish-medium Education; an online survey distributed to all Irish-medium teachers in Northern Ireland and completed by a sample of 130 respondents from Irish-medium nursery, primary and post-primary schools (representing 29% of the sector); and a series of individual and group interviews with a total of 24 principals and teachers from a range of standalone Irish-medium schools and units attached to English-medium schools across Northern Ireland. Data collection took place between October 2024 and January 2025. Full ethical permission was granted by the Research and Ethics Committee of Stranmillis University College, Belfast. A summary of the key findings is presented below.

Teacher Workload in the Irish-medium sector

The findings of this research indicate that Irish-medium teachers in Northern Ireland are facing significant workload challenges unique to their sector. The current workload agreement[1] (which applies to all teachers in Northern Ireland) sets an upper limit of 1,265 hours of directed time (in school) over 195 days per year, but acknowledges that "schools have always been dependent on a commitment from Teachers beyond the legal minimum requirement" to deliver "such activities as games, drama, music and school trips". The agreement adds that the extent of this non-directed time commitment "is for each Teacher to determine for himself or herself" (§5.2). Perhaps deliberately, there is therefore significant ambiguity as to what might be deemed reasonable non-directed time, and no specific guidance in relation to planning, preparation and assessment, above and beyond the 10% allocation within directed time as established under the TNC 2020/1 agreement between management and the Teachers' Negotiating Committee[2].

Assuming 195 days equates to 39 weeks of 5 working days, it is calculated that the workload agreement's directed time limit of 1,265 hours per year equates to 32.4 hours of directed time per week. For the first time, this study reveals that Irish-medium teachers are working 47.2 hours per week on average, 14.8 hours per week over and above the directed time limit. Moreover, four out of five (82%) Irish-medium teachers work more than 40 hours per week, more than a quarter (28%) work more than 50 hours per week, and one in twenty teachers (5%) work more than 60 hours per week. Across a school year of 195 days, the findings from this research indicate that Irish-medium teachers work a total of 1,841 hours, representing 576 hours (or 46%) above the 1,265 hours of directed time stipulated in the current workload agreement, with many reporting that they work much longer hours.

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[1] https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/tnc-20242-workload-agreement
[2] https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/tnc-202001-agreement-between-management-and-trade-union-side-28-april-2020

While it could be argued that all teachers (including English-medium teachers) work over and above their directed time limit, participants in this study are clear that the main factor leading to their excessive workload is the constant sector-specific need for resource creation due to a lack of available and appropriate Irish language materials. Survey respondents reported that their additional workload was caused by a wide range of tasks including the translation of resources (99%, n=129), followed by subject specific resource development (97%, n=126), producing bilingual communications for parents and relevant professionals (85%, n=110), preparation of resources for children with special educational needs (84%, n=109), preparation of additional assessment resources (82%, n=106), supporting children and families with little to no Irish at home (78%, n=102), and additional professional development relevant to develop and/or maintain Irish language competence (76%, n=99).

Interviews reinforce this issue, with teachers frequently reporting the significant evening and weekend workload required to adapt English-language resources or to modify materials from other Irish dialects. The lack of textbooks, past papers, digital content, assessment resources and exemplar material available in Irish exacerbates the problem, while the shortage of Irish-speaking education professionals and the steady growth in class sizes, restricts opportunities for professional development, limits one-to-one pupil support, and in some cases even prevents teachers from taking sick leave. This research found a consistently reported shortage of classroom teachers (especially subject-specific post-primary teachers), substitute teachers and classroom assistants across the sector.

Additionally, inadequate school buildings and facilities negatively affect teaching conditions, making the job of teaching more challenging and impacting on teachers' morale and mental health. A majority of respondents felt that the quality of their school facilities and resources was 'severely inadequate' or 'inadequate' in respect of the play spaces (56%), green spaces (54%), buildings (51%), IT equipment (51%), other resources (51%), and classroom space for the number of children in the room (46%). Principals readily admitted that the inadequate condition of the school buildings had a negative impact both on pupil enrolment and also on teacher recruitment and retention across the sector (where parents and teachers inevitably drew negative comparisons with newer, better resourced English-medium schools)

Many teachers believe their contributions are undervalued, with 76% feeling unappreciated and 87% believing their remuneration is insufficient. Principals in particular consistently reported that classroom assistant recruitment is extremely difficult as the salary is less than what they would receive working in a supermarket, and they were keen to draw attention to the importance and valuable skill set of classroom assistants who are critical to language development within the Irish-medium sector.

The Impact of Excessive Workload

Teachers and school principals report that this excessive workload is having a very significant impact on teachers' professional and personal lives. Survey findings indicate that 87% of teachers find their workload excessive, 81% consider it unsustainable, and 88% believe it negatively impacts their teaching quality. Alarmingly, 80% report that their workload affects their physical health, while 90% say it compromises their mental well-being. Female teachers and those teaching composite classes report particularly high workloads, stress levels and burnout.

Interviews reveal deeply personal struggles, with many teachers describing exhaustion and an inability to maintain a work-life balance. Some reported that their partners questioned their constant work in the evenings and at weekends, while others noted that fatigue extended into school holidays. As one teacher explained *"I can't continue on the way that we're going. Like, not to be dramatic, like I am exhausted and like you crawl to the finish line at every half term, because I suppose that coincides with assessment and translating and all those things like it just, it's not sustainable the way it is."* The sector's goodwill factor appears to be diminishing, particularly among new teachers, who often find the workload overwhelming. Opportunities to work in the Republic of Ireland or the UAE are already being taken up as teachers are increasingly aware of the disparity in pay and conditions.

There is also frustration among teachers and principals that their concerns are not being addressed at a policy level. In line with the findings of *Reviewing the Review: An Audit of Progress on the Review of Irish-medium Education* (Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta, 2025), many feel that repeated petitions for support have not resulted in meaningful change, leading to a sense of disillusionment and disengagement from efforts to influence education policy.

To address workload pressures, surveyed teachers overwhelmingly called for improved resource provision (92%), more planning and preparation time (88%), and additional language assistants (85%). Other key recommendations included increased professional development opportunities (88%), better remuneration (88%), enhanced support for newly qualified teachers (80%), and smaller class sizes (78%).

Recommendations

This study thus complements many of the findings of previous studies in respect of many of the general challenges facing the Irish-medium Education sector (e.g., Purdy et al., 2021; O'Boyle et al., 2023; Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta, 2023; 2025) but uniquely focuses on the particular workload challenges faced by its teachers. Drawing on the quantitative and qualitative evidence from this study, existing research and best practice from other immersion education contexts, we propose seven key recommendations to address the current teacher workload crisis across the sector:

1. Introduction of an Irish-medium-specific Teaching Allowance

To address the additional demands on IM teachers, an IM-specific teaching allowance is recommended. This would be similar to the "Teaching through Irish" allowance in the Republic of Ireland and the Special Educational Needs (SEN) allowances in Northern Ireland. If the current DE model used for Special Educational Needs (SEN) allowances is adopted, and estimating that 50% of the FTE is at Allowance 1 and 50% at Allowance 2, the estimated cost of implementation would be around £1.2m annually across the primary and post-primary sectors. This allowance would recognise the high-level linguistic and immersion teaching competencies required in the sector, supporting both recruitment and retention.

2. Additional Time for Planning, Preparation, and Assessment (PPA)

An additional 10% PPA allowance is proposed for teachers in all phases (statutory nursery, primary and post-primary), beyond the existing 10% allocated under the 2020 Teachers' Negotiating Committee (TNC) agreement. This time would be ring-fenced to ensure it is not used for other duties like class cover. With an estimated additional Full-Time Equivalent (FTE)

requirement of 31.78 (10% of the total current FTE in the statutory sector), the annual cost is projected at £1.56m. This measure would help ensure high-quality resource creation by qualified teachers, though it depends on the availability of Irish-medium teachers.

3. Expansion of Initial Teacher Education (ITE) for Irish-medium Education

To tackle recruitment challenges, a significant increase in ITE places for Irish-medium teachers is proposed. This would include subsidised PGCE programmes, professional Master's degrees, and financial incentives such as bursaries and grants, similar to schemes in Wales and the Republic of Ireland. Additionally, a guaranteed post-qualification placement, as seen in Scotland, would enhance job security and attract new teachers. A dedicated Irish-medium teacher recruitment unit funded by the Department of Education would coordinate these efforts, ensuring a sustainable pipeline of qualified teachers to meet the demand of a fast-growing sector. To meet the projected need for an additional 68 ITE places by 2027-28 (Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta, 2023), we estimate a cost to the Department for the Economy of £354k per annum (assuming 68x£5,200 per ITE place at St Mary's University College or Stranmillis University College and excluding tuition fee loans).

4. Development of an Irish-medium Teacher Apprenticeship Model and Career Progression for Classroom Assistants

A new apprenticeship model is recommended to enable classroom assistants with Irish language proficiency and experience of working within the sector to become qualified teachers, while continuing to earn a salary within the school. This funded model, drawing on the model currently being expanded in England[3], would provide structured, school-based training while concurrently studying for a bachelor's degree and gaining Qualified Teacher Status with an accredited university provider. It would expand the recruitment pool by offering a pathway for existing school staff to upskill while addressing teacher shortages. Collaboration between the Department for the Economy, the Department of Education, and ITE providers would be essential to establish and fund the programme.

A related proposal would be to develop a career progression framework to enable classroom assistants to gain additional relevant qualifications at Level 3 and 4 to become Teaching Assistants or Higher-Level Teaching Assistants, with additional responsibilities and increased remuneration. Such a model, also based on current practice in England[4], would help provide much-needed progression for classroom assistants, boosting retention and helping relieve pressure due to a lack of qualified teachers.

5. Investment in the Irish-medium Schools Estate

Many Irish-medium schools operate in outdated or inadequate buildings, increasing teachers' workload and making recruitment more difficult. Targeted investment in school infrastructure is needed to create stable, high-quality learning environments. Research shows that improved facilities enhance student achievement and teacher well-being. Addressing these deficiencies would not only improve educational outcomes but also make Irish-medium Education a more attractive career option.

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[3] https://getintoteaching.education.gov.uk/train-to-be-a-teacher/teacher-degree-apprenticeships
[4] https://nationalcareers.service.gov.uk/job-profiles/teaching-assistant

6. Reform of External Assessments for Irish-Medium Education

The current assessment system for Irish-medium students creates unnecessary workload on teachers due to translation inefficiencies and inconsistencies and can lead to errors impacting on grades awarded to pupils in high stakes assessments. Recommended reforms include streamlining the translation process by removing costly forward and back translations, introducing a standardised terminology database (agreed with schools and reflecting the terms being used in the sector), and ensuring exam papers for Irish-medium pupils are released simultaneously with English versions. Additionally, a system of automatic grade adjustments should be implemented in cases of translation errors. Increased staffing within examination bodies, including additional dedicated programme managers for Irish-medium Education, would further enhance fairness and efficiency, and would place responsibility for accuracy and quality assurance firmly with CCEA rather than with schools.

7. Exploring AI Support for Irish-medium Education

Looking ahead, and although not proposed by the participants in this study, Artificial Intelligence (AI) has the potential to contribute to the reduction in workload of Irish-medium teachers in Northern Ireland, who face the highly-skilled and time-consuming task of translating and adapting educational resources from English to Irish. AI tools, such as machine translation (e.g., Google Translate) and large language models (e.g., ChatGPT), could offer valuable support by generating first drafts of teaching materials or assisting with routine translation tasks, thereby freeing up teachers' time for planning and pedagogy. However, significant challenges remain. Current AI systems struggle with the nuances of high-level academic language, and the accuracy required for high-stakes assessments and examinations is not yet guaranteed. Furthermore, AI tools are not yet fully equipped to handle variations in Irish dialect with adequate consistency or accuracy. Despite these current limitations, with ongoing refinement and greater integration of dialectal data, the extremely rapid pace of AI development offers grounds for cautious hope. It is therefore recommended that the Department of Education and CCEA explore opportunities to invest in research and pilot projects focused on how AI technologies could support Irish-medium education, ensuring future solutions are both linguistically accurate and educationally robust.

Acknowledgements

How to cite this research report:

Purdy, N., McVeigh, C., Ballentine, M. & Symington, E. (2025) *Teacher Workload in the Irish-Medium Sector: Evidential Insights.* Belfast: Centre for Research in Educational Underachievement, Stranmillis University College, Belfast.

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Chapter 1: Context/Background

This mixed-methods research study set out to critically examine the nature and extent of the teacher workload in the Irish-medium Education sector in Northern Ireland. Its aims were to quantify workload in respect of current workload agreements, to explore the causes and impact of the workload on teachers, and to suggest practical strategies to address any identified challenges.

This chapter provides a concise overview of the context and background surrounding the challenges and opportunities facing the Irish-medium Education sector in Northern Ireland.

1.1 The Growth of Irish-medium Education in Northern Ireland

Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta (2023) note that Irish-medium Education is one of the fastest growing sectors in Northern Ireland, with growth expected to continue, carrying significant implications for Initial Teacher Education, recruitment and retention.

According to the Department of Education (2025a), there are currently 28 standalone Irish-medium primary schools and 7 Irish-medium units at primary level in Northern Ireland. At post-primary level there are 2 standalone Irish-medium schools and 3 Irish-medium units.

There are also 46 Irish-medium nursery settings across Northern Ireland, comprising 23 voluntary/private and 23 statutory settings. In a report on educational outcomes within the Irish-medium pre-school sector, DE (2016) identified a number of key challenges, particularly around the need for consistent support across both statutory and voluntary sectors, the need for enhanced professional development and the need for an exploratory framework of desirable descriptors/indicators of typical Irish-medium language development for children in pre-school settings.

The most recent pupil enrolment data from the Department of Education (2024a) indicates that in the 2023-2024 academic year, 926 children were enrolled in Irish-medium nursery settings (up from 814 in 2014), 4632 at primary level (up from 3256 in 2014), and 1856 at post-primary level (up from 831 in 2014). This represents a total of 7,414 children educated in Irish-medium Education in 2024, an increase of 51% since 2014.

In response to a request from the Centre for Educational Underachievement at Stranmillis University College, Belfast, the Department of Education (2025) reported a consistent year-on-year increase in the number of both nursery/primary[5] and post-primary teachers employed in the Irish-medium sector in Northern Ireland over the past 10 years (see Appendix 1). At nursery/primary level, teacher numbers have increased from 189 (FTE = 184) in 2014/15 to 233 teachers (FTE = 220.5) in 2023/24. At post-primary level, teacher numbers have increased from 46 (FTE = 44.5) in 2014/15 to 103 teachers (FTE = 97.3) over the same period.

A report by Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta (2023) has forecast that pupil enrolment will continue to rise, projecting increases at primary level from 4,664 in 2022/23 to 5,462 in 2027/28, and at post-primary level from 1,746 to 2,494. To meet this increasing demand, the

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[5] Note: DE has included nursery class teachers within the total headcount and FTE for primary schools – there are currently no stand-alone statutory Irish-medium nursery schools in Northern Ireland.

number of Initial Teacher Education (ITE) graduates will also need to rise, specifically to 41 per year for primary and 27 per year for post-primary by 2027/28. The report also highlights an ongoing shortage of substitute teachers in the sector.

1.2 The Benefits and Challenges of Immersion and Irish-medium Education

The benefits of immersion and bilingual education are well-documented. For instance, according to Lambert (1980, cited in Baker, 1993, p.57), the term "additive bilingualism" is used to refer to the positive outcomes of being bilingual. This occurs when the first language and culture are preserved while the speaker gains proficiency in another language, as well as associated benefits such as bilingualism, biliteracy, biculturalism, and certain cognitive advantages. Evidence of positive educational outcomes linked to additive bilingualism have been found in the Irish-medium Education (IME) sector, particularly in terms of academic performance (Gilleece et al., 2012). McVeigh, Wylie and Mulhern (2017) found evidence of largely equivalent performance in tasks involving working memory and executive control in both Irish and English, further supporting the presence of additive bilingualism within the sector.

In their recent systematic review of international research on immersion and bilingual education, O'Boyle et al. (2023) found many common challenges, including the need for more time than required in a shared dominant language, inappropriate assessment practices, insufficient high-quality training in relevant pedagogies, inadequate resources, wide variation in teacher and pupil abilities in terms of both language and content, social pressures and discrimination, and limited funding for professional development opportunities for teachers. Their review recommends several solutions to address these challenges, such as additional linguistic and pedagogical training for teachers, classroom practices building on pupils' linguistic and cultural assets, bespoke teacher-developed additional practices in response to classroom and local conditions, greater collaboration with colleagues and enhanced support from teaching assistants.

The final report and action plan of the Expert Panel on Educational Underachievement in Northern Ireland, *A Fair Start* (Purdy et al., 2021) highlights a number of significant challenges facing the Irish-medium sector, including the need for more support for Initial Teacher Education, more subject specialists at post-primary level and better support examinations at Key Stage 4 and 5. The report also notes that the Irish-medium sector has a higher proportion of socially and educationally disadvantaged pupils and that a greater percentage of pupils are on the SEN register in Irish-medium schools (22.4%) compared to English-medium schools (19.3%).

O'Boyle et al. (2023) also highlight a resource gap in the sector, which includes human resources as well as classroom-based materials, subject-specific textbooks, exam preparation materials, and language testing materials. The authors note that the physical environment of the school, including buildings and facilities, must also be appropriate to accommodate growing numbers of students. In line with this, Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta (2024) outline how 60% of Irish-medium schools are housed in accommodation that is not fit-for-purpose, with many using mobile classrooms that lack basic resources and accessibility features.

A Fair Start (Purdy et al., 2021) also outlines the need to ensure high-quality resources and Teacher Professional Learning (TPL) opportunities for the sector as it grows, with a particular focus on encouraging more Irish speakers to enter ITE. This would ensure that the needs of

children at risk of underachievement within the Irish-medium sector are met. In line with this, O'Boyle et al. (2023) recommend increased and specialised TPL in Irish-medium Education to improve linguistic and pedagogical skills. This recommendation supports and goes beyond the actions in *A Fair Start* to support teacher development at both pre- and in-service levels. As outlined above, O'Boyle et al. (2023) also recommend implementing a redistribution of labour across more human resources to include co-operation with colleagues, collaborative relationships and the potential addition of teaching assistants.

Issues with accessing Teacher Professional Learning and redistributing workload are challenged by the immediate lack of substitute cover and ongoing issues with staff training and retention in Northern Ireland. Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta (2023; 2024) identify a lack of both teaching and non-teaching staff available in the sector.

An additional challenge facing the Irish-medium sector is that, as Ní Chinnéide (2009) reported, a minority of parents in the sector speak Irish themselves. The latest census data (NISRA, 2021) indicates that 228,621 people in Northern Ireland speak Irish, though proficiency varies widely, ranging from full fluency to limited understanding or speaking ability. McVeigh (2012) found that 92% of parents/guardians of children in Irish-medium Education had some degree of Irish themselves, ranging from fluency or exceptionally high ability to just a few words of Irish. The average proficiency score indicated relatively low levels of Irish, which impacts parental involvement, particularly in helping with homework and supporting language development at home.

In order to address some of the challenges, O'Boyle et al. (2023) outline a comprehensive action plan comprising a total of 8 key recommendations: to provide more professional development opportunities, to provide career progression and mentorship for teachers, measures to address the lack of resources (e.g., funding for teaching assistants, time in lieu etc.), stronger networking opportunities for Irish-medium teachers, greater public recognition for Irish-medium teachers, collaboration with language revitalization and reclamation efforts, greater emphasis on teacher recruitment and mentorship, and a public engagement strategy.

In addition to the present research, two further surveys are currently being undertaken in Northern Ireland on the subject of workload in the sector: Altram's state of the sector survey focusing on Irish-medium nursery schools (Kernaghan, 2025), and a consultation survey currently being conducted on a proposed Irish-medium Education Workforce Bill (Sheehan, 2025).

1.3 Additional teaching competencies for the Irish-medium sector

The General Teaching Council of Northern Ireland (GTCNI, 2011) acknowledge the additional requirements for the Irish-medium sector under the broad theme of professional knowledge and understanding. Specifically, the guidance states that in Irish-medium and other bilingual contexts, "Teachers will have developed…sufficient linguistic and pedagogical knowledge to teach the curriculum" (2011, p.19). This requirement is further detailed in relation to different career phases, including Initial Teacher Education (ITE), Induction, Early Professional Development (EPD), CPD, Collaborative Practice, and School Improvement.

At the ITE stage, the GTCNI guidance stipulates that student teachers should "have sufficient linguistic and pedagogical knowledge to teach the curriculum, including immersion teaching methodologies." During the Induction phase, teachers are expected to "extend and deepen

linguistic and pedagogical knowledge to teach the curriculum, including the application of immersion teaching methodologies to the classroom context." Following this, in the EPD phase, teachers are expected to broaden and evaluate their expertise beyond the classroom, as they "extend, deepen and evaluate linguistic and pedagogical knowledge to teach the curriculum, including the application of immersion teaching methodologies to classroom and whole-school practice." Finally, during CPD, curriculum practice and school improvement phase, teachers are expected to "collaborate with others to evaluate and develop their linguistic and pedagogical knowledge in order to teach the curriculum and the application of immersion teaching methodologies to whole-school policy and practice." (GTCNI, 2011, p.19).

In addition to these guidelines, O'Boyle et al. (2023) highlight a number of professional competencies based on their review of international literature which includes linguistic expertise, cultural knowledge, knowledge of appropriate pedagogies, skill with materials development and technology, ability to integrate diverse subject matter and cultural content into instruction, understanding of political complexities relevant to specific immersion context, the ability to liaise with parents and advocate for minoritised language students, and reflexivity and awareness of power inequities inside and outside the classroom.

Looking more specifically at Irish-medium competencies on a cross-border level, recent research by Ó Ceallaigh and Nig Uidhir (2023; 2024) has led to production of a uniquely comprehensive framework of specific professional competencies which teachers in the Irish-medium sector can reflect on in order to develop and maintain their professional practice. These competencies are in line with those specified by GTCNI (2011) but go far beyond this to respond to the unique needs and challenges within the sector in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. These 30 distinctive Irish-medium Education professional competencies are structured under the three broad themes of teacher knowledge, pedagogical skills and vision and values. Ó Ceallaigh and Nig Uidhir (2024) also highlight that these competencies are expected to evolve over time, reflecting the dynamic nature of the Irish-medium teaching profession.

1.4 Initial Teacher Education for Irish-medium education in Northern Ireland

In Northern Ireland, the Identity and Language (NI) Act 2022 provides "official recognition of the status of the Irish language" (part 78J), and Article 89 of The Education (Northern Ireland) Order 1998 states that it "shall be the duty of the Department to encourage and facilitate the development of Irish-medium education". This duty is also supported by the Education Authority's ongoing work in Northern Ireland (Education Authority, 2024).

Statistics from the Department of Education indicate a consistent intake of 28 students annually into Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programmes in Northern Ireland from 2014 to 2024. However, these figures do not account for the additional 18 places available each year on the B.Ed. Hons (Bilingual) programme delivered at St Mary's University College, Belfast.

In terms of sector growth, data from Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta (2023) indicates a year-on-year increase in both the number of pupils attending Irish-medium schools and in the number of schools being established However, this expansion brings significant staffing challenges. Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta (2023) has highlighted the urgent need to address teacher retention and to increase the number of teachers in Northern Ireland who are suitably qualified to work within the Irish-medium sector. In examining the need for the training, recruitment and

retention of both teaching and non-teaching staff Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta (2024) state that "The identified gaps will not be filled for a number of years but work must be initiated to begin to address current gaps and ensure supply for future years" (p.16).

1.5 Initial Teacher Education for Immersion Education in Other Countries

Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta (2023) identify several strategies implemented in other jurisdictions to support the recruitment and retention of immersion education teachers. These examples, drawn from Scotland, Wales, the Republic of Ireland, and the Basque Country, highlight varied approaches to addressing teacher supply and sustainability in immersion contexts.

Scotland

In Scotland there are a number of routes to qualify as a teacher in Gaelic medium education, including MA (Hons), BA (Hons) and PGDEs for primary and post-primary levels. Measures in place to recruit and retain teachers in the sector include an education grants scheme to fund places on selected courses, an ITE bursary for individuals transitioning into teaching STEM, Home Economics, Primary, or Gaelic subjects, and a guaranteed position for newly qualified teachers for one year. A recruitment officer within Bòrd na Gàidhlig, funded by the Department, co-ordinates teacher recruitment and ensures appropriate provision across the sector.

Wales

Wales offers various routes into Initial Teacher Education (ITE) at primary and post-primary levels. The Open University delivers a salaried PGCE over two years for classroom assistants, alongside a flexible, self-funded PGCE option designed to accommodate those who are currently employed. In terms of provision, there are a number of Welsh language courses available to education professionals including at entry level for classroom assistants. These range from entry-level courses for classroom assistants to higher-level courses for teachers in both English-medium and Welsh-medium settings. The 'Welsh in a Year' programme enables teachers from the English medium sector to be released from their roles for a year to develop their Welsh-language proficiency, although most return to the English medium sector thereafter.

Republic of Ireland

In the Republic of Ireland, all primary ITE courses require students to qualify in the Irish language, regardless of whether they intend to teach in Irish-medium schools. Specific provision includes the B.Ed. through the Medium of Irish (Primary Teaching) at Marino Institute of Education in Dublin and the M.Ed. in Immersion Education and Gaeltacht Schools at Trinity College Dublin (2024). At post-primary level, the University of Galway offers a two-year Professional Masters in Education (PME) programme tailored to Irish-medium second-level teaching (University of Galway, 2022).

There are a number of bursaries available to support students pursuing teaching qualifications, including those enrolled in the B.Ed. and the MGO at University of Galway. Trinity College Dublin also provides subsidised places on its PGCE programme (Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta, 2023). For further language development, a fully-funded two-year professional development programme, jointly delivered by Trinity College Dublin and Marino

Institute of Education, supports registered post-primary teachers in enhancing their Irish-language skills

It must also be noted that some teachers in the Republic of Ireland receive a "Teaching through Irish allowance" (Department of Education, 2023). This was amended in 2012 so that teachers who qualified after 1 February 2012 are not eligible to earn the allowance. Teachers who qualified before this period remain eligible, but only while remaining in the same post. In a recent consultation report by Ó Duibhir et al. (2023), many respondents requested that the "Teaching through Irish allowance" be paid to all teachers in the Irish-medium sector in recognition of the extra work they must do.

Basque Country

Ó Duibhir et al. (2023) identify the Basque Country as an exception to the widespread challenge of teacher shortages in immersion education. This has followed considerable financial investment in the 1980s and 1990s providing sabbatical schemes for teachers (Ó Duibhir et al., 2023). Wales is actively drawing on this model to enhance its own teacher supply.

Planning in the Basque Country placed a strong emphasis on educational quality and language prestige, making Basque-medium schools the preferred choice for many parents (Ó Duibhir et al., 2023). The support system for teachers includes the appointment of an additional teacher in each school to lead the implementation of a language plan in Basque, with allocated time to undertake this role. The NOLEGA unit is part of the Department of Education, and the Ulibarri programme is now under the umbrella of the programme. The programme provides a range of supports: grants, professional development for teachers, prizes for schools for a high standard of Basque, events to promote Basque, and links between schools. Staff are employed to promote a language normalisation plan in schools. A dedicated department employs coordinators and officials to support programme delivery, and each school forms its own committee to promote and implement the language plan. Extracurricular activities conducted through Basque also reinforce language use among students. Furthermore, parents have legal rights to request education through the target language, with the relevant authorities obliged to respond to their requests (Ó Duibhir et al., 2023).

1.6 Teacher workload regulations in Northern Ireland

Agreement on teachers' pay and conditions of service in Northern Ireland is reached through the Teachers' Negotiating Committee (TNC). The TNC comprises employing authorities/employer representatives, the Department of Education, and the five recognised teachers' unions (INTO, NASUWT, UTU, NEU and NAHT).

The current terms and conditions for teachers in all grant-aided schools are outlined in the Teachers' (Terms and Conditions of Employment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1987 and the Amendment Regulations of 1988. The most recent guidance on teacher workload, issued by the Department of Education (2024b, §4.4.1b) is underpinned by the 1987 Regulations and subsequent amendments, collectively known as the 'Jordanstown Agreement'. These regulations specify that:

> *"A Teacher, other than a Teacher employed in a residential establishment, shall be available to perform such duties at such times and such places as may reasonably be specified by the Principal, or where he is employed by an Employing Authority on terms*

under which he is not assigned to any one school by the Employing Authority or the Principal of any school in which he may be for the time being be required to work as a Teacher, for 1265 hours in any year exclusive of time spent off school premises in preparing and marking lessons and time spent travelling to and from the place of work" (1987; pp. 1267-1268).

The 1265 hours referenced above is commonly referred to as 'directed time' and constitutes the contractual period during which a teacher may be required to undertake specific duties. This directed time includes teaching, supervision (excluding lunchtime supervision unless specifically contracted), leading or attending school assemblies, registration, pastoral responsibilities, participation in five non-teaching days, contingency duties, and other professional activities deemed reasonable and equitably distributed among colleagues. Directed time also encompasses duties related to the receipt of additional allowances such as the Teaching Allowance or Special Educational Needs Allowance.

It is further specified that 10% of directed time is spent on planning, preparation and assessment (PPA) as established under the TNC 2020/1 agreement between management and the Teachers' Negotiating Committee[6].. All of the time during which a teacher has to be on the school premises is included in directed time. Time spent off the school premises completing lesson preparation or marking, along with travel time to and from a place of work, are excluded.

The Department of Education (2024b) workload agreement states that a teacher's directed time of 1265 hours per year is the basic legal requirement to meet their contractual obligations. A teacher cannot be directed to undertake duties beyond 1265 hours on 195 days. However, the workload agreement also notes a significant acknowledgement that schools have always been reliant on the additional good will and effort of teachers above and beyond their prescribed 1265 hours:

> *"However, schools have always been dependent on a commitment from Teachers beyond the legal minimum requirement and this guidance does not change this. Schools would, for example, find it impossible to include within a Teacher's 1,265 hours all of the time currently given by Teachers to such activities as games, drama, music and school trips. Nevertheless, the extent of this commitment is for each Teacher to determine for himself or herself. Teachers should be given reasonable notice before being directed to undertake evening duties.*
>
> *If a Teacher agrees to carry out these duties on a voluntary basis they will not count as directed time, however, if the duties are directed by the Principal then the hours fall under directed time"* (p.7, §5.2).

The agreement further specifies that teachers are entitled to breaks, socially acceptable working hours, and sufficient time to enjoy as reasonable work/life balance. The agreement (Department of Education, 2024b) also mandates that cover for absent teachers should be shared equitably and not exceed specified weekly teaching limits. Schools must develop transparent mechanisms for workload distribution and provide a time budget for each teacher. The guidance states that it provides a framework to ensure the allocation and distribution of duties in a fair and reasonable manner that enables teachers to observe their contractual requirements with sufficient time to enjoy a reasonable work/life balance. It states that disputes over workload

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[6] https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/tnc-202001-agreement-between-management-and-trade-union-side-28-april-2020

should be resolved through informal discussions or formal grievance procedures, where needed.

1.7 Teacher workload in England

It is important to note that at present there is a scarcity of recent, detailed research on teacher workload in Irish-medium schools which has been conducted either in Northern Ireland or in the Republic of Ireland, or indeed comparing the situation in the two jurisdictions. This research gap limits the ability to draw robust, evidence-based conclusions about the unique pressures faced by teachers working within Irish-medium Education.

There is however existing research into English-medium teacher workload in England. The Department for Education (DfE) provided funding for the Teaching Schools Council (TSC) to promote the School Workload Reduction Toolkit and support schools to use it in ways that worked in their own contexts. The TSC representatives encouraged schools from across England to use the toolkit to identify priority areas and adopt new practices to address them. The Education Development Trust (EDT, 2020) was commissioned to support schools in assessing the impact of any changes they made and found that teacher-designed interventions significantly reduced time on conducting the targeted tasks, i.e., approaches to marking and feedback, lesson planning, managing pupil data, internal communications, and lesson observation and monitoring. Findings indicated an improvement in overall wellbeing and maintained or improved outcomes for pupils (EDT, 2020).

Further research by Martin et al. (2023) supports these findings, highlighting that while most schools implement strategies such as Planning, Preparation, and Assessment (PPA) time, the use of pre-existing lesson plans, and collaborative planning, these isolated efforts are often insufficient. Instead, it is the whole school approach to reducing workload that is important, in addition to the efficacy of specific strategies. Insufficient funding and staff capacity were identified in their research as top barriers, along with external pressures from government and Ofsted exacerbating the issue. Schools with high proportions of disadvantaged pupils were suggested to face additional barriers to reducing workload which included a lack of parental support and pupil behavioural management.

Martin et al. (2023) suggest that effective school leadership and a whole-school approach are crucial in reducing workload. However, introducing new strategies can initially increase workload. Their findings highlight the need for sustained efforts and further research into external drivers of workload, particularly in schools in disadvantaged contexts.

1.8 The Importance of High-Quality Learning Environments

Research into the significance of school climate and its effects on student achievement and well-being remains limited in Northern Ireland. However, in a recent review of international literature, Kutsyruruba et al. (2015) proposed a new framework for categorizing school climate, encompassing physical, social, and academic dimensions. They reference multiple studies highlighting a positive correlation between the quality of school facilities and student performance (O'Neill & Oates, 2001). Conversely, Buckly et al. (2004) note that poorly maintained school buildings can hinder learning.

Uline and Tschannen-Moran (2008) further identify specific characteristics of the learning environment that influence student achievement, such as the age of the school building, climate

control, air quality, lighting, acoustics, design, and overall appearance. Several studies also establish a clear connection between the environmental quality of schools, the attitudes of pupils and staff, teaching and learning behaviours, and ultimately, educational outcomes (Berry, 2012; Marzano, 2003; Rutter et al., 1979; Wentzel & Watkins, 2002).

The condition of school buildings also has implications for teachers and other staff. A study conducted in the United States found that teacher retention and attrition decisions were linked to the quality of school facilities, even when controlling for other factors (Buckley et al., 2004). Teachers who believed that the physical condition of their school negatively affected their health were more likely to seek employment elsewhere. Uline and Tschannen-Moran (2008) argue that teachers working in poorly maintained or inadequate buildings are likely to become demotivated, leading to less enthusiastic teaching and, in turn, adverse effects on student learning.

In summary, research demonstrates that a school's physical environment has a direct impact on learning and attainment. Schools in more disadvantaged areas, however, are less able to mitigate the effects of inadequate government funding through local fundraising or parental contributions. This not only exacerbates existing inequalities but also affects community perceptions of the value placed on education. International research corroborates local anecdotal evidence, suggesting that the state of school buildings communicates a powerful message about societal priorities. When children and staff are expected to learn and work in buildings that are cold, damp, neglected, or even unsafe, it conveys an implicit message that their education is not valued. As Uline and Tschannen-Moran (2008, p.67) observe, the physical state of a school is deeply symbolic:

> *"The manner in which a school building is designed, managed, and maintained sends a message to its occupants and the community beyond, speaking volumes about the value placed on activities transpiring within its walls. The physical properties of a school building are the tangible context within which teaching and learning take place…We have the capacity to influence these properties practically and artfully on behalf of the students and teachers whose performance we wish to support and improve (Uline, 2000)."*

1.9 The SEN Reform Agenda in Northern Ireland

The Department of Education (2025b) has recently set out an ambitious *SEN Reform Agenda* and associated Delivery Plan for 2025-2030. The aim of this plan (2025c) is to ensure that "all our children and young people with Special Educational Needs will benefit from greater inclusion and receive the right support, from the right people, at the right time and in the right place" (p.4). The Delivery Plan (2025b, p.5) further states that "quality provision for children with SEN must be underpinned by up-to-date, evidence-informed practice and shaped by research on what works". Within the delivery plan, the need for "confident and highly skilled teaching and support staff who can access additional support to complement and enhance their practice" is noted as well as "effective early identification of needs and early intervention" and an "appropriate learning environment" (p.6).

Despite its comprehensive scope, the Delivery Plan includes only one (albeit significant) mention of the Irish-medium sector within the Delivery Plan. In the section detailing the

implementation plans for Local Impact Teams, there is a commitment to "Develop, where appropriate, bespoke services to support children in Irish-medium education" (p.9) with an indication that this implementation would be through each of the five years of the Delivery Plan, and involving the following delivery partners: DE, EA, DoH, PHA, MCA and Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta. The Delivery Plan and wider SEN Reform Agenda must be considered in light of the Department of Education's duty "to encourage and facilitate the development of Irish-medium education" as outlined in article 89 of The Education (Northern Ireland) Order (1998).

Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta (2025) note that very little progress has been made to date on the 2008 review's recommendations to encourage and facilitate the development of the Irish-medium sector in Northern Ireland; including (but not limited to) continuing issues with accommodation, limited opportunities for Teacher Professional Learning in Irish-medium Education, the need for ongoing IME-specific support for professional development of classroom assistants and pre-school educators, development of curriculum and teaching resources for the sector, research, and support for pupils with Special Educational Needs. Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta (2024) report a higher incidence rate of SEND within Irish-medium Education and the need to further consider factors such as socio-economic disadvantage, the availability of appropriate assessment and timely identification of difficulties, access to sector-appropriate early intervention and access to appropriate support. A lack of appropriate assessment tools for pupils in the Irish-medium sector was also noted in this report. These concerns must be taken into account when implementing the SEN Reform Agenda to ensure that the needs of children within Irish-medium education are not overlooked or inadequately addressed.

1.10 Special Educational Needs Allowances in Northern Ireland

The case of additional payments in the form of Special Educational Needs (SEN) allowances for teachers is of particular relevance, as it illustrates that one subgroup of highly skilled teachers in Northern Ireland already receive additional remuneration for their work.

The Department of Education (2024d) outlines two rates of Special Educational Needs Allowances in Northern Ireland. These are namely Special Needs 1, with a gross annual value of £2,475 and Special Needs 2, with a gross annual value of £4,886 (effective from 1 September 2023 and subject to a potential pay award effective from 1 September 2024). Principal and Vice Principals are not in receipt of Special Education Needs Allowances. It is clear therefore that the SEN Allowance, which has been offered for many years, is offered solely to those who engage face-to-face in the classroom with children with SEN.

The rationale for this allowance is clarified by the Education Authority (2012), which draws on the Guidance for Boards of Governors on the Formulation and Implementation of Salary Policy (May 2008, amended September 2012). This document states that "SEN Allowance 1 may be awarded in other mainstream circumstances in recognition of a particular contribution to the teaching of pupils with special educational needs, *which is significantly greater than* that which would normally be expected of a classroom teacher" (Section 4.9.3; page 18; emphasis added).

Although not specified in any official documentation, it is reasonable to infer that the allocation of this SEN allowance to teachers in both mainstream and special education contexts reflects the high level of skill and additional workload involved in this pedagogical context.

Furthermore, the existence of this financial recognition may serve as a strategic mechanism for attracting and retaining experienced and capable professionals in SEN teaching roles. In this way, the SEN allowance supports the Department of Education's statutory duty to ensure that pupils with additional needs are adequately supported and can fully access their right to education.

Chapter 2: Methodology

2.1. Overview

This research study set out to explore the workload of teachers in the Irish-medium education (IME) sector in Northern Ireland. Specifically, four research objectives were identified by Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta:

- Quantify the additional hours worked by teachers in the Irish-medium sector and assess the impact of these additional hours on educational disadvantage.
- Provide evidence-based insights into how this surplus workload contributes to the educational challenges in IME settings.
- Strengthen the argument for recognising the unique challenges of IME teachers and developing strategies to mitigate these challenges in the future.
- Offer recommendations for policy changes, including potential costs for addressing the workload-related issues.

2.2. Research Design and Methodology

The study adopted a mixed-methods approach, comprising three key strands: a literature review, an online survey, and a series of semi-structured interviews. All three strands of the research process were informed by an Expert Reference Group, which included experienced union officials, to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the contextual factors influencing teacher workload.

Strand 1: Literature Review and Policy Analysis

The first strand involved a comprehensive review of the existing research and policy literature on teacher workload in the Irish-medium and wider immersion language contexts, both within Northern Ireland and internationally. This review included an analysis of relevant contractual agreements, such as the Jordanstown Agreement, and recent developments within Northern Ireland's educational sector. Additionally, the review explored comparable studies on teacher workload in non-immersion education settings, drawing on available research from Northern Ireland and beyond.

Strand 2: Online Survey

The second strand of the research involved the administration of an online survey designed using SurveyLab. The survey was distributed to all Irish-medium schools in Northern Ireland via email by Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta. It consisted of three main components:

- Background Information: This section collected data on respondents' qualifications, employment history, and professional experience.
- Workload Assessment: This section explored the nature, extent and impact of the workload associated with working in the Irish-medium sector. Key areas included the time spent on preparing materials, the challenges of bilingual teaching, and the availability of resources.
- Recommendations for Change: This section gathered teachers' perspectives on potential solutions to alleviate workload issues and improve working conditions in the Irish-medium sector.

The survey was open for 10 weeks and received 130 responses.

Strand 3: Semi-Structured Focus Group Interviews

The third strand of the methodology had two elements:

- The first element comprised three focus groups with principals/vice-principals from IME schools, carried out in person during a half-day conference organised by Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta at Stranmillis University College on 23rd October 2024. A total of 16 principals/vice-principals were interviewed.
- The second element involved a series of semi-structured focus group/individual interviews with 8 staff from a representative sample of IME schools. A total of five schools were originally identified for inclusion, although one later withdrew from the process. Three of the schools were at the primary level and two were at the post-primary level. The schools were selected to reflect a geographical spread across both urban and rural areas, as well as a range of school sizes. A breakdown of the data collection is provided below:

School ID	Number of Participants
School 1	1 x Principal interview 1 x Teacher interview
School 2	1 x Principal interview 1 x Teacher interview
School 3	1 x Principal interview 1 x Teacher interview 1 x Teacher focus group
School 4	1 x Teacher interview
School 5	Withdrawn from the study

The interviews focused on the specific nature, extent, and impact of the workload challenges faced by IME teachers, the implications of these workload challenges for teachers' well-being, retention, and student outcomes, and recommendations for improving workload conditions and reducing the strain on teachers. Principals and senior leaders were also asked about the particular challenges they faced in their positions of leadership.

2.3. Ethical Considerations

This research adhered to the highest ethical standards, in line with the BERA's (2024) *Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research*. Ethical approval was sought from the Research and Ethics Committee of Stranmillis University College. The study ensured the confidentiality and anonymity of participants' data, and all participants provided informed consent prior to participation in both the survey and the interviews. All electronic data was securely stored on a password-protected cloud system, accessible only to the research team.

2.4. Data Analysis

Quantitative data from the online survey was analysed using descriptive and inferential statistical methods, including measures of central tendency, cross-tabulations, and regression analyses, where appropriate.

Qualitative data from the focus group interviews was transcribed and coded thematically. The analysis aimed to identify recurring patterns and themes related to workload issues, teacher well-being, and educational disadvantage.

2.5. Research Limitations

There are several limitations to this study. One limitation is that, due to unforeseen circumstances, one of the selected schools withdrew from participation, resulting in interviews being conducted with only four schools instead of the intended five. Additionally, while the overall response rate for the survey was positive, the representation from nursery schools was notably underrepresented.

Chapter 3: Survey Results

3.1. Summary Statistics

3.1.1. Demographic Summary Statistics

A total of 130 respondents completed the survey, representing 29% of the 450 nursery, primary and post-primary teachers currently working in the Irish-medium sector in Northern Ireland (EA, 2025). As shown in Figures 3.1 and 3.2, the sample is predominantly female (72%, n=94), and the most common age range is 21 – 50 years old, with 31-40 years old being the most common age group of respondents (38%, n=50).
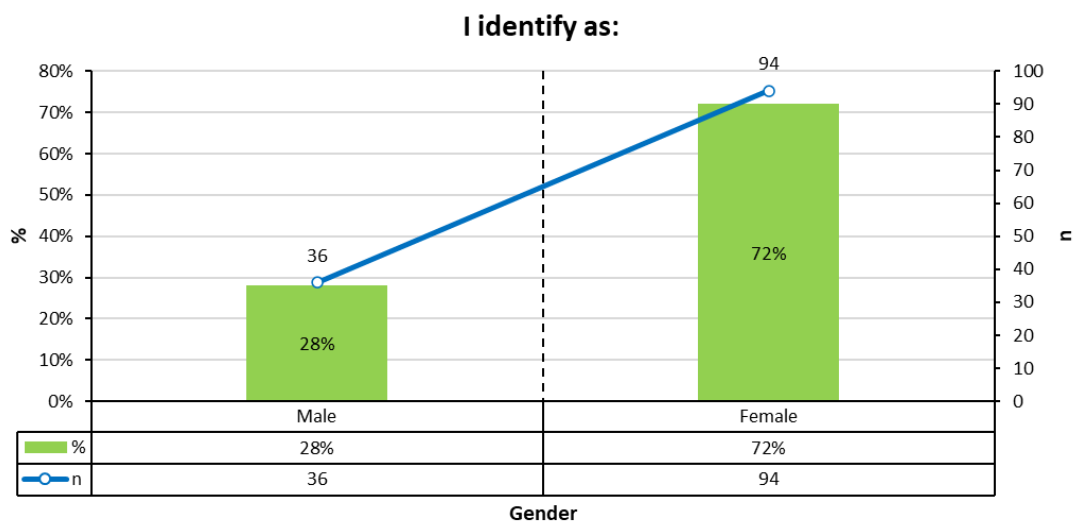
Figure 3.1. *Gender demographic.*
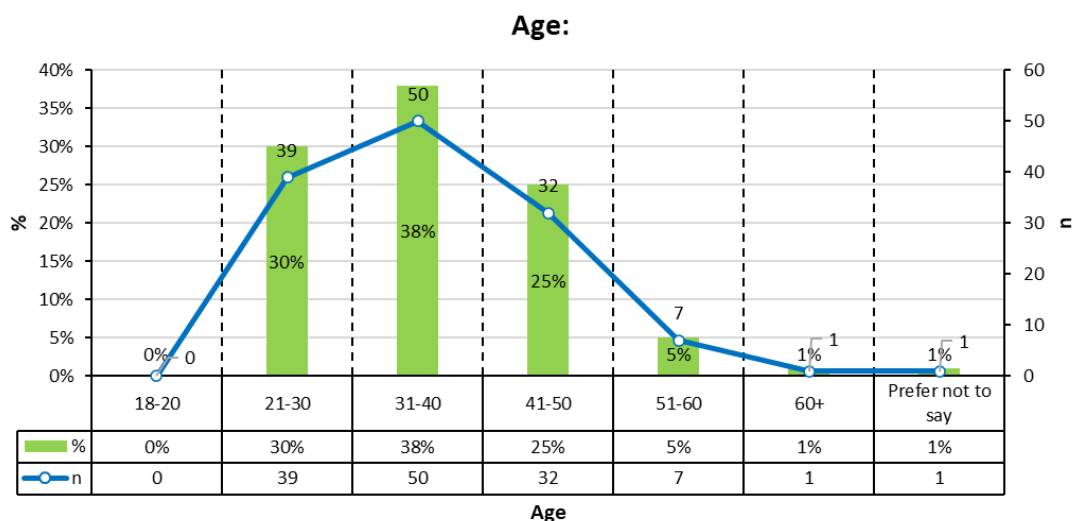
Figure 3.2. *Age demographic.*

Furthermore, as shown in Figures 3.3. and 3.4, the sample is representative of a wide range of years of experience, with primary being the most represented sector (57%, n=74), followed by post-primary (39%, n=51) and a very small nursery representation (4%, n=5).

Number of years in service:

	Less than 1	1-3	4-5	6-10	11-15	16-20	21-25	26-30	30+
%	3%	12%	13%	22%	19%	15%	8%	6%	2%
n	4	15	17	28	25	20	11	8	2
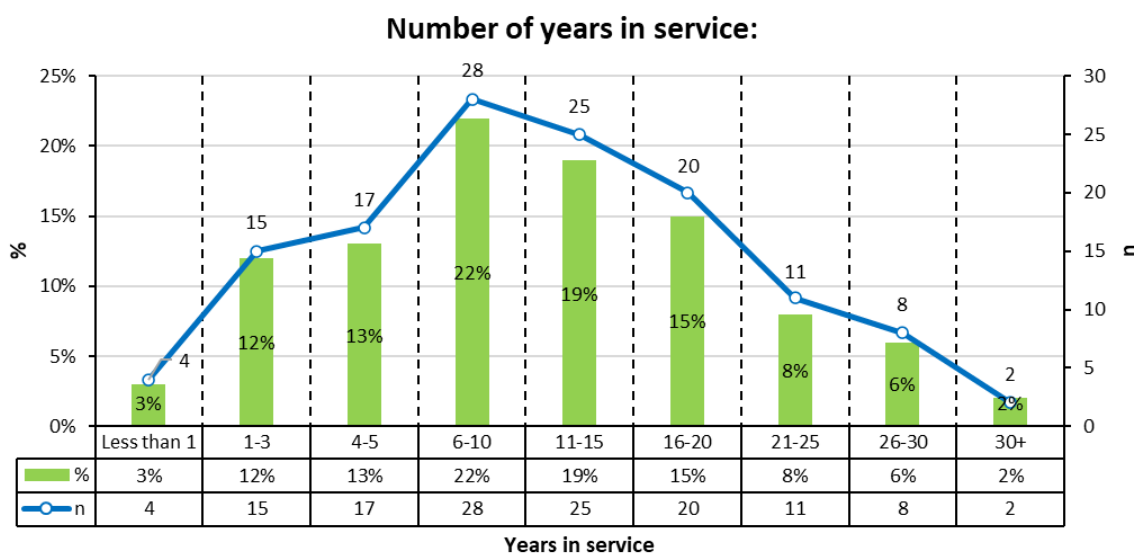
Years in service

Figure 3.3. Number of years in service.

I work in the following sector:

	Primary	Post-Primary	Nursery
%	57%	39%	4%
n	74	51	5
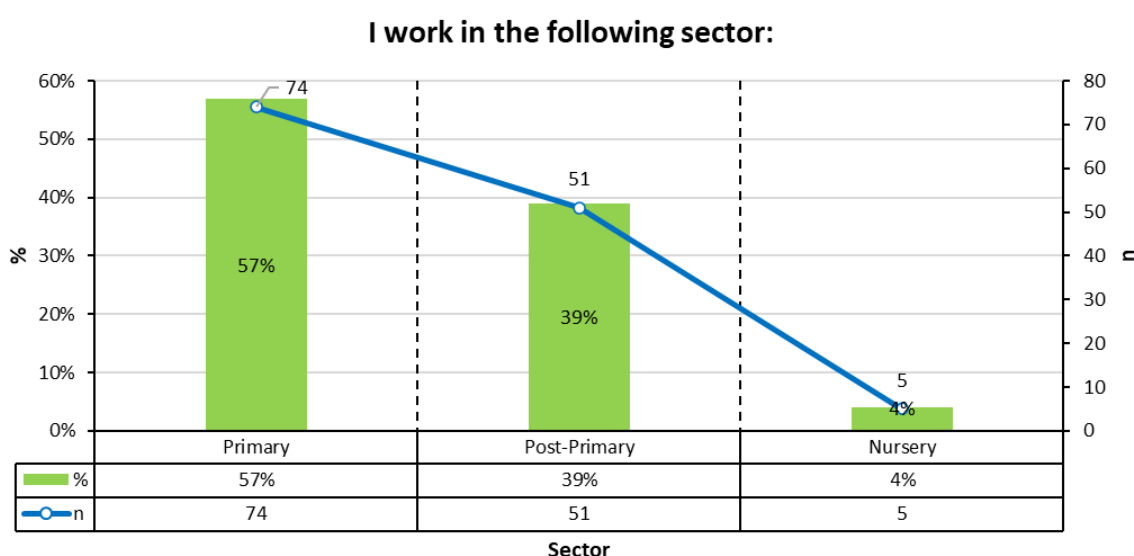
Sector

Figure 3.4. Sector of work.

Respondents were also asked to state the training/Initial Teacher Education route by which they had qualified to teach in the Irish-medium sector. By far, the most common route to qualifying among this sample is the Irish-medium PGCE programme at St. Mary's University College, Belfast (44%, n=57), followed by the four-year B.Ed. bilingual programme also at St. Mary's University College, Belfast (20%, n=26) (Figure 3.5).

What was your route to qualifying as a teacher in the Irish-medium sector?

	Irish-medium PGCE programme at St Mary's University College, Belfast	B.Ed. (Hons) Bilingual programme at St Mary's University College, Belfast	Other	QUB Post Primary PGCE plus Irish-medium Enhancement Cert offered in conjunction with St Mary's University College, Belfast	UU Post Primary PGCE plus Irish-medium Enhancement Cert offered in conjunction with St Mary's University College, Belfast
%	44%	20%	20%	14%	2%
n	57	26	26	18	3

Route to qualifying

Figure 3.5. Route to qualifying as a teacher in the Irish-medium sector.

The next series of questions related to teachers' own perceptions of their Irish language proficiency (i.e., the extent to which they feel that their Irish language proficiency is generally sufficient for their role in school; the extent to which they feel confident in their spoken Irish language proficiency, the extent to which they feel confident in their subject-specific/ curriculum and academic Irish language proficiency; the extent to which they feel confident in their written Irish language proficiency; and whether they would like additional training to improve their Irish language proficiency for teaching purposes.

A weighted scoring system (-2 to +2) was applied to these statements as shown in Table 3.1 and Figure 3.6[7]. As shown, all scores indicate moderate to high levels of agreement with all statements on Irish language proficiency. For example, 94% (n=122) either agree or strongly agree that their Irish language proficiency is generally sufficient for their role in school. However, perhaps understandably, the levels of confidence are higher for oral than for written proficiency in Irish: 91% (n=119) of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they were confident in their *spoken* Irish language proficiency, compared to 82% (n=107) who agreed or strongly agreed that they were confident in their *written* Irish language proficiency. Over two thirds (70%, n=91) of respondents expressed a desire to access additional training to improve Irish language proficiency for teaching purposes.

When the survey results were analysed further by the gender of respondents, some interesting findings emerge. For instance, male respondents' confidence levels in every aspect of their Irish language proficiency (e.g., spoken, written etc.) tended to be slightly higher than female respondents' confidence levels.

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[7] In the weighted scoring system, used throughout the presentation of the survey results, we attribute a score of -2 for 'strongly disagree'; -1 for 'disagree'; 0 for 'neither agree nor disagree'; +1 for 'agree'; and +2 for 'strongly agree'. A colour-coding approach is also adopted (for visual clarity) where positive scores ($>0 \leq +2$) were coloured green and negative scores ($<0 \leq -2$) were coloured red.

Table 3.1. Rated statements on Irish language proficiency (weighted scores, -2 to +2).

Please rate your agreement with the five statements below:	Strongly disagree	Strongly disagree - %	Disagree	Disagree - %	Neither agree nor disagree	Neither agree nor disagree - %	Agree	Agree - %	Strongly agree	Strongly agree - %	Total	WS
WS Points	-2		-1		0		+1		+2			
I feel that my Irish language proficiency is generally sufficient for my role in school	2	2%	1	1%	5	4%	57	44%	65	50%	130	1.400
I am confident in my spoken Irish language proficiency	5	4%	3	2%	3	2%	56	43%	63	48%	130	1.300
I am confident in my subject-specific/curriculum and academic Irish language proficiency	3	2%	5	4%	12	9%	62	48%	48	37%	130	1.131
I am confident in my written Irish language proficiency	5	4%	4	3%	14	11%	64	49%	43	33%	130	1.046
I would like additional training in order to improve my Irish language proficiency for teaching purposes	6	5%	13	10%	20	15%	38	29%	53	41%	130	0.915
Answered											130	
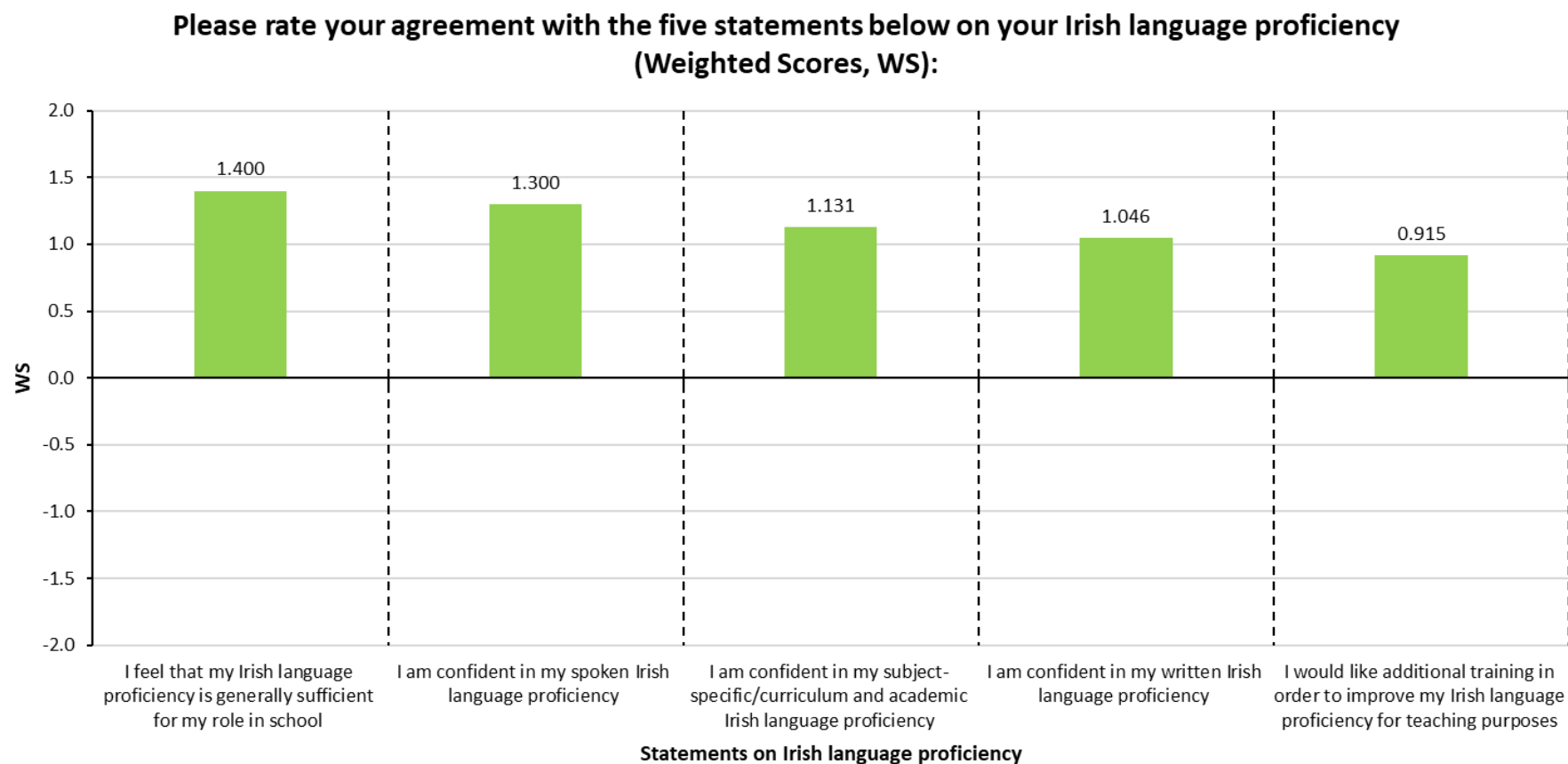
Figure 3.6. *Rated statements on Irish language proficiency (weighted scores, -2 to +2).*

Respondents were then asked whether they had already undertaken further study to develop their Irish for teaching purposes. As shown in Figure 3.7, a majority of participants have undertaken further study to develop their Irish for teaching purposes (63%, n=82 responding 'yes').

When analysed further by gender, it was found that male respondents (78%) were more likely than female respondents (57%) to have undertaken further study to further develop their Irish for teaching purposes.

Since beginning work in the Irish-medium sector, I have undertaken further study to further develop my Irish for teaching purposes.

	Yes	No
%	63%	37%
n	82	48

Yes / No
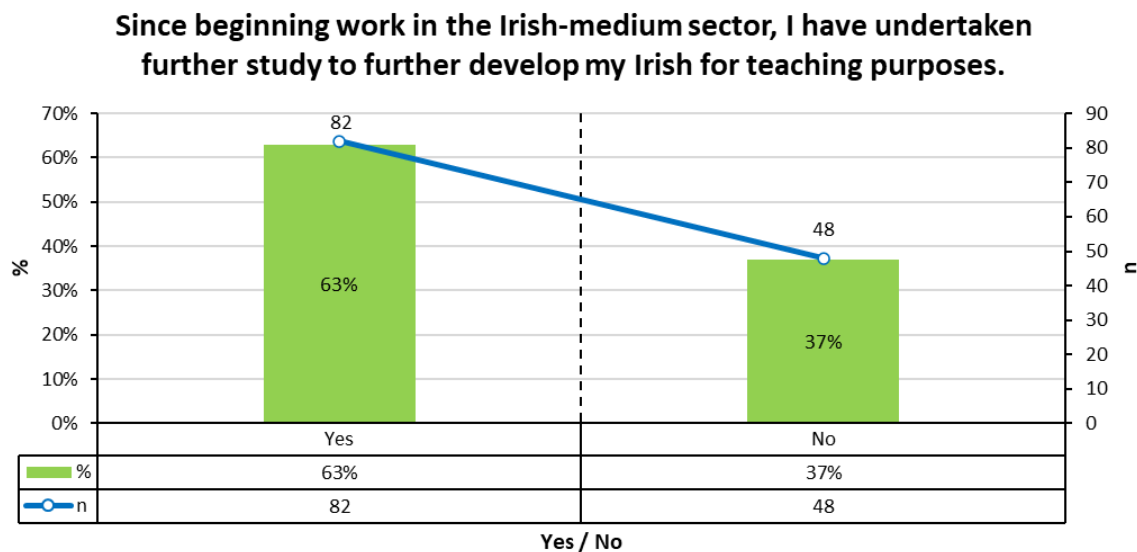
***Figure 3.7.** Further study undertaken to further develop Irish for teaching purposes.*

The issue of additional roles within the small but growing IME sector was also explored in the survey. The findings (Figure 3.8) show that over three-quarters (76%, n=99) of respondents hold one or more additional roles within their school, with just 24% (n=31) of respondents holding no additional roles in addition to their teaching role. 38% (n=50) hold one additional role, while 38% (n=49) hold more than one additional role in addition to their teaching role.

We are interested in any additional roles you might hold in your school. Choose the statement that best reflects your status in school.

	I have one additional role above and beyond my main teaching role.	I have more than one additional role above and beyond my main teaching role.	I don't have any additional roles beyond my main teaching role.
%	38%	38%	24%
n	50	49	31
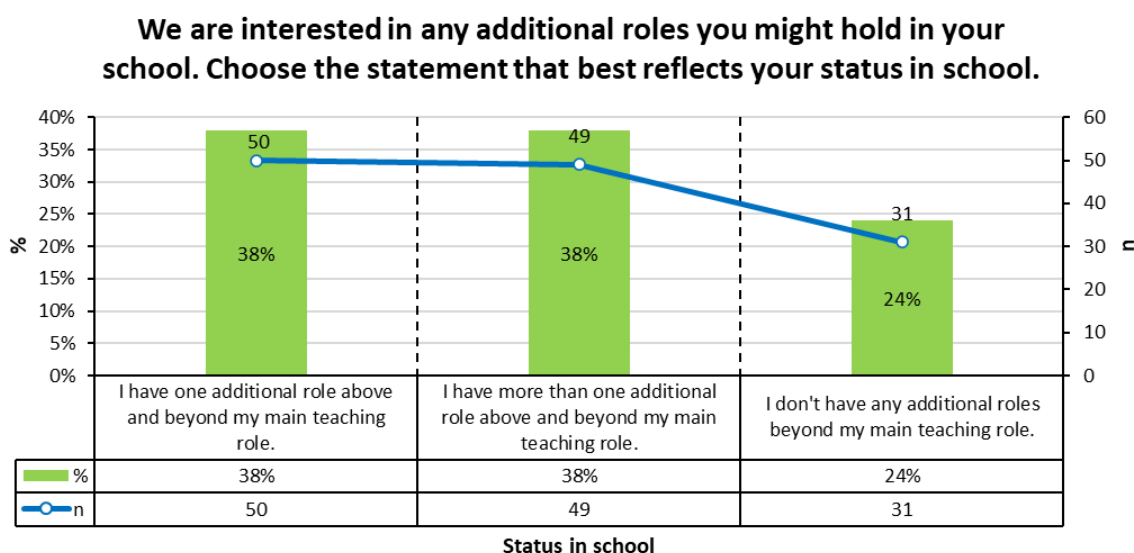
Status in school

Figure 3.8. *Statements on number of additional roles in school.*

In terms of undertaking additional roles, there was also a stark differentiation by gender. While there was only a very slight difference in the percentage of male (39%) and female (38%) respondents holding one additional role beyond their main teaching role, male respondents were much more likely than female respondents to hold more than one additional role (50% vs 33%).

Figure 3.9 (below) highlights the variation in levels of remuneration for those who hold additional roles, including leadership roles. Heads of Department (post-primary) are most likely to be remunerated (96%, n=27), followed by, for example, Year Heads (post-primary) (91%, n=10). SENCOs (79%) and primary subject co-ordinators (63%) were less likely to be remunerated for their roles. When analysed further, it is interesting to note that while 100% of the post-primary SENCOs were remunerated for their role, just 73% of primary SENCOs were remunerated for their role. This would further suggest that additional post-holders are less likely to be remunerated in primary schools compared to post-primary schools.

Additional roles you hold (if any), in addition to classroom teaching, and whether you are remunerated. You can indicate if you hold more than one role.

	Head of Department (Post-Primary)	Year Head (Post-Primary)	SENCo	Subject Co-Ordinator (Primary)	Other
I am remunerated for this role - %	96%	91%	79%	63%	58%
I am not remunerated for this role - %	4%	9%	21%	37%	42%
I am remunerated for this role (n)	27	10	11	22	32
I am not remunerated for this role (n)	1	1	3	13	23

Additional role remuneration
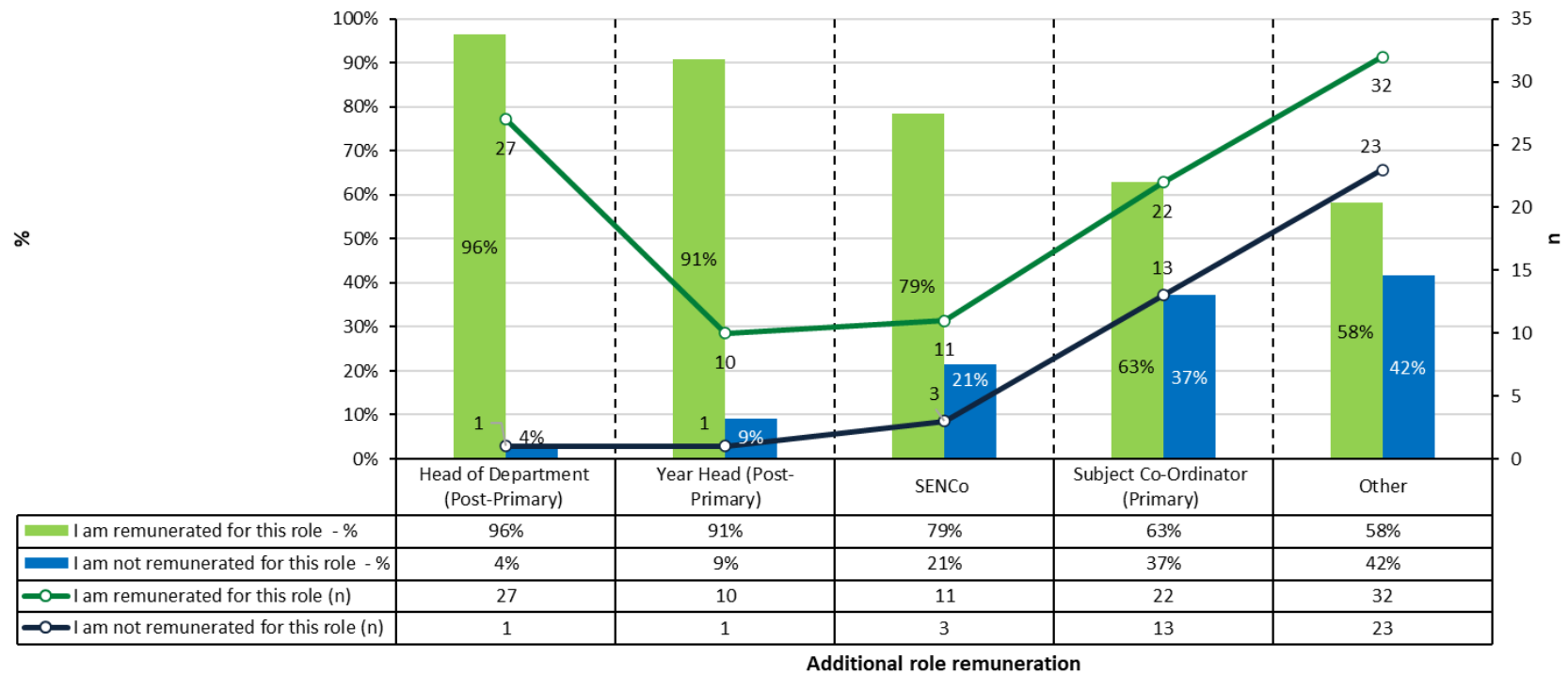
Figure 3.9. *Additional roles and remuneration.*

3.1.2. School Summary Statistics

As conveyed in Figure 3.10, the survey sample consists mainly of schools with 101 – more than 500 pupils, with a small number of schools having 50 – 100 (n=8) or less than 50 (n=2) pupils.

Approximately how many pupils are in your school?

	Less than 50	50 - 100	101 - 150	150 - 200	200 - 300	300 - 500	More than 500
%	2%	6%	21%	20%	12%	18%	21%
n	2	8	28	26	15	24	27
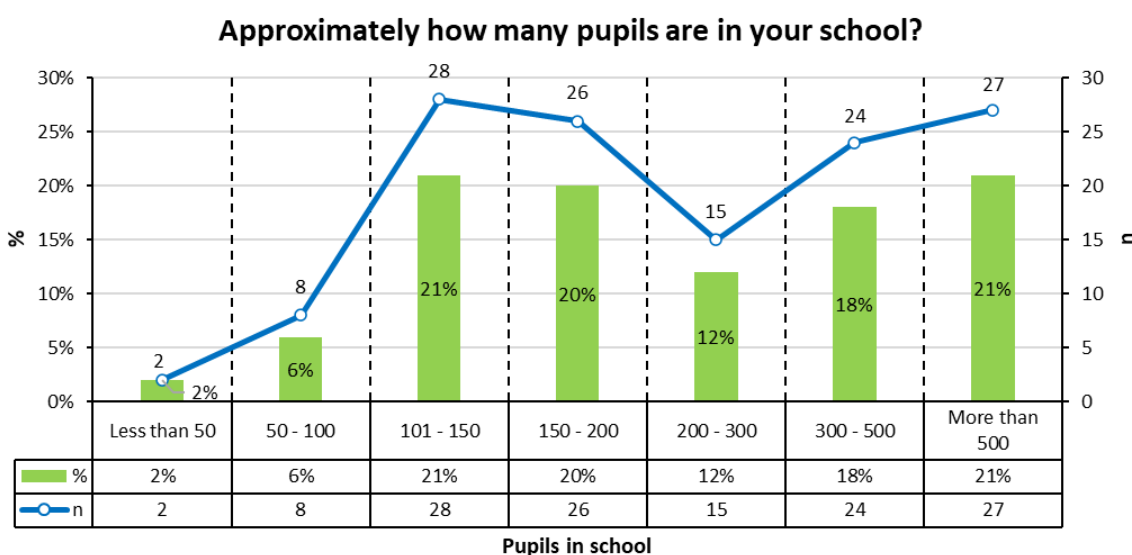
Pupils in school

Figure 3.10. Number of pupils in school.

The next series of questions explored teachers' perceptions of the quality or condition of facilities and resources in their school. These questions asked for a ranking/assessment from 'severely inadequate' through to 'very good'.

A weighted scoring system (-2 to +2) was again applied to the responses/ rankings of the quality or condition of facilities and resources in school (Table 3.2 and Figure 3.11).

The results show very clearly that all statement scores are low negative. More precisely, a majority of respondents felt that the quality of their school facilities and resources was 'severely inadequate' or 'inadequate' in respect of the play spaces (56%), green spaces (54%), buildings (51%), IT equipment (51%), other resources (51%), and classroom space for the number of children in the room (46%).

Only a third of respondents (33%, n=44) felt that the quality or condition of their school was 'good' or 'very good', falling to less than a quarter (23%, n=30) who felt that the quality or condition of their school's green spaces was 'good' or 'very good'.

Table 3.2. *Rated statements on quality/condition of facilities and resources in school (weighted scores, -2 to +2).*

Please rate the quality/condition of the following in your school:	Severely inadequate	Severely inadequate - %	Inadequate	Inadequate - %	Satisfactory	Satisfactory - %	Good	Good - %	Very good	Very good - %	Total	WS
WS Points	-2		-1		0		+1		+2			
Buildings	34	26%	32	25%	20	15%	24	18%	20	15%	130	-0.277
Classroom space for number of children in the room	35	27%	25	19%	32	25%	22	17%	16	12%	130	-0.315
Green Spaces	40	31%	30	23%	22	17%	21	16%	17	13%	130	-0.423
Play spaces	32	25%	40	31%	28	22%	16	12%	14	11%	130	-0.462
IT equipment	32	25%	34	26%	36	28%	21	16%	7	5%	130	-0.485
Other resources	33	25%	34	26%	37	28%	18	14%	8	6%	130	-0.508
Answered											130	
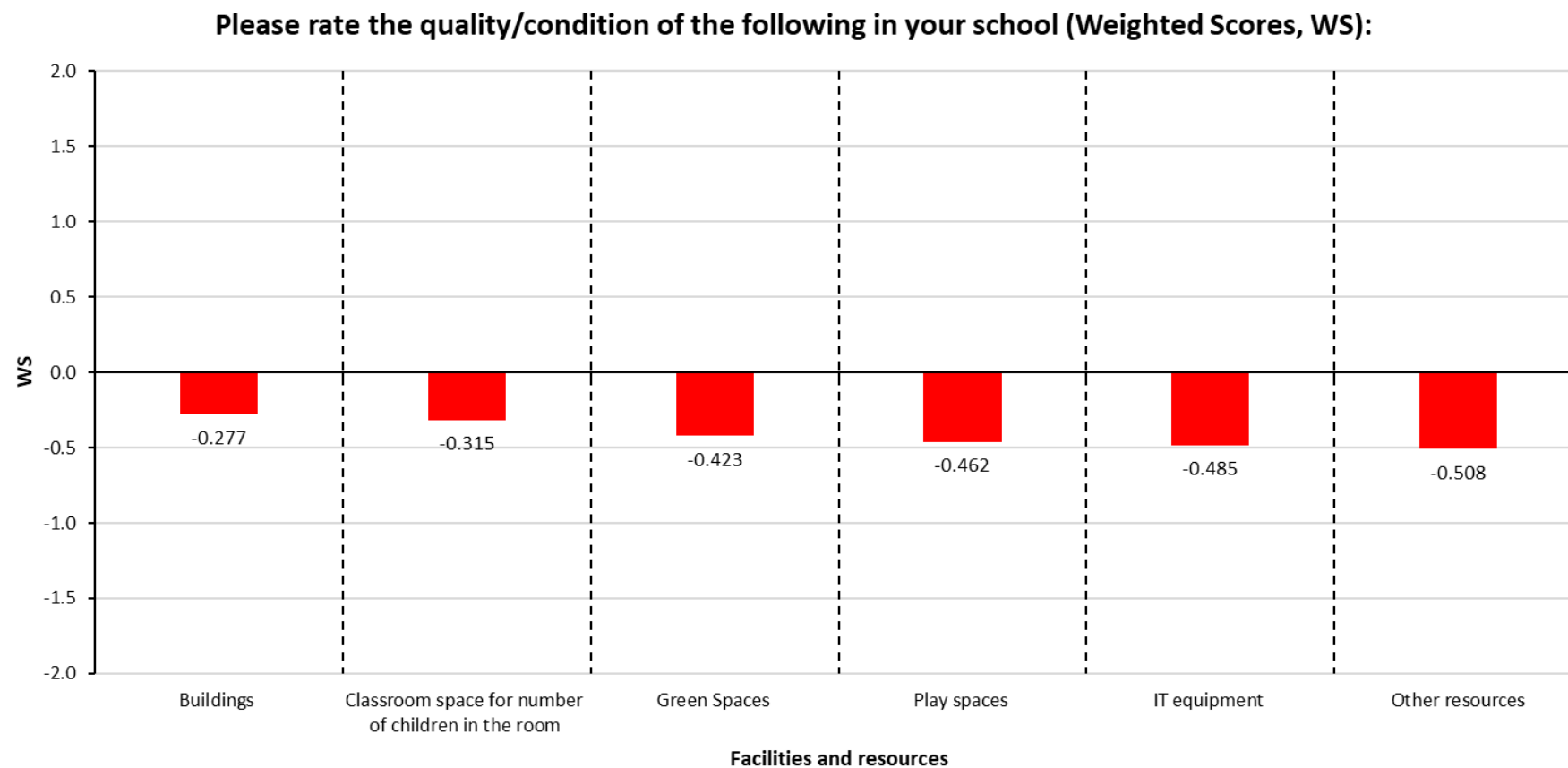
Figure 3.11. *Rated statements on quality/condition of facilities and resources in school (weighted scores, -2 to +2).*

Smaller primary schools are known to have more composite classes. As shown in Figures 3.12, 60% (n=50) of the primary sector sub-sample reported that they have composite classes in their school.

Do you have composite classes in your primary school?

	Yes	No
%	60%	40%
n	50	34

Total = 84
N/A = 46
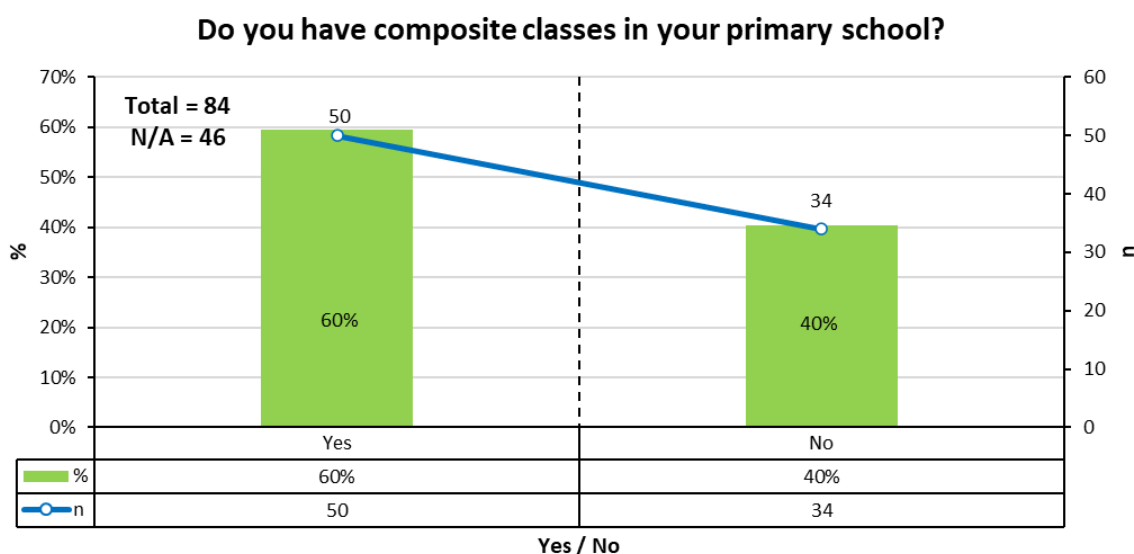
Figure 3.12. *Composite classes in primary schools.*

Respondents were then asked about the extent of provision of Irish language assistants (i.e., not classroom assistants designated to support pupils with SEN) . The results, as shown in Figure 3.13, highlight that more than two-fifths (41%, n=54) do not have the support of an Irish language assistant at all, while just 12% (n=6) reported that they had the support of an Irish language assistant in every class.

Do you have the support of an Irish language assistant to support your teaching?

	Yes – in every class	Yes – in most classes	Yes – in some classes	Yes – in very few/just one class	No
%	12%	18%	18%	11%	41%
n	16	23	23	14	54
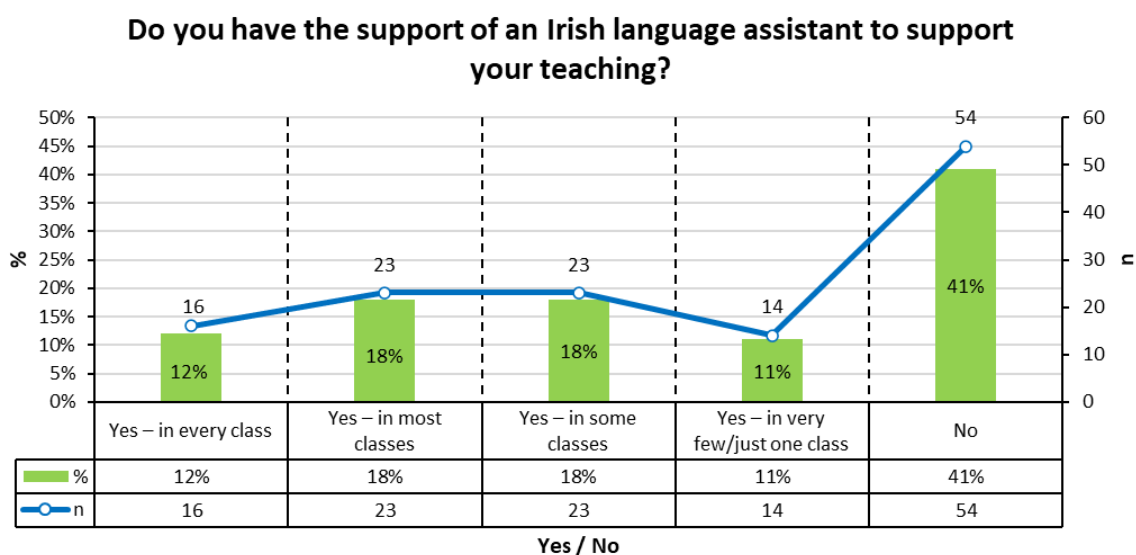
Figure 3.13. *Support of an Irish language assistant to support teaching.*

The following series of questions explored teachers' perceptions of a range of experiences of working in the IME sector in Northern Ireland. Once again, the weighted scores (-2 to +2) are presented in Table 3.3 and Figure 3.14. Here it can be readily seen that respondents feel that there are particular challenges facing them as teachers in the IM sector.

For instance, an overwhelming majority of teachers (99%, n=129) 'strongly agreed' (91%, n=118) or 'agreed' (8%, n=11) that teachers in the Irish-medium sector frequently have to make resources due to a lack of availability.

A similar very high percentage (98%, n=128) 'strongly agreed' (85%, n=111) or 'agreed' (13%, n=17) that there is a lack of understanding of the particular challenges faced by those working in the IM sector by those outside the sector e.g. DE/EA.

The lack of available training across the sector was also highlighted: 92% (n=120) 'strongly agreed' (74%, n=96) or 'agreed' (18%, n=24) that it is harder for teachers to access training opportunities for the IM sector than for the English medium sector.

The results demonstrate strong agreement too that teachers in the IM sector are more likely to experience burnout in comparison to teachers in the English medium sector. A total of 92% (n=120) 'strongly agreed' (65%, n=85) or 'agreed' (27%, n=35) that this was the case.

The next three statements once again exposed strong feelings that teachers' work in the IM sector was not adequately recognised. For instance, over three quarters of respondents (76%, n=98) 'disagreed strongly' or 'disagreed' with the statement that teachers in the IM sector are sufficiently valued for their work, while an even higher percentage of respondents (87%) 'disagreed strongly' or 'disagreed' with the statement that teachers in the IM sector are sufficiently remunerated for their work. Finally, 78% (n=102) 'disagreed strongly' or 'disagreed' with the statement that there are enough teachers joining the IM education workforce to ensure the sustainability of the sector.

Table 3.3. Rated statements on teachers in the Irish-medium sector (weighted scores, -2 to +2).

Looking in general at teachers in the Irish-medium Sector, please rate your agreement with the following statements:	Strongly disagree	Strongly disagree - %	Disagree	Disagree - %	Neither agree nor disagree	Neither agree nor disagree - %	Agree	Agree - %	Strongly agree	Strongly agree - %	Total	WS
WS Points	-2		-1		0		+1		+2			
Teachers in the Irish-medium sector frequently have to make resources due to a lack of availability	0	0%	0	0%	1	1%	11	8%	118	91%	130	1.900
There is a lack of understanding of the particular challenges faced by those working in the Irish-medium sector by those outside the sector e.g. EA/DE	1	1%	0	0%	1	1%	17	13%	111	85%	130	1.823
It is harder for teachers to access training opportunities for the Irish-medium sector than the English-medium sector	1	1%	0	0%	9	7%	24	18%	96	74%	130	1.646
Teachers in the Irish-medium sector are more likely to experience burn out in comparison to teachers in the English-medium sector	1	1%	0	0%	9	7%	35	27%	85	65%	130	1.562
Teachers in the Irish-medium sector are sufficiently valued for their work	41	32%	57	44%	18	14%	13	10%	1	1%	130	-0.954
There are enough teachers joining the Irish-medium education workforce to ensure the sustainability of the sector	63	48%	39	30%	10	8%	16	12%	2	2%	130	-1.115
Teachers in the Irish-medium sector are sufficiently remunerated for their work	56	43%	57	44%	12	9%	5	4%	0	0%	130	-1.262
Answered											130	

Looking in general at teachers in the Irish-medium Sector, please rate your agreement with the following statements (Weighted Scores, WS):

Statements on teachers in the Irish-medium Sector

- Teachers in the Irish-medium sector frequently have to make resources due to a lack of availability: 1.900
- There is a lack of understanding of the particular challenges faced by those working in the Irish-medium sector by those outside the sector e.g. EA/DE: 1.823
- It is harder for teachers to access training opportunities for the Irish-medium sector than the English-medium sector: 1.646
- Teachers in the Irish-medium sector are more likely to experience burn out in comparison to teachers in the English-medium sector: 1.562
- Teachers in the Irish-medium sector are sufficiently valued for their work: -0.954
- There are enough teachers joining the Irish-medium education workforce to ensure the sustainability of the sector: -1.115
- Teachers in the Irish-medium sector are sufficiently remunerated for their work: -1.262

Figure 3.14. *Rated statements on teachers in the Irish-medium sector (weighted scores, -2 to +2).*

3.1.3. Workload Summary Statistics

At the core of the survey were questions related to the actual workload of teachers in the IM sector. As illustrated in Figures 3.15, more than four out of five IM teachers (82%, n=102) work more than 40 hours per week including evening and weekends. Over half (54%, n=67) work between 41 and 50 hours per week and an alarming 28% (n=35) work 51 hours or more per week.
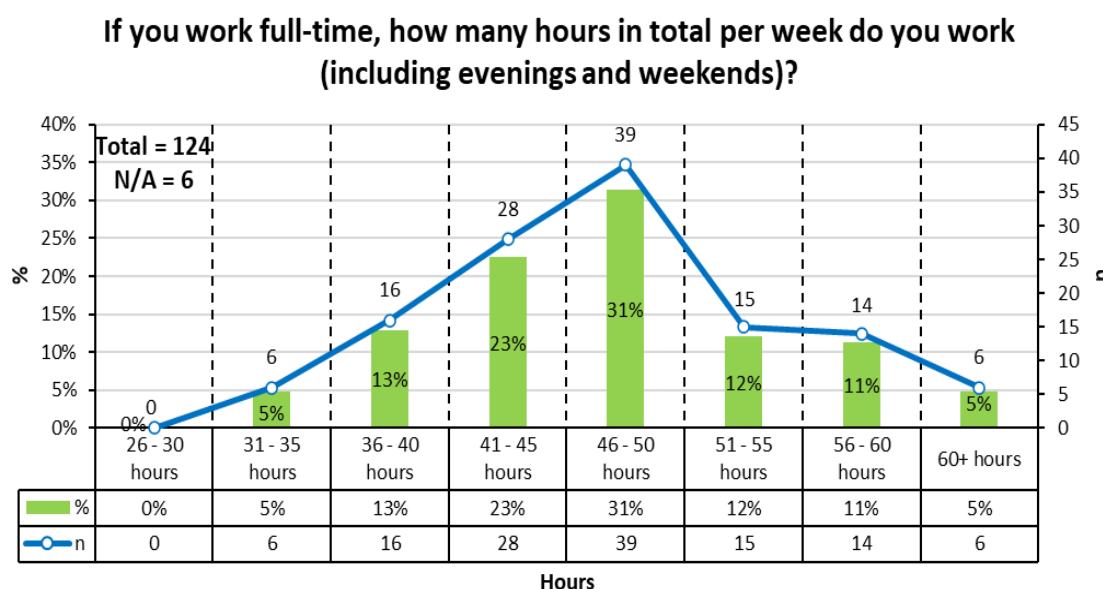
Figure 3.15. Number of hours worked per week including evenings and weekends.

When asked how many hours they work outside their directed time (e.g. evenings and weekends), the results are again alarming – see Figure 3.16. The most common number of hours per week worked outside of directed time is 6-10 hours (41%, n=51). Results also show that 40% (n=49) of teachers are working more than 10 additional hours per week, 16% (n=20) are working 16 or more additional hours, and 5% (n=6) are working 20 or more additional hours per week.

If you work full-time, how many hours in total per week do you work outside your directed time e.g. evenings and weekends?

Total = 124
N/A = 6

	1 - 5 hours	6 - 10 hours	11 - 15 hours	16 - 20 hours	20+ hours
%	19%	41%	23%	11%	5%
n	24	51	29	14	6
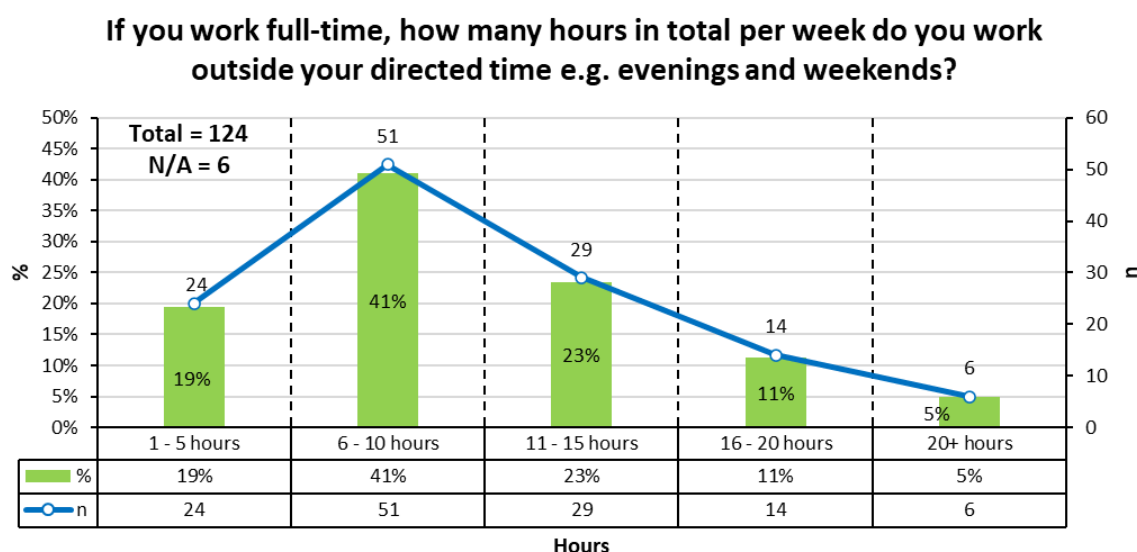
Hours

Figure 3.16. *Number of hours worked per week outside of directed time including evenings and weekends.*

In terms of workload itself, there was once again a stark difference by gender, in particular in the proportion of male and female respondents who work more than 51 hours per week, although sample sizes are small. Of the male respondents, 20% claimed that they worked more than 51 hours per week compared to 33% of the female respondents. Similarly, all 6 respondents who claimed that they worked 20+ hours per week outside of directed time were female.

Interestingly, when analysed by whether the teachers were teaching composite classes or not, there was no consistent pattern of difference in the relative workload hours, except that all 4 of the respondents who claimed to be working 60+ hours per week were teachers of composite classes, while four of the five teachers who claimed that they worked 20+ hours outside their directed time were also composite class teachers.

Respondents were then asked whether they felt that working in the IM sector required them to work more hours than would be required in the EM sector. The findings (as displayed in Figure 3.17 below) show that 99% of respondents did feel that they were required to work more hours, with 64% (n=83) claiming that this was the case 'to a significant extent'.

Do you feel that working in the Irish-medium sector requires you to work more hours than would be required if you were a teacher in the English-medium sector?

	No – being an Irish-medium teacher does not require any additional working hours	Yes – to a small extent I feel that being an Irish-medium teacher requires me to work additional working hours	Yes – to a moderate extent I feel that being an Irish-medium teacher requires me to work additional working hours	Yes – to a significant extent I feel that being an Irish-medium teacher requires me to work additional working hours
%	1%	8%	27%	64%
n	1	11	35	83

Yes / No

Figure 3.17. *Number of hours worked in the Irish-medium sector compared with the English medium sector.*

The subsequent series of questions explored the particular nature of this additional workload in more detail through presenting respondents with a list of possible tasks and asking them whether they were required in order to complete their teaching role.

Figure 3.18 shows that the vast majority of participants (more than three quarters in every case) are completing all the listed tasks; the most common of which is translation of resources (99%, n=129), follow by Irish-medium subject specific resource development (97%, n=126), producing bilingual communications for parents/relevant professionals (85%, n=110), preparation of SEN resources specific to the IM sector (84%, n=109), preparation of additional assessment resources specific to the IM sector (82%, n=106), supporting children and families with little to no Irish at home (78%, n=102), and additional professional development relevant to develop and/or maintain Irish language competence (76%, n=99).

Below are a selection of tasks which might be required in addition to normal teaching hours for teachers in the Irish-medium sector. Please select as many as you feel you are required to complete in your role:

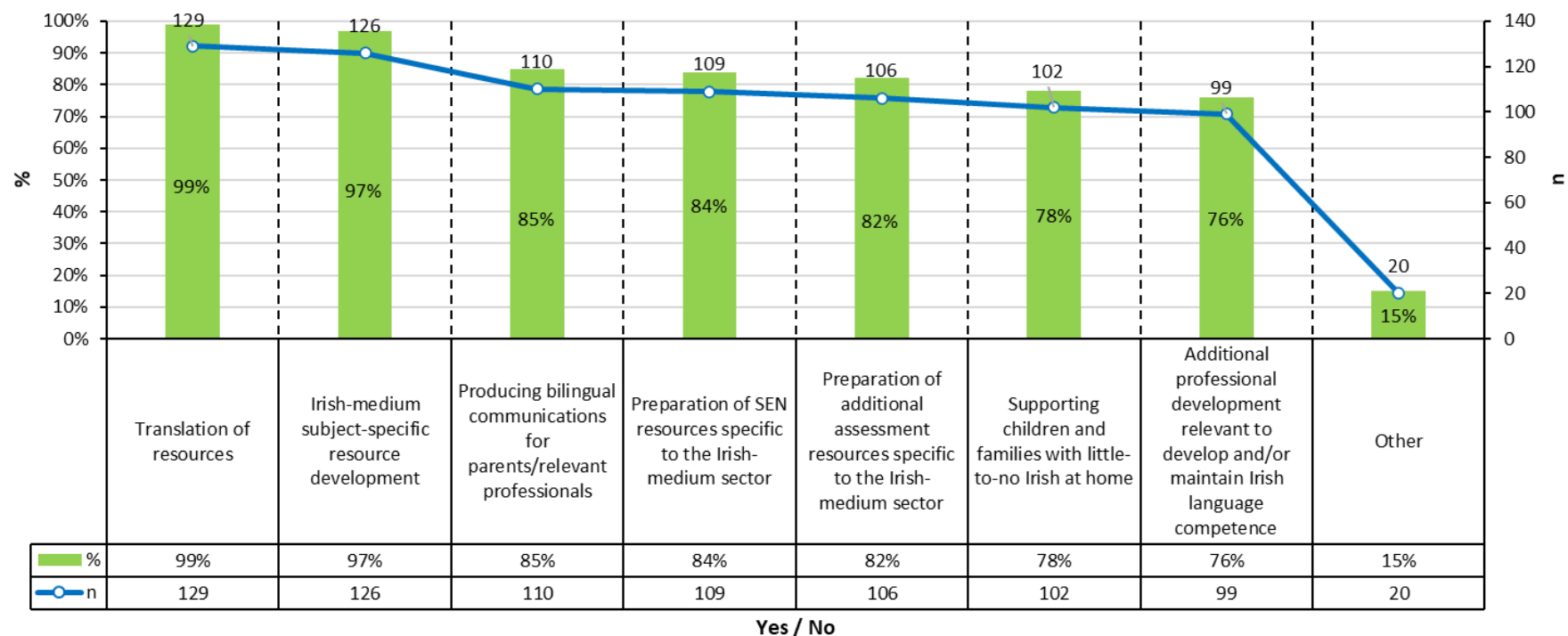|	Translation of resources	Irish-medium subject-specific resource development	Producing bilingual communications for parents/relevant professionals	Preparation of SEN resources specific to the Irish-medium sector	Preparation of additional assessment resources specific to the Irish-medium sector	Supporting children and families with little-to-no Irish at home	Additional professional development relevant to develop and/or maintain Irish language competence	Other
%	99%	97%	85%	84%	82%	78%	76%	15%
n	129	126	110	109	106	102	99	20

Yes / No

Figure 3.18. Tasks required in addition to normal teaching hours for teachers in the Irish-medium sector.

In one of the most significant series of questions in the survey, respondents were then asked about the impact that their workload as teachers in the IM sector was having on them. The results are displayed in Table 3.4 and Figure 3.19.

Findings show that more than three-quarters of respondents (87%, n=113) 'agree' or 'strongly agree' with the statement that "I think my workload is excessive" and 81% (n=106) 'agree' or 'strongly agree' with the statement that "I think my weekly workload is unsustainable".

Furthermore, a total of 88% (n=111) 'agree' or 'strongly agree' with the statement that "I'm concerned that my workload may compromise my quality of teaching", with just three teachers disagreeing with this statement.

In particular, and most alarmingly, we see that 90% (n=117) 'agree' or 'strongly agree' with the statement that "I'm concerned that my workload may compromise my mental health" – only two respondents disagreed with this statement. Similarly, 80% (n=104) 'agree' or 'strongly agree' with the statement that "I'm concerned that my workload may compromise my physical health".

This disproportionate female workload (highlighted above) may explain why female respondents were more likely than their male colleagues to note their concern that their workload was impacting their mental and physical health, that their workload was compromising the quality of their teaching, and that their workload was excessive and unsustainable. Furthermore, female respondents were more likely than male respondents to agree that teachers in the IM sector are more likely to experience burnout than their EM colleagues.

Table 3.4. *Rated statements on workload (weighted scores, -2 to +2).*

Please rate your agreement with the statements below:	Strongly disagree	Strongly disagree - %	Disagree	Disagree - %	Neither agree nor disagree	Neither agree nor disagree - %	Agree	Agree - %	Strongly agree	Strongly agree - %	Total	WS
WS Points	-2		-1		0		+1		+2			
I'm concerned that my workload may compromise my quality of teaching	0	0%	3	2%	13	10%	47	36%	67	52%	130	1.369
I'm concerned that my workload may compromise my mental health	0	0%	2	2%	11	8%	55	42%	62	48%	130	1.362
I think that my weekly workload is excessive	0	0%	1	1%	16	12%	56	43%	57	44%	130	1.300
I think that my weekly workload is unsustainable	0	0%	7	5%	17	13%	55	42%	51	39%	130	1.154
I'm concerned that my workload may compromise my physical health	1	1%	9	7%	16	12%	49	38%	55	42%	130	1.138
Answered											130	

Please rate your agreement with the statements on your workload below (Weighted Scores, WS):
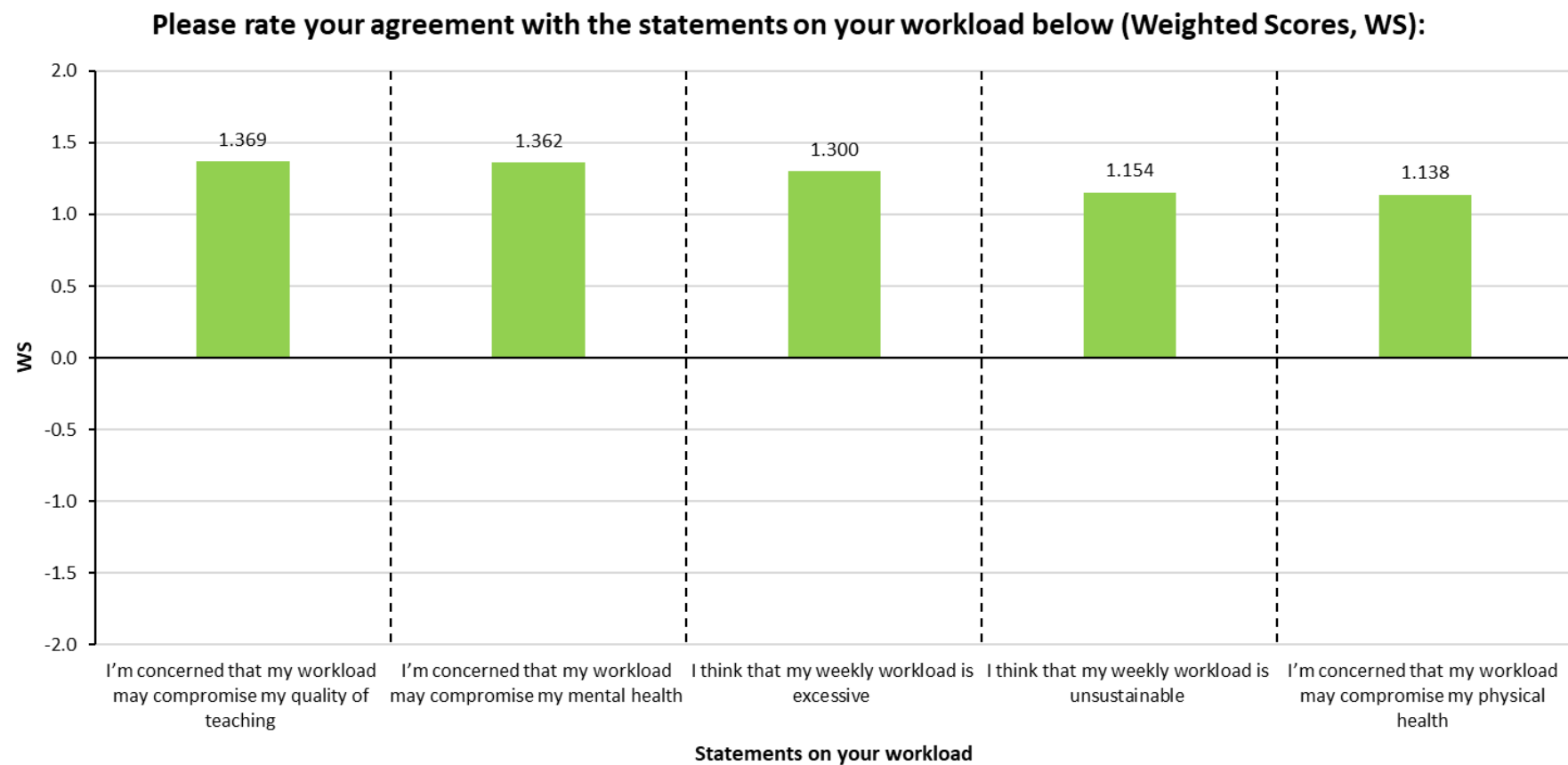
Figure 3.19. *Rated statements on workload (weighted scores, -2 to +2).*

The perceived disparity in workload between the IM and EM sectors was explored in the next question where respondents were asked how their workload compared to colleagues in the EM sector. The findings, highlighted in Figure 3.20, show that 59% (n=77) felt that they work *significantly* longer hours in comparison to colleagues in the English-medium sector, while a further 35% (n=46) stated that they work *slightly* longer hours. Just 6% of respondents (n=7) felt that the workload was comparable, and no respondents suggested that they worked fewer hours.
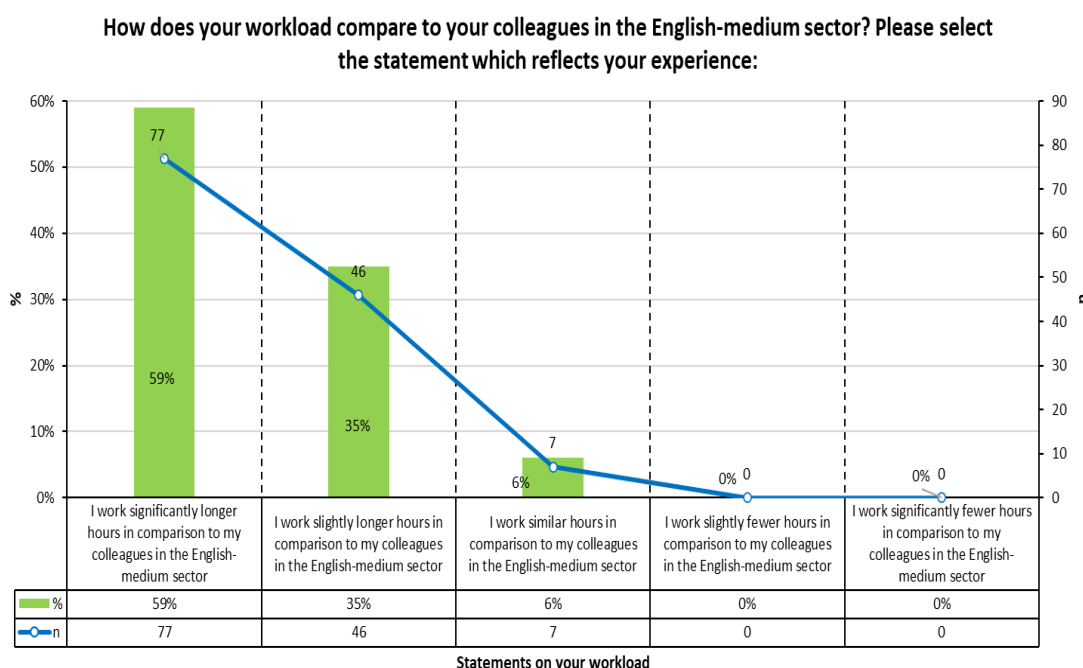
Figure 3.20. Comparison of workload in the Irish-medium sector with the English-medium sector.

The final main question in the survey asked respondents what would improve the workload of teachers and practitioners in the IM sector. Respondents were presented with a list of possible options and were invited to select all that they felt would help improve the current situation.

The results, as displayed in Figure 3.21, show that all options presented were supported by more than two thirds of respondents. The measures that gained most support from the teachers were (in descending order): provision of more subject-specific Irish language resources (92%), additional time for planning and preparation (88%), additional salary/allowance for IM teachers (88%), additional professional development (88%), additional Irish language assistants e.g., to support resource development (85%), additional support and training for newly qualified teachers (80%), smaller class sizes (78%), additional ITE places for the IM sector (76%) and additional support and training for teachers returning to the sector (70%).

What would improve the workload of teachers and practitioners in the Irish-medium sector? Tick all that apply:

	Provision of more subject-specific Irish language resources	Additional protected Planning and Preparation time (and so reduced teaching time) for teachers in the Irish-medium sector	Additional allowance/salary for teachers working in the Irish-medium sector	Additional ongoing professional development for all teachers within the Irish-medium sector	Additional Irish language assistants e.g. to support resource development	Additional support and training for teachers who are newly qualified	Smaller class sizes for the Irish-medium sector	Additional Initial Teacher Education places for the Irish-medium sector	Additional support and training for teachers returning to the sector	Other
%	92%	88%	88%	88%	85%	80%	78%	76%	70%	16%
n	119	114	114	114	111	104	101	99	91	21

Improvements for workload

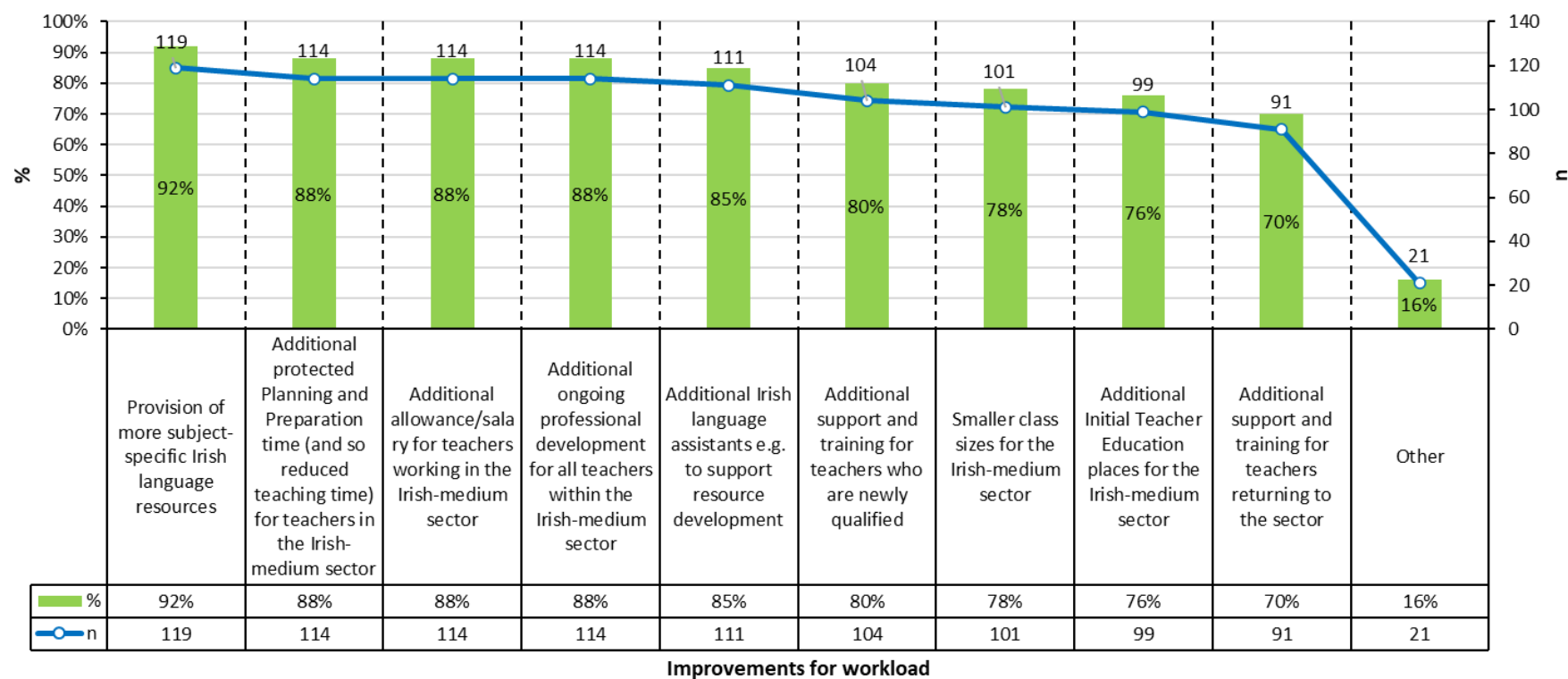*Figure 3.21. Improvements for workload of teachers and practitioners in the Irish-medium sector.*

Chapter 4: Qualitative Results

4.1 Resources

4.1.1. Lack of Available Resources in Irish

One of the most significant challenges faced by Irish-medium schools is the lack of readily available teaching resources. Unlike English Medium schools, where teachers can easily access materials aligned with the curriculum, Irish-medium educators must invest significant time and effort into sourcing appropriate resources for their pupils.

> *"We don't have the same resources. You can't walk and put your hand on what you're teaching that day so there's prep between, you know, finding the right material for all the abilities of children in your class and finding that from, you know, on a daily and a weekly basis, so that you're covering all of the curriculum." (School 1, Principal)*

This challenge is particularly acute for new Irish-medium schools, which often start with little to no existing resource base, placing them at a significant disadvantage compared to more established schools.

> *"You've got schools now that are starting up, new Irish-medium schools are starting up, but they're in the position that our school was 50-odd years ago. You know, they're starting and the resources aren't there." (Principal, Focus Group)*

In contrast, Irish-medium educators note that schools in the Republic of Ireland benefit from a more structured and well-resourced system, with better access to curriculum-aligned materials.

> *"[In the South] there's more resources for them… It's more structured, or whatever, the books and things that they would use... [in the North] if you wanted to cover a particular topic, there's not one book that would cover a topic from that." (School 1, Teacher)*

Despite these challenges, Irish-medium schools continue to deliver strong academic outcomes, but educators feel they are expected to achieve excellence without the same level of support.

> *"We're expected to get excellent results, do get good results, but you know, we don't have the resources." (School 2, Principal)*

A major concern is the lack of translated textbooks and exam materials for Irish-medium pupils. For example, Irish-medium pupils do not have access to many past papers or textbooks in Irish, placing additional burdens on both the pupils and the teachers.

> *"CCEA revised all their syllabus in 2017 I think, and there's not been one single textbook or GCSE or A Level translated to Irish. CCEA have basically said there's no money to translate them to Irish." (School 2, Teacher)*

> *"CCEA provide excellent resources. But there's just not enough, you know? And it means then that teachers have to work additional hours, you know? There are fewer Irish-medium past papers and all exams than there are English Medium papers on the site. For some reason they took down all of the past papers and revamped the site, but now with even less papers [in Irish] available." (School 2, Principal)*

Further concerns have been raised about the potential impact of a curriculum review, as Irish-medium schools are often left out of initial planning and must later advocate for the necessary resources to be developed in Irish.

> *"There's talk now of the Minister having a review of the educational curriculum. And for me, that fills me with alarm, because, you know, does that mean then all the stuff that we have will have to be, you know, redeveloped… A decision will be made without thinking of Irish-medium schools. And then Irish-medium schools will have to lobby, you know, persuade, try and get the resources in place to deal with any changes that may happen to the Northern Ireland curriculum. And it's the same with CCEA. And, you know, CCEA is the only examinations board that provides, you know, examinations through the medium of Irish, so when CCEA has a review of their specifications at GCSE and A Level, you know, they don't think of Irish-medium at the start. So then we have to scramble to try and provide resources for our pupils ourselves." (School 2, Principal)*

This ongoing lack of resources places additional strain on teachers and pupils, requiring Irish-medium educators to dedicate significant time and effort to creating their own materials while also advocating for sector-wide improvements.

4.1.2 Resource Preparation

A key challenge for Irish-medium educators is the extensive time and effort required to prepare their own resources. Unlike English Medium educators, who can usually rely on pre-existing materials, IM teachers frequently translate, adapt, or create their own teaching resources to ensure they align with the curriculum and meet the needs of their pupils.

> *"We're self-resourcing. That's just the nature of it." (Principal, Focus Group)*

This necessity to create materials from scratch places a significant additional workload on teachers. Without adequate funding allocated to resource development, many Irish-medium educators are left to complete this work in their own time.

> *"It's extra workload when you're translating resources and trying to source resources and everything." (Principal, Focus Group)*

> *"If you wanted to teach a big book to somebody and then, and then do work based on that. I mean, I was taking photos and uploading them off a big book and making worksheets and making my own worksheets and differentiating my own worksheets, and it was very, very, very, very time-consuming." (School 1, Teacher)*

Despite the considerable amount of extra work required, Irish-medium teachers are not given dedicated time within the school day to prepare resources. This leads to preparation having to be completed during evenings, weekends, and school holidays.

> *"And where do you get the time? You know, none of us were given time off timetable, you know, to develop. If we decided, right, we want to deliver OCN RE next year, none of us were given time off timetable to prepare the resources that were needed. We just spent our weekends and our holidays." (Principal, Focus Group)*

Some teachers acknowledge that developing their own materials allows for better differentiation and customisation for pupils' needs, but still described how the workload remains overwhelming.

> *"We can make resources that are more appropriate and more suitable to the level of the children in the class when we're differentiating. So, in that respect, it is good because you have that—you know you can do that. But the difficulty is the time… You're taking work home with you. It never ends, and you're never on top of things." (School 4, Teacher)*

Even when external organisations, such as Áisaonad, provide new resources, teachers often lack the time to review and integrate them effectively into their teaching.

> *"It's okay saying yes, the Áisaonad is making more resources, but sometimes we get resources sent out, and you don't even have time to properly look at them, to properly get used to using them and fit them into your planning. So sometimes stuff gets delivered out here, or new resources appear, and they could be sitting in a storeroom because you don't have the time to actually, let's have a look at this and see can we use this in term two." (School 1, Principal)*

Teachers who have been in the Irish-medium sector for many years describe how it has taken decades to build up a sufficient resource base. As a result of these challenges, Irish-medium teachers often develop a habit of "hoarding resources" and repurposing materials whenever possible, recognising that finding appropriate materials is an ongoing struggle.

> *"I have been teaching now over 27, 28 years in the Irish-medium sector, and I have built up my resources, but it took that long to get to the stage now." (School 4, Teacher)*

> *"Every teacher kind of hoards resources, and they're kind of a magpie, you know, anything that's fine. I don't know, maybe more an Irish-medium thing, because there's such a shortage. But anything I would've found, I would've been like, oh, I use that. I find somewhere to use that. And there was a lot of, you know, there still are a lot of main copies, or primary copies, of a lot of handwritten resources, and a lot of handwritten resources in maths and the world around us as well as different topics, you know, just basically where people have translated everything and gone through and made their own workbooks, and worksheets." (School 1, Teacher)*

Although some progress has been made over time in developing more resources for Irish-medium Education, the issue remains significant.

> *"There are a lot more resources than when I started, to be honest." (School 1, Teacher)*

Despite these improvements, the burden of resource preparation still falls heavily on teachers, consuming significant amounts of their personal time and contributing to workload pressures in the Irish-medium sector.

4.1.3 Resource Disparities Between Sectors

The participants consistently highlighted the contrast between the resources available to them and those readily accessible to their English Medium (EM) counterparts. While EM schools benefit from an extensive range of pre-prepared materials, digital tools, and structured curricular supports, Irish-medium teachers often find themselves having to create, translate, or adapt their own resources.

> *"There's loads of apps and all, you know, to help spelling in English… You could do the Wordles and all of those, but you have to make your own if you want to do that in Irish." (Principal, Focus Group)*

> *"There's a massive difference between teaching in Irish-medium and English medium. Everything is just available in English medium schools, everything is just at the touch of a button or on the shelf... Everything is in front of you, and I noticed a massive difference in Irish-medium... You're always thinking about teaching or the things you've got to do, you're flat out preparing lots of resources at all times."* (School 3, Teacher)

Participants reported that although there has been progress in recent years, Irish-medium schools still face significant shortages in subject-specific resources, textbooks, and exam preparation materials compared to their English Medium counterparts.

> *"While there's been some progress in recent years, it remains the case that there are very few educational resources for schools to teach through the medium of Irish when compared to their English medium counterparts."* (School 2, Principal)

> *"If I was teaching in an English school, I would have resources coming out of my ears."* (School 3, Principal)

This gap in resources not only affects classroom teaching but also has a direct impact on teachers' workloads, forcing them to dedicate substantial personal time to translating and creating materials from scratch.

> *"Talking to their friends at weekends; what did you do at the weekend? Aww I was here early; I'm flying off to Spain. What are you doing? I'm translating books." (Principal, Focus Group)*

> *"I have to spend a lot of time, you know, working with CCEA to try and, you know, manage this and, you know, basically scope out the issues, and it also impacts on my teachers, because they then, you know, are left with trying to get pupils prepared for examinations without all the support that their English medium counterparts would have." (School 2, Principal)*

The lack of structured resources also influences daily teaching practices, such as homework assignments, which requires considerably more support in Irish-medium settings.

> *"I have to say, for one thing, for homework and that, now we would have to do our homework sort of on a daily basis, whereas the English medium, they can just fire homework home for the whole week and let them at it, you know? But for ours, it's, you*

know… For foundation, especially, you're sort of monitoring all the time, and, you know, you have different levels in the class. With the Irish-medium, it is very difficult." (School 4, Teacher)

Teachers who have trained in both Irish-medium and English Medium settings observe a clear difference in the ease of access to teaching materials, reinforcing the additional pressures placed on IM educators.

"Whenever I was on teaching practice and asked, and my friends would have been English medium, and everything was just so much easier for them. They just went online, and there's so much access, even the library and the university, and there was a lot more available, and it just seemed easier for them." (School 1, Teacher)

To bridge this gap, many Irish-medium teachers have taken it upon themselves to develop their own resources, often working just a step ahead of their pupils in the absence of translated materials.

"Most teachers like me, who've been working in the area for a number of years, will have provided their own workbooks from scratch. We have translated textbooks. I translated a textbook, you know, I was a chapter ahead of a class for a whole year." (School 2, Principal)

While increasing the availability of Irish-medium resources would significantly reduce the burden on teachers, it is acknowledged that resource provision alone will not completely eliminate the challenges faced by Irish-medium educators.

"Resourcing is one issue, and if you ask teachers, they will say they will want resources. And there's maybe a misunderstanding sometimes that teachers mean we can consider a resource, throw it at a class, and that's everything sorted, because teachers in English medium also have to prepare resources for the particular context of the class that they have. So there's a slight misunderstanding that sometimes people think that that would solve everything—that if CCEA would produce all these resources, that somehow workload would be significantly affected. It would be affected. It would be helped. But it's only one aspect of it." (Principal, Focus Group)

While additional resources would undoubtedly alleviate some of the pressures on Irish-medium teachers, the disparity in provision remains a core issue that affects not only teacher workload but also the quality and consistency of education for IM pupils.

4.2 Language

4.2.1 Teaching in a Second Language

For most educators in the IM sector, teaching involves an added cognitive demand, as they are working in what is often their second language. Even those who are highly fluent in Irish acknowledge the extra effort required to teach effectively in the language.

"You're teaching in what is most likely is your second language, even though you're probably… very fluent and competent, it's still a second language. And there are bits and pieces of extra work that go into that." (School 1, Principal)

"For most of us, Irish is our second language. Got to, you know, work on your Irish skills, and you know it's an extra cognitive kind of task that you're undertaking as well as your teaching." (School 2, Teacher)

This additional workload extends beyond teaching content; IM teachers must also focus on language acquisition, ensuring their own fluency remains strong while simultaneously helping pupils develop their Irish language skills.

"All Irish-medium teachers are language teachers as well as subject teachers." (School 2, Principal)

A major challenge in IM schools is that, for many pupils, the school environment is their only exposure to the Irish language. Unlike English Medium pupils, who encounter their language in daily life, IM pupils often rely entirely on school hours for their linguistic development.

"The vast majority of [pupils] only are exposed to Irish in here, therefore there, you know, it's an additional piece of work to get them comfortable and get them feeling safe and happy and ready to learn in that environment, in that immersion environment." (School 1, Principal)

Ensuring that pupils not only understand but also feel confident using Irish therefore requires additional scaffolding, increasing the workload required.

4.2.2 Translating and Adapting Resources

A recurring issue highlighted by participants is the significant amount of time IM educators spend translating and adapting resources that are readily available in English. Unlike English Medium teachers, who can access pre-prepared curricular materials, IM teachers must often create their own, reducing the time available for lesson planning and pedagogy.

"They're trying to have specific skills in each subject. So history, you're no longer just doing content. You're trying to do the historical skills part of GCSE, and also language. So they're doing two things, but they're not being given the time to develop these resources properly or to liaise properly." (Principal, Focus Group)

"I have no more time or energy to do anything, except give it out and go through with them and hope that they understand it. But like you're eating away at that, like, what the craft of teaching is meant to be, you know, we're, say, like, spend most of your time translating, as opposed to actually preparing to teach or teaching, because you have to." (School 2, Teacher)

Educators frequently take on translation work not only for their own subjects but also for external programmes, ensuring that pupils have access to the same educational opportunities as their EM peers.

> *"You would have people who would come in and train classroom assistants on, say, like reading partnerships, which is a 12-week programme to help children develop reading or reading skills. Our teachers would sit and translate, and have done, sat and translated the whole programme to then be able to deliver it to our children through Irish, because it's only available through English."* (Principal, Focus Group)

Further complicating the translation burden is the issue of dialect variation within Irish. Many of the available resources originate from the Republic of Ireland, where dialects differ from those spoken in Northern Ireland, requiring further adaptation to ensure accessibility for students. his results in additional translation work for educators, who must not only ensure linguistic accuracy but also adapt materials to align with the dialectal norms familiar to their students.

> *"The resources that are complete are coming from the South, which has different dialects. So again, you're still having to translate. For example, we have the Diary of a Wimpy Kid, and it's translated into Irish but it's translated by someone from Galway, where the dialect is different, so the kids still can't read it until we've gone through it."* (School 3, Teacher)

In addition to classroom translation, the administrative workload is increased by the need to function bilingually. This is especially true for staff teaching in an IM unit within an English Medium school.

> *"I try and conduct my business with the staff that I have through Irish, but that has to go to our main office. Our principal doesn't have Irish. So then I have to spend extra time writing the minutes in English so that they're available for her to read. We try and have a bilingual policy within our school with regard to letters, you know, texts that go out to parents. I'm sure all schools are the same as well. But again, that's extra work, you know, we we don't really have secretarial staff. You know, in fact, none of our secretarial staff in the main office have Irish."* (Irish medium Unit Coordinator, Focus Group)

4.3 Course Development and External Moderation

Expanding IM curriculum options is another significant challenge, as there is little systemic support for developing new courses in Irish. Teachers who wish to introduce new subjects must often take on the task themselves, translating and adapting materials without structured assistance.

> *"If you're trying to expand and develop new courses within the school, you kind of have to do it off your own bat and there's there's nothing immediate. There's no option even at that stage, you know, would you, would you be interested in delivering this course in Irish? It's, if you want to deliver it, you have to work on it. You have to translate it yourself. So it is a massive challenge."* (Principal, Focus Group)

The burden extends beyond teaching and into assessment processes. External moderation presents additional difficulties, as work must often be translated into English for evaluators who may not be proficient in Irish, leading to concerns about misinterpretation.

> *"We have to take all the resources and translate every unit into Irish and deliver every unit through Irish. And then you have external moderation coming in. You're having to get your work translated for the external moderator. And you're worried about, you're worried about anything being lost in translation. You're worried about, you know, points being made. It's absolute, and that's just the level of commitment and the level of work that's being done."* (Principal, Focus Group)

4.4 Impact

The additional workload of translating materials, teaching language skills alongside subject content, and adapting assessments inevitably affects the time available for other subjects. Core subjects like Irish, English, and Maths take priority, often at the expense of creative and physical education.

> *"We can't do two hours of PE. We do not physically have the time to do that, because every day we're doing Irish, English and Maths and then it's PE, PDMU, you know. So things like art, all those other things end up getting reduced."* (Principal, Focus Group)

The participants emphasised that translating resources is not a straightforward process. Effective translation requires deep linguistic, contextual, and pedagogical understanding, making it an intensive and specialised task.

> *"There needs to be a level of understanding there that it's not just you take the English version and you translate it into the Irish version. There's a deeper level of understanding needed by whoever's doing the versioning."* (School 2, Teacher)

Without a broader recognition of these challenges, the additional workload associated with teaching in IM schools will continue to place a significant strain on educators.

4.5 SEN Provision

The provision of Special Educational Needs (SEN) support in IM schools is a significant challenge, compounded by the lack of tailored resources and Irish-speaking specialists. The participants described feeling that the Irish-medium SEN coordinators (SENCo) faced a heavier workload compared to their English-medium counterparts.

> *"There's more of a burden on a SENCo in an Irish-medium school, to try and provide the same level of service, I would say, than in an English-medium school, because the tools are geared towards the English medium you know?... Services are largely provided through the medium of English. This leaves a gap for IME practitioners to fill creating an additional workload."* (School 2, Principal)

> *"We have an extra layer of work, because we're dealing with Irish language. We have kids coming through here with dyslexia, ASD, specific speech and language difficulties... but we also have the Irish language on top of that, so it's difficult for us to get like a baseline assessment for children. We have to wait until we've started formal*

teaching English, so P4, and then everyone's saying well, they haven't been exposed to the English language enough for us to be able to carry out assessments, so we can't get that support." (School 3, Teacher)

Additionally, a lack of Irish-speaking educational psychologists further exacerbates the challenge. One principal explained how the lack of understanding about the IM education system meant that they were prevented from accessing early diagnostic testing for dyslexia. The main reason for this was that the children currently cannot be assessed in Irish, so diagnoses cannot take place until pupils begin studying English literacy, usually towards the end of Year 3 or beginning of Year 4. This also increased the workload on class teachers, because all documentation from the educational psychologist needed to be translated into Irish.

> *"Whenever it comes to education psychology, it's trying to get the education psychologists to understand the system here. And like, for example, for diagnosis of dyslexia, you're generally seven or eight years of age… So even though we've children who we think may be dyslexic, we can't do anything about that… There are some children who are being told to go to English medium, because that's where the supports are."* (School 3, Principal)

> *"All our Ed Psychs are all in English. So our team, our teachers, are qualified in the Irish-medium sector. They're, they're used to using the language, you know, and all the terminology in Irish and then, and then an Ed Psych comes in, and you have to then, you know, kind of translate and go back and into English."* (Principal, Focus Group)

In one of the principal focus groups, when discussing SEN provision in IM schools, one principal summarised that, "*There's absolutely nothing."* Another principal agreed, responding that, *"The SEN provision through Irish-medium is non-existent."*

4.6 Facilities

One of the challenges facing teachers and practitioners in the IM sector is the issue of substandard and inadequate school accommodation. A significant proportion of IM schools operate in older, temporary or insufficiently resourced buildings. This disparity in facilities has a direct impact on the workload of teachers and school leaders, who must dedicate additional time and effort to securing appropriate resources and advocating for necessary improvements.

> *"In the Irish-medium sector, there is a higher percentage of schools with substandard accommodation… In the English-medium sector, you've got mostly… well-established schools that have been going for a long time, and they have the basic infrastructure required."* (School 2, Principal)

> *"You've got schools now that are starting up, new Irish-medium schools are starting up… but they're starting off with huts. And, you know, in this day and age, I mean, that's a disgrace, you know, nothing short of a disgrace, particularly when there's legal judgments and agreements internationally, binding agreements that that all this stuff is gonna be on a parity now, that every opportunity will be given to Irish-medium. But when you're on the ground, it's not, it's not the case."* (Principal, Focus Group)

These statements underscore the additional administrative burden placed on IM school leaders, who must engage in continuous advocacy and negotiation to secure adequate facilities, detracting from their core educational responsibilities. Furthermore, the uncertainty surrounding school infrastructure in the IM sector has a cascading effect on educational planning and delivery.

> *"Teachers have to be inventive. School leaders have to work hard. You know, every year for up until maybe year seven, of the school we didn't know how many classrooms we would have until August, when you know we are delivering mobile classrooms or whatever, and then you know you can't plan your curriculum, you can't plan your timetable, you can't plan your staffing. All of that is impacted by the accommodation."* (School 2, Principal)

Teachers also spoke of the impact of unsuitable or crowded accommodation. In one instance, this meant that there was no staff room, and a teacher remarked that this impacted on her ability to find somewhere to prepare her lessons and mark pupil work:

> *"There's just no there's just no nowhere where you can escape to and find peace, quiet, nowhere." (School 1, Teacher)*

Participants reported that this instability places an additional workload on IM teachers and administrators, who must constantly adapt to evolving circumstances, often at very short notice. The lack of permanent, well-equipped facilities not only increases the workload for IM teachers but also creates an additional layer of disadvantage for pupils in the sector. Without the stability of a well-planned learning environment, curriculum implementation, timetabling, and staff allocation become significantly more complex.

Principals readily admitted that the inadequate condition of the school buildings had a negative impact both on pupil enrolment (where parents make obvious comparisons to newer, better resourced English-medium schools) and also on teacher recruitment and retention (where student teachers cannot fail to notice the differences and are thereby discouraged from seeking employment in the Irish-medium sector):

> *But we, we get about 50 or 60% of our children each year from our naíscoil, from the nursery, and then we'll have to entice and make it, make it an option for parents who are interested in bilingual education or Irish-medium education. But we lose, but I'm sure, because I see it on their faces when they walk in on Open Day, and the place is as good as it ever looks on Open Day, and they're looking about, and they're sort of waiting to turn the corner to see the next bit. You know, "Where's your soft play area? Where's your, you know your resource area for children?"* (Principal, Focus Group)

> *"It's never been a purpose-built school, and the school is 33 years old, 34 years old this year maybe, you know there's no space outside of just tarmac outside. So, if we have student teachers coming in, you know? And maybe they've done two years and the two schools close to us there's XXXX and XXX both schools where they've, yeah, both beautiful and maybe less than 10 years old. So, our student teachers have spent they have been up in XXX, and then they come down to us, and it's just night and day, you*

know? So, you can see them you can sort of see the cogs moving" (Principal, Focus Group)

4.7 Parents in Irish-medium Education

Parents play a critical role in the IM education system, yet they often face significant barriers due to language constraints and socio-economic challenges. Many parents of pupils in IM schools do not speak Irish themselves, which necessitates a bilingual approach in school communications. This requirement substantially increases the workload for IM educators, as all school materials, including newsletters, prospectuses, websites, and general correspondence, must be produced in both Irish and English.

> *"Most of the parents, you know, from Irish-medium schools don't speak Irish, so… everything has to be produced in Irish and in English. So just the additional burden to provide material in Irish and in English… That's twice as much work as you would have if I was in an English-medium school."* (School 2, Principal)

> *"The parents don't have Irish, so when they set homework, they have an awful lot of explaining and see-saw to do in English, so that the parents can understand what the children have to do. A lot of it, to me, is lost, or the value of the homework is lost, because so much of it has to be done through English. Otherwise the children maybe wouldn't get their homework done."* (Principal, Focus Group)

> *"Parents come in and they're worried, they don't speak Irish, so sending their child to an Irish-medium is already taking a chance. So I think we spend a lot of time reassuring parents that this is the correct learning setting."* (School 3, Teacher)

> *"The whole nursery sector is struggling at the minute with the amount of skills, but then you're setting that against children coming into an Irish setting as their second language as well. So there's an awful lot more work going in to even developing their speech and language, and you're trying to add the Irish into the mix there as well."* (Principal, Focus Group)

Additionally, many IM schools serve lower socio-economic communities, contributing to the pastoral responsibilities of teachers and school leaders. One principal indicated that a significant amount of time was spent supporting parents who had "*significant problems*":

> *"The profile of the school populations that we serve, generally, are from poorer social and economic backgrounds, and an awful lot of our work, our extra workload, is actually the pastoral work."* (Principal, Focus Group)

> *"Irish-medium schools tend to have a very high level of free school meals, and that means that we are doing everything else that… comes with that, and that's not being reflected in the analysis of the workload."* (Principal, Focus Group)

4.8 Exams

The participants explained that CCEA only translated the papers that had been requested: "*they won't just translate them en masse, they only translate the ones we ask for.*" This proved problematic when the IM school decided to introduce new GCSE subjects, because they would have no existing past papers to use in their preparation with the pupils: "*If it's a new subject, there's no past papers translated. At all. But it'll all be just there for the English medium sectors.*" (School 2, Teacher).

The lack of past papers was repeatedly mentioned as contributing to an excessive workload for educators in the IM sector. Participants suggested that there should be a "*better process*" in place for creating and storing IM past papers, as well as ensuring that equivalent practice materials are available in Irish.

> "*They don't seem to have a system in CCEA whereby whoever translates the paper goes, oh, here's the paper. Save it where the rest of them are… It disadvantages our pupils that are revising at home, you know, looking for the papers at home. They don't have access to the same stuff.*" (School 2, Teacher)

> "*It seems that they need to have a better process to have somebody who's responsible for uploading the papers to the website, and then that that person should know it is their duty as well, to find out, was there an Irish-medium paper? Does it need to be uploaded as well?*" (School 2, Teacher)

> "*We don't even get to see the tests anymore, and we can't even get professional practice papers in Irish, whereas there's hundreds of companies [producing tests in English].*" (School 3, Principal)

> "*There's packages upon packages of transfer test preparation in English for children. And there's nothing that I'm aware of, out there, obviously, in Irish-medium.*" (Principal, Focus Group)

> "*CCEA have provided excellent fact files and other support materials for exams. These are not provided in Irish*" (School 2, Principal)

Participants also noted that translation errors in examinations also place an additional burden on IM teachers and pupils. Although papers are translated centrally by CCEA, the participants disclosed that there were frequent errors in the translations, which significantly impacted the pupils.

> "*There always mistakes on the papers. There are grammar mistakes, there are spelling mistakes, there are questions that don't make sense.*" (School 3, Teacher)

> "*So there are five options on the AS history paper, they only translate the one option we were doing. And a few years ago they translated the wrong one… Imagine how stressed you are doing an AS already, and then that happens. And then, you know, the adrenaline sitting for an hour, you know, exhausted already, and then having to actually do the paper after that.*" (Principal, Focus Group)

The translation errors also occur during the marking process. Multiple participants recounted experiences of dedicating significant time to rectify and correct translation issues which had resulted in pupils being awarded incorrect marks.

> *"Papers are audited by us in the school. You know, any issues with regard to translation errors or terminology are communicated to CCEA… Okay, they've been cooperating with us, but the burden still remains on us… There should be markers in place who speak Irish."* (Principal, School 2)

> *"Instead of preparing for the school year ahead, once results come out and we get papers back, we have to sit and go through and make sure that they've been awarded the right marks."* (Teacher, School 2)

4.9 Staff Wellbeing

4.9.1 Mental Health and Burnout

Teachers in the IM sector experience significant challenges related to mental health and burnout due to high workloads, lack of resources, and additional demands unique to IM education. Many participants described an unsustainable work-life balance, with excessive hours spent on planning, assessment, and translation work outside of school hours.

> *"I can't continue on the way that we're going. Like, not to be dramatic, like I am exhausted and like you crawl to the finish line at every half term, because I suppose that coincides with assessment and translating and all those things like it just, it's not sustainable the way it is. We have full timetables. Not only full timetables, extra responsibility points, heads of year, heads of department, plus all the extra demands of an Irish-medium teacher… I could count on one hand the nights I haven't taken out my laptop at home."* (School 2, Teacher)

A key concern among educators is the pressure to maintain high-quality teaching despite the lack of adequate support. This often leads to chronic stress and burnout, as teachers report pushing themselves beyond their limits to meet expectations.

> *"The main thing in your mind is always to make sure that the children still get the highest quality of teaching and that the highest quality of learnings going on in the classrooms. But you can't do all that if you're not properly resourced, be it financially, or bodies on the ground, etc, etc. So it leads to burnout, because teachers, we keep going and we keep going and keep going."* (School 1, Principal)

> *"Mentally, yeah, it does take it out of me, because I will be sitting with my husband… and he would just be wondering, why are you doing work so much outside of school hours? And it's because I don't have time to do it during the school day. And so yeah, that impacts on my mental health… because then I feel stressed that I don't get that done, and I'm bringing it, bringing it home… I just feel that I need to be at a particular level, and if I'm not, at that level, I wouldn't be happy with what I'm, wouldn't feel that I'm doing justice for the children."* (School 1, Teacher)

The participants described how they would often begin the school year with enthusiasm and energy, but that the cumulative effect of the workload takes its toll as the year progresses. The impact is not just felt during term time but extends into holidays, with many educators struggling to recover from the exhaustion.

> *"I always hate giving the negative picture, because on a, you know, on a daily basis, our teachers come in and I'm sure it's the same for most of the teachers in most of the schools, come in energised and ready for the day's work. But I suppose, similar to what I'm saying about the cumulative effect… You maybe reach breaking point midway through term two and your energy levels go or how it hits you in the summer, when you get off and you stop… You're off work, but it's not, it's really not a nice experience. For some of that first two weeks you're that exhausted." (School 1, Principal)*

The strain of excessive workloads does not just impact individual teachers but also their home lives, creating further stress and dissatisfaction.

> *"People are tired. People are like it's impacting their home life. It's impacting their health." (School 2, Teacher)*

> *"Talking to other teachers, yeah, mental health in the classroom, even just just with the amount that they feel they need to cover." (School 1, Teacher)*

Newer teachers in the sector are particularly affected, finding the workload overwhelming and struggling to maintain a sustainable balance between their professional and personal lives.

> *"When I started, like I would have been working to midnight every night, you're taking, you're constantly taking stuff home. And I would say, a lot of the new, the young teachers that are coming in now, they're doing the same, you know?... We do have directed time, but directed time's not long enough, and you're still taking that home. It's stressful." (School 4, Teacher)*

> *"I think young teachers are finding [the workload] very overwhelming." (School 1, Principal)*

While burnout has long been an issue in the Irish-medium sector, participants reported that it has become more widely discussed in recent years.

> *"There's an awful lot more talk about burnout because it's become mainstream nearly, you know? The teachers [in IM schools] were experiencing burnout before COVID, but it wasn't talked about so much… But I've noticed it more, you know, in English medium and stuff like that, whereas the Irish-medium practitioners have been talking about it for decades, because we've had this, this extra work." (School 1, Principal)*

4.9.2 Staff Morale

Staff morale in the IM sector is closely linked to workload and professional satisfaction. Many participants express frustration at being unable to complete tasks to the best of their ability due to excessive demands, which negatively impacts their confidence and overall morale.

"People want to be successful in their jobs, you know, but if you've, you've so much to do, and you're not finishing things properly, and you're not doing things to the best of your ability, that affects your morale and your confidence and your professional confidence, which knocks away morale." (School 2, Teacher)

"You're never on top of your work. That's how I feel." (school 2, Teacher)

While enthusiasm remains high among newly qualified teachers, many senior staff observe that this passion diminishes over time due to the realities of workload and lack of support.

"We've lots of young teachers who, again, are really, really enthusiastic, we could do this, we could do that, and now they're starting to just, I can see the enthusiasm going." (Principal, Focus Group)

For those juggling family life, the pressures of teaching in the IM sector can be particularly overwhelming. One participant described how the excessive workload became unmanageable after having children, forcing them to reduce their working hours. The inability to balance professional responsibilities with family life places additional strain on educators, potentially discouraging experienced teachers from remaining in the sector long-term.

"The workload is non-stop, and before I had kids I had maybe more free time so I didn't mind doing work like sitting in front of the TV, but then when I had children I found it really hard to come back to work because the workload is so excessive. I had to reduce my hours... But not everyone can do that."

4.9.3 Career Progression

Career progression opportunities in the IM sector are often limited due to staffing constraints and the additional responsibilities placed on educators. Many participants felt unable to apply for promotions as their presence is required in key teaching roles.

"I find, the teachers are very much unable to go for promotion. They can go for promotion as heads of year, but we need them as form teachers for Irish-medium classes." (Principal, Focus Group)

The heavy workload also discourages teachers from seeking additional responsibilities, as they feel overwhelmed by their existing duties.

"Every opportunity that came up for career progression… I never applied for it. I didn't want it. I don't want more responsibility because I'm snowed under as it is." (School 4, Teacher)

Additionally, professional development and training opportunities for IM educators are not always tailored to immersion education. Many training programmes are delivered in English, requiring staff to adapt the content to their unique teaching environment, contributing to the existing workload.

"All training is carried out in English, usually, staff in Irish-medium schools attend English medium courses and work to adapt their journey to the Irish-medium context...

All this creates an additional burden for teachers and leaders in adapting training, resources, practices to the immersion setting." (School 2, Principal)

4.10 Staff Shortages

4.10.1 Teaching Assistants

Classroom assistants play a crucial role in supporting both pupils and educators in the Irish-medium sector, yet schools face significant difficulties in terms of recruitment and retention. Many schools report an ongoing struggle to find and keep qualified classroom assistants, particularly for pupils with special educational needs.

> *"We've really struggled to get classroom assistants from September. We got two children statemented over the summer, and we still don't have anyone for them. So it's very difficult." (Principal, Focus Group)*

A major barrier to recruitment and retention is low pay. Classroom assistants frequently leave their positions for better paying jobs in other sectors.

> *"Classroom assistants is very hard to find, classroom assistants in any school because they're paid very poorly. But, you know, in an Irish-medium it's harder, I suppose, because they do need that additional knowledge be able to do their work through Irish." (School 2, Principal)*

> *"[Classroom assistants] can get more money working in Tesco." (School 3, Principal)*

> *"You're investing an awful lot in these people, and then they, they sort of move on when they get over the pay is… really bad." (Principal, Focus Group)*

Another key challenge is that classroom assistants are not paid over the summer, forcing many to seek alternative employment and leaving schools to restart recruitment efforts each year.

> *"The reason why we can't retain classroom assistants is because of the way that they're paid now. They're not paid over the summer." (Principal, Focus Group)*

4.10.2 Substitute Teachers

Another challenge facing IM schools is the shortage of substitute teachers. School leaders frequently struggle to find cover for absent staff, leading to increased workloads and disruption to both teaching and professional development.

> *"I can't even find one sub on most days." (School 1, Principal)*

This shortage has a direct impact on teachers' ability to attend essential training and networking events. Newly qualified teachers, in particular, frequently miss out on critical induction opportunities that their counterparts in English Medium schools can readily access.

> *"If this was an English medium school… Teachers would be released to go to their induction days. The class would be covered by a teacher. They'd come back. Everything would be as well and as smooth as they left it… Whereas, if I can't get a sub teacher…*

and it's the cumulative effect of that, of not being able to attend your induction." (School 1, Principal)

Additionally, the lack of substitute teachers places extra strain on permanent staff, who feel unable to take time off, even when unwell.

"There just aren't enough people in the schools doing the work, you know? And we've heard that a lot about not, not even being able to take time off sick because there's nobody to cover, you know, literally working yourselves into the ground." (School 1, Principal)

The challenge is not just finding substitute teachers but ensuring that they are fluent in Irish. Some have suggested hiring English Medium substitutes, but school leaders in the IM sector have raised concerns about the long-term implications of such a decision.

"And one of the governors was saying, I wonder, would you think of getting somebody from English medium and I said, not in a million years. And they were like, but they could be better than somebody? And I was like, No, I get your point. I says, as soon as we start doing that, we're on a slippery road I says as because as soon as DE know that we're willing to take in English medium subs, they will go, well, sure why do we need Irish-medium subs? Why do we need more Irish-medium teachers?" (School 3, Principal)

Many of the school leaders identified a lack of routes into IM teaching. The educators highlighted the established pathways, which in Northern Ireland are the four-year BEd (Hons Bilingual) and one-year PGCE (Irish medium - Primary) offered through St. Mary's University College Belfast (SMUCB) as well as an Irish medium enhancement course leading to a Certificate in Bilingual Education (also awarded by SMUCB) for post-primary PGCE students at Queen's University Belfast (QUB) or Ulster University (UU). However, the participants commented that the options for routes into post-primary teaching are more limited. The participants called for a dedicated IM post-primary teacher training programme, arguing that it could be implemented quickly by reallocating existing places from Queen's University and Ulster University to a single provider like SMUCB or Stranmillis University College. Some have also suggested that SMUCB, which already has a large Irish department, could expand its offerings to include a two-year IM post-primary PGCE or a four-year post-primary BEd.

"Initial teacher training isn't preparing teachers for the sector." (School 2, Principal)

"There's a PGCE for Irish-medium primary, there's a BEd for Irish-medium primary, for an Irish-medium secondary... We need a BEd or a PGCE for an Irish-medium secondary, specific and you would need a BEd for Irish-medium, for Irish-medium post primary... But the PGCE could be done very quickly and should be done very quickly. We suggested taking the two places off Queens, and taking the places off Ulster, they've got maybe four or five places each, and providing that St Mary's or Stranmillis." (School 2, Principal)

"It's a one year course at St Mary's. That is not enough." (School 3, Principal)

*"I don't know whether there's that many teachers going through getting trained through the Irish-medium anymore. I'm not sure, but there seems to be a lack of them. You know, you find, we find it very difficult to get a sub." (*School 4, Principal)

The shortage is particularly pronounced in rural areas, where schools are often left with no options for cover. However, even in urban areas like Belfast, school leaders still struggle to find substitutes for sickness cover, school development work, or staff training.

"I think the the main problem at the minute is staffing. We can't we can't get sub teachers…. And that's even in Belfast. I know it's worse in rural areas. I don't think there have been, there are enough teachers being trained, and we're lucky in Belfast that we've an organization who train classroom assistants… But in terms of staff, we can't get sub teachers at all for to cover sickness or to cover courses or for any sort of school development work at all. You can't, you can't get sub teachers to free up coordinators for any sort of internal, there just are no teachers out there. Staffing I just think it's an absolute massive, massive issue at the minute and beyond." (Principal, Focus Group)

In some cases, schools are forced to rely on classroom assistants to manage the class when no substitute teacher is available.

4.10.3 Lack of Teachers in Schools

Irish-medium (IM) schools face significant staffing shortages. Finding teachers in certain subject areas is particularly challenging, further exacerbating staffing difficulties.

"it's really, really hard to find teachers in certain subjects." (School 2, Principal)

Retention is also a major issue, as many newly qualified teachers opt to leave Northern Ireland for better pay, reduced bureaucracy, and improved working conditions abroad or in the Republic of Ireland.

"The teachers that go to St Mary's or whatever, every year, and you know, they all would get jobs. You know, that's the good thing about it. They're gonna get, they're gonna find employment, and if not full time, you know, subbing or whatever. But they had a lot of them just leave and they go down south, or else they go to Australia or Dubai and… why wouldn't they? They get more money. More money and less paperwork, and they seem to get more holidays… And there are just more resources." (School 1, Teacher)

An additional challenge is that some student teachers come from the Republic of Ireland to complete their training in Northern Ireland, only to return south upon qualification.

"There's a lot of people that come up from the south [to train] because our course is one year and down south it's two… and then once they've got their training they go back." (School 3, Principal)

Without proper support, teachers are leaving the profession or seeking better opportunities elsewhere. Some feel that they are not receiving the professional support and conditions they deserve.

"Trained teachers, they are professional in what they're coming out to teach. And if things aren't in place professionally for them, they're kind of maybe going, I don't fancy this, it's just one's going to Doha, one's going to Dubai, you know looking over the fence and you can see, you know… They're getting paid the same but they're not getting equitable service." (Principal, Focus Group)

This trend has long-term consequences, as some teachers lose their Irish language skills after working abroad for several years.

"Young people who are getting four years of Irish-medium education training and then going off to the Middle East for two or three years, coming back and they've no Irish left. Can't blame the young people for doing it, I'd do it myself if I was in that situation. But there needs to be some sort of strategy from the top to say, we need to keep these people incentivised." (Principal, Focus Group)

Many IM teachers who remain in Northern Ireland are leaving for jobs in the Republic of Ireland, where salaries and benefits are significantly better.

"Teachers are leaving the Northern system, and they're going south to teach in the South. You know, there's a teacher that taught with me, and he just, you know, he wouldn't have any points of responsibility is getting 70,000 Euro a year as a salary. And three months over the summer." (Principal, Focus Group)

Staffing shortages also lead to significant disruptions in schools. When teachers are unavailable, classes may be split, amalgamated, or pupils may be sent to other classrooms, creating an unstable learning environment.

"So when the staff isn't there to cover, it ends up… classes being split, or classes being amalgamated, or children being sent around other classes, you know, things that shouldn't be happening in a modern society are are still happening because schools are under huge pressure." (Principal, Focus Group)

Many participants highlighted the need for additional teachers and classroom assistants to alleviate workload and improve working conditions. Beyond simply increasing staffing levels, some of the school leaders suggested that providing additional teachers or even fractional teaching posts, such as a floating teacher or additional part-time roles, would make a significant difference.

"We need more people in our schools, and more money, then to give more, you know, an extra, an extra teacher in the school, or an extra half a teacher in the school, will change the school environment completely. Or an extra classroom assistant, you know, so the funding for those sort of things, means that, you know, teachers will be able to get an afternoon out a week, to make up for it, you know, to look at resources, or to plan or whatever." (School 1, Principal)

"It would be a great thing for the school, to have a sort of a floating teacher in, or the extra point two of a teacher in, or point four, as that would be… I think if it was, if it was a thing, schools, if Irish-medium schools, had the extra funding, even if it was ring

fenced for you to have to spend this on a teacher, staff, I think the staff would be available." (School 1, Principal)

One potential solution raised by principals is a government-backed initiative that would fund teacher training in exchange for a contractual commitment to remain in Northern Ireland for a set period. Other regions, such as Scotland, have introduced guaranteed post-graduation employment for newly qualified teachers, which was suggested as a model for Northern Ireland to follow.

"If there was some sort of contract that you got your PGCE funded, but you had to stay in the country, even in the North for, you know, for two years or whatever." (Principal, Focus Group)

"Was that not an initiative that was in place in Scotland for a while, all the Scottish student teachers were guaranteed a year's work whenever they came out of college? There's no reason it can't be done here." (Principal, Focus Group)

4.11 Vocation

Teachers and school leaders in the IM sector express a strong sense of vocation that extends beyond the classroom. Many view their work as part of a broader movement to sustain and develop Irish language education, often taking on additional responsibilities to support the sector as a whole.

"We're very, very good at filling in the cracks and filling the gaps to keep the thing going. Because I think, you know, we do realize that we're part of something bigger than just teaching, and that's not said with any insult to English medium teachers. But you know, we do feel we're part of a bigger movement and a bigger community, and something with more purpose." (School 1, Principal)

This sense of responsibility often extends beyond individual schools, with some leaders feeling that they are carrying the weight of the entire sector on their shoulders.

"You're not carrying a school, you're carrying a sector at times." (Principal, Focus Group)

Despite their dedication, IM educators express frustration over the lack of recognition and parity with other professions. Many feel that their passion and commitment have been taken for granted.

"There has to be some kind of parity, you know, with other professions, you know, I think we've been taken for granted quite a lot, and it's only because of the love and the passion that we have for something that we believe in, you know, and we can see the benefits the children gain from the education that we we're trying to provide." (Principal, Focus Group)

Beyond teaching, IM educators often take on the additional burden of advocating for their schools and the sector, ensuring that pupils receive the highest quality education possible.

> *"It's just, it's a constant—you're trying to sell, and you're trying to make sure that the kids are getting the best, and they're being seen to be getting the best." (Principal, Focus Group)*

However, while many educators remain deeply committed to their work, some are beginning to feel the strain. The sector has historically relied on goodwill, but this willingness to go above and beyond is beginning to diminish as teachers seek better opportunities elsewhere.

> *"I find the goodwill factor is lessening… Teachers have got better options." (Principal, Focus Group)*

This growing disillusionment suggests that while IM educators remain passionate about their purpose, structural and systemic changes are needed to ensure their dedication is met with the necessary support and resources.

4.12 Strategy/Governance

4.12.1 Strategy

The participants described the perceived absence of a clear and overarching strategy for the development of IM Education in Northern Ireland. The lack of a cohesive strategic framework for the sector has created significant challenges at both the operational and leadership levels.

> *"There's an absence of an overarching or overall strategy for, you know, developing Irish-medium schools." (School 2, Principal)*

> *"There's a lack of strategy, strategic planning for Irish-medium schools, at the highest level… And that impacts then on the principal and on the leadership of schools, because you know the leadership then are being, I suppose wanting, you know, committees, Board of Governors wanting the best possible outcomes for the pupils, but at the same time, we don't have the support that many other schools would have from the start." (School 2, Principal)*

Without a unified strategy, leaders have had to compensate for the gaps in support by taking on additional responsibilities, often with little to no external assistance. One principal (School 2) noted that this absence of leadership within the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) has further exacerbated the issue, leaving school leaders to *"try and... fill that gap,"* which in turn impacts the entire sector.

Furthermore, participants raised concerns about the lack of support structures that could help mitigate these challenges. Unlike other education sectors, IM does not have a dedicated employing authority similar to CCMS for Catholic schools or the Education Authority for controlled schools. This has left many IME schools without a central organisation to manage administrative tasks or provide strategic guidance.

> *"We don't have an overarching body that, you know, supports, you know, the implementation of an immersion education system, you know, in the way that CCMS is, you know, an overarching body for Catholic maintained schools. Integrated education*

sector has a support organisation, the controlled schools sector, you know, has the Education Authority to administer a lot of the admin issues… There's those kind of issues that would affect any school, whether it's, you know, Irish-medium or English medium, but in our case, because most of the Irish-medium schools are standalone schools, we don't have that support network." (School 2, Principal).

4.12.2 Progression

While there has been some progression within the Irish-medium Education (IME) sector, the participants felt that meaningful change has been slow and largely driven by the schools themselves rather than at a system level.

"The extra work that the Irish-medium practitioners do, we've, we've just come, you come to accept it, because you don't, you don't know anything different" (School 1, Principal).

"They definitely are increasing there have been increased resources made available through loads of different organisations and technology has been very helpful for Irish-medium, but it's, it's mostly teacher led" (School 1, Principal).

The participants explained that in the past there was some attempt by the Education Authority to address these challenges, which initially provided several advisors specifically for Irish-medium schools. However, this support was gradually reduced, leaving only one advisor to cover both Irish and English medium schools, a situation that many principals felt was insufficient for such a diverse and widespread sector.

"At one stage, there were three or four advisors in the Education Authority for Irish-medium… And that was reduced to one person who also had responsibility for English Medium" (Principal, Focus Group).

This lack of support from the Education Authority has contributed to a sense of stagnation in terms of meaningful, large-scale change.

"We don't feel that the system has changed in any way significantly, even to give us a recognition through additional time, or additional... the things that would help improve Irish-medium would be more time to do the things that you can't" (School 1, Principal).

"Nothing much has changed, I mean, we've all been coming to the principals' forums now for a good few years. And just feel that, you know, not to take away from this, but we've all been part of similar things before, and we've knocked on the door. And, you know, in two years' time, this might be still talked about, but you just get the feeling, if it doesn't have the support from the top, from, you know, the Minister for Education and the Department of Education, it just falls off the cliff" (Principal, Focus Group).

This frustration reflects the broader sense that without strong support from the Department of Education, efforts to improve the sector often fail to gain traction.

4.13 Recommendations

Several key recommendations emerge from the interviews and focus groups to address the ongoing challenges and support the future growth of IME schools. One of the primary requests is for a reduced teaching timetable to allow for the additional workload that comes with teaching in an immersion language environment. This would enable educators to focus on critical tasks such as preparing resources and translating materials without the pressure of a full teaching load.

> *"What I would like is a reduced timetable in school, to translate, provide resources… to do whatever it is you have to do" (School 2, Teacher).*

Additionally, there is a strong call for parity with the English-medium sector, particularly in terms of resources and support. Teachers expressed frustration at the disparities between IME and English-medium schools. This sentiment underscores the need for equal recognition and provision of resources to ensure IME schools can thrive on an equal footing.

> *"I want parity. Parity with resources, and just that we are treated the same as what the English medium sector would have" (School 2, Teacher)*

To further support teachers, there was a recommendation for dedicated time within the school term specifically allocated for planning and preparation. This would allow educators to focus on the unique aspects of teaching in an Irish-medium environment without the added burden of balancing these tasks with their regular teaching schedule.

> *"If there was like a day a term or whatever, a day and a half a term given to Irish-medium teachers to say, right, this is your time to prep your work or do whatever translations or whatever it is, because we have so much extra" (School 2, Teacher).*

Finally, there is a call for increased resources and funding, as well as greater expertise in supporting IME schools. Teachers highlighted the need for more classroom assistants, expertise from outside agencies, and additional Irish-language support to enhance the educational experience.

> *"We would like more resources, and we would like more funding, and we would like more, you know, expertise, classroom assistants, outside agencies coming in with more of, you know, Irish" (School 4, Teacher).*

Chapter 5: Discussion

In the following section, the findings from the teacher survey and interview data will be summarised and discussed in relation to the literature presented in the opening chapter.

5.1 Workload in the Irish-medium sector in Northern Ireland

The Teachers' (Terms and Conditions of Employment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1987, Schedule 3, §4[8] (cited in DE's 2024 TNC workload agreement guidance[9]) state that teachers are required to work for 1265 hours in any year "exclusive of time spent off school premises in preparing and marking lessons and time spent travelling to and from the place of work" (§4b). The DE guidance adds that "A Teacher cannot be directed to undertake duties beyond 1,265 hours on 195 days" (DE, 2024, §5.2). Despite this apparent clarity, an important element of flexibility and/or ambiguity is added by the insertion of the following caveat "However, schools have always been dependent on a commitment from Teachers beyond the legal minimum requirement and this guidance does not change this. Schools would, for example, find it impossible to include within a Teacher's 1,265 hours all of the time currently given by Teachers to such activities as games, drama, music and school trips. Nevertheless, the extent of this commitment is for each Teacher to determine for himself or herself. Teachers should be given reasonable notice before being directed to undertake evening duties" (DE, 2024, §5.2).

Notwithstanding the flexibility and/or ambiguity inherent in the workload agreement and the debate around the status of the 1,265 hours, this study has set out to ascertain the nature and extent of the workload of teachers in the Irish-medium sector in Northern Ireland, drawing conclusions from a large-scale teacher survey (completed by 130 teachers, equivalent to 29% of the sector) and a series of interviews with a total of 27 principals and teachers across the sector and from a range of standalone Irish-medium schools and Irish-medium units attached to English-medium schools.

The results are very stark: teachers in the Irish sector are working very long hours in order to complete their duties. Assuming 195 days equates to 39 weeks of 5 working days, it is calculated that the workload agreement's directed time limit of 1,265 hours per year equates to 32.4 hours of directed time per week. For the first time, this study reveals that Irish-medium teachers are working 47.2 hours per week on average, 14.8 hours per week over and above the directed time limit. Moreover, four out of five (82%) Irish-medium teachers work more than 40 hours per week, more than a quarter (28%) work more than 50 hours per week, and one in twenty teachers (5%) work more than 60 hours per week. Across a school year of 195 days, the findings from this research indicate that Irish-medium teachers work a total of 1,841 hours or 576 hours (or 46%) above the 1,265 hours of directed time stipulated in the workload agreement, with many reporting that they work much longer hours.

In terms of workload outside their directed time (evenings and weekends), almost a quarter (23%, n=29) report working an additional 11-15 hours per week, while 16% (n=20) are working an additional 16 or more hours per week. Further analysis has shown that the workload is

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[8] https://www.legislation.gov.uk/nisr/1987/267/pdfs/nisr_19870267_en.pdf
[9] https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/tnc-20242-workload-agreement

especially high among female respondents and those who teach composite classes in primary schools.

In line with previous research findings (e.g. O'Boyle et al., 2023) survey results highlighted that almost all teachers (99%, n=129) 'strongly agreed' (91%, n=118) or 'agreed' (8%, n=11) that teachers in the Irish-medium sector frequently have to make resources due to a lack of availability. In another question, when asked what particular demands led to the additional workload, survey respondents reported a wide range of Irish-medium-specific tasks which included the translation of resources (99%, n=129), followed by Irish-medium subject specific resource development (97%, n=126), producing bilingual communications for parents/relevant professionals (85%, n=110), preparation of SEN resources specific to the IM sector (84%, n=109), preparation of additional assessment resources specific to the IM sector (82%, n=106), supporting children and families with little to no Irish at home (78%, n=102), and additional professional development relevant to develop and/or maintain Irish language competence (76%, n=99).

The challenge of producing resources was further highlighted in the qualitative engagement, emerging as perhaps the most constant theme across all of the interviews. One principal noted that with an element of resignation: *"We're self-resourcing. That's just the nature of it."* Another experienced principal explained, *"We don't have the same resources. You can't walk and put your hand on what you're teaching that day so there's prep between, you know, finding the right material for all the abilities of children in your class"*, while a third principal noted the challenge where *"We're expected to get excellent results, do get good results, but you know, we don't have the resources."* In particular teachers cited the lack of textbooks, past papers, fact files and exemplar/support materials available in Irish, meaning that they were constantly adapting and translating material from English to Irish in their own time, or adapting from Republic of Ireland dialects to an Ulster dialect. As one teacher lamented, *"You're taking work home with you. It never ends, and you're never on top of things."* At post-primary level, mistakes in the Irish translation of exam papers was also commonly cited as a challenge that could lead to additional stress on pupils.

In addition to the preparation of general resources, data from both the survey and interviews highlights the sheer range of additional work required, for instance in ensuring fairness in moderation and assessment where there was a real risk of the content of pupils' answers to exam questions being "lost in translation", thereby significantly disadvantaging pupils and jeopardising progression to further or higher education. Further concerns were expressed in relation to supporting children with special educational needs within the Irish-medium sector, where there is a lack of assessment material available in Irish and where the onus is placed on teachers to take English language recommendations produced by occupational therapists and educational psychologists and version these into a programme to support pupils in their sector.

It could be argued that teachers in all sectors are required to prepare resources and to work outside directed time, however there was a very strong sense that the workload within the Irish-medium sector was significantly greater than within the English Medium sector. This was reflected in the survey responses where 95% of respondents felt they worked either significantly (59%) or slightly (35%) longer hours than their colleagues in the English Medium sector. No respondents suggested that they worked fewer hours. Undoubtedly, one of the reasons for this is the linguistic demands of immersive language teaching which require an

additional series of high-level teaching competencies. This has been highlighted in earlier research by O'Boyle et al. (2023) and has led to the development of a comprehensive self-evaluation framework of specific Irish-medium teacher competencies to support teachers' professional development (see Ó Ceallaigh and Nig Uidhir, 2023; 2024).

As already suggested by Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta (2023), there is a lack of available teaching resource and forward planning to address projected future growth in demand for teachers in the sector. The current study confirms this earlier finding and reports that the workload challenges are partly caused by and certainly compounded by the lack of Irish-medium teachers in general but in particular a dearth of subject-specific post-primary teachers and substitute teachers with Irish who could support teaching and learning in the Irish-medium sector, and who could relieve the workload burden to some extent, freeing up teachers to prepare resources, attend vital professional development courses, work one-to-one with pupils with special and/or additional needs, and even allowing teachers to take a day off sick. Issues of low pay for classroom assistants were cited as a barrier to recruitment and retention.

International research has demonstrated that there is a clear correlation between the environmental quality of schools, attitudes of pupils and staff, teaching and learning behaviours, and, consequently, educational attainment (Berry, 2012; Marzano, 2003; Rutter et al., 1979; Wentzel & Watkins, 2002). In addition, a modern, attractive, well-resourced learning and working environment makes the job of the teacher easier, where there are more play and green spaces, IT facilities, and uncrowded learning and preparation/work spaces. The results of this study have shown however that teachers and principals predominantly report that the condition of their schools is inadequate. For instance, only a third of respondents (33%) reported that the quality or condition of their school was 'good' or 'very good', and less than a quarter (23%, n=30) felt that the quality or condition of their school's green spaces was 'good' or 'very good'. Conversely, teachers frequently reported that the condition of their school facilities and resources was 'severely inadequate' or 'inadequate' in respect of the play spaces (56%), green spaces (54%), buildings (51%), IT equipment (51%), other resources (51%), and classroom space for the number of children in the room (46%). Principals reported that this was having a negative impact on learning, enrolment of pupils, and the recruitment and retention of teaching staff, who are inevitably discouraged by the overcrowded or outdated facilities across some of the Irish-medium schools estate. As Uline (2000) notes, the standard of maintenance of a school building "sends a message to its occupants and the community beyond, speaking volumes about the value placed on activities transpiring within its walls".

Finally, in terms of workload, there is a strong perception among teachers in the Irish-medium sector that their work is undervalued and not adequately remunerated. More than three quarters (76%) of survey respondents felt that Irish-medium teachers were not sufficiently valued for their work, while 87% felt that they were not sufficiently remunerated for their work.

5.2 The Impact of Additional Workload

This study has demonstrated the profound impact of the additional workload on teachers in the Irish-medium sector. In a series of survey questions, teachers revealed that the current workload was having a negative and potentially dangerous impact on their lives outside the classroom. For instance, 87% felt that their workload was excessive, and 81% claimed it was

'unsustainable'. This has an impact both on the quality of their classroom teaching (as cited by 88% of respondents) but most alarmingly, workload is affecting teachers' health: 80% of respondents noted their concern that their workload was compromising their physical health, while 90% claimed that it was compromising their mental health. This impact was high across the sample, but especially high among female respondents, who similarly were more likely to report that teachers in the Irish-medium sector experience more burnout than their English Medium colleagues.

While the survey statistics provide evidence of the extent of the problem across the sector, the interviews gave an opportunity for practitioners to tell of their everyday lived experience. Here, the accounts were often very personal and powerful. One teacher explained that ""*I can't continue on the way that we're going. Like, not to be dramatic, like I am exhausted and like you crawl to the finish line at every half term, because I suppose that coincides with assessment and translating and all those things like it just, it's not sustainable the way it is.*" Another teacher, typical of the cohort, explained their commitment to ensuring high quality teaching and learning to the children in their school, or *"doing justice for the children"* yet noted that *"you can't do all that if you're not properly resourced, be it financially, or bodies on the ground, etc, etc. So it leads to burnout, because teachers, we keep going and we keep going and keep going"*. Teachers and principals reported that this workload was impacting on their home lives, leading their partners to question why they were always working, and causing exhaustion which extends into the first few weeks of the school holidays.

While a constant thread through the interviews was the very strong sense of vocation and commitment to the Irish-medium sector, there was some indication that this was not as strong among some younger teachers. As one principal explained, *"I find the goodwill factor is lessening…Teachers have got better options"*. The particular impact on young or beginning teachers was highlighted by some participants, who, it was claimed, find the workload *"very overwhelming"*. One principal noted that, among the younger teachers, they could see *"the enthusiasm going"*. The challenge is exacerbated when opportunities for young teachers to earn higher salaries in the Republic of Ireland (where there are also longer summer holidays) and/or in the United Arab Emirates (e.g., Dubai) appear highly attractive.

Finally, the overriding impression gained from the interviews was that teachers and principals in the Irish-medium sector feel increasingly frustrated and overlooked. As one principal explained, despite years of petitioning and campaigning, "*We don't feel that the system has changed in any way significantly*". Another principal lamented that research to date had had little impact on policy and practice: "*we've all been part of similar things before, and we've knocked on the door. And, you know, in two years' time, this might be still talked about,*" but that in the absence of DE or ministerial support, *"it just falls off the cliff"*.

5.3 Teachers' Recommendations

Participating teachers and principals were all asked to make suggestions for how the current workload challenges facing the Irish-medium sector could be addressed. This was considered firstly in the survey where teachers were presented with a list of possible options and invited to select all that they felt would help improve the current situation. The results highlight once

again how the burden of resource creation features as the most significant single issue. For instance, 92% of the teachers selected 'provision of more subject-specific Irish language resources', 88% selected 'additional time for planning and preparation' and 85% selected additional Irish language assistants e.g., to support resource development. Other important recommendations focused on professional development opportunities (88%), additional remuneration/salary (88%), additional support for newly qualified teachers (80%) and smaller class sizes (78%).

Recommendations from the various interviews with principals and teachers were wide-ranging but again often focused on measures to address the workload burden and included additional time, resources and Irish language support.

At a more strategic level, several principals voiced their concern about the lack of strategic planning or *"an overarching or overall strategy"* for the Irish-medium sector, and argued that the absence of an employing authority (such as the Education Authority or Council for Catholic Maintained Schools) meant that Irish-medium schools felt isolated and had to deal themselves with many additional administrative functions (for instance in terms of HR) that would be dealt with by the employing authority in other sectors. There were calls for such a *"support network"* to be established as a matter of priority.

Chapter 6: Conclusion and Recommendations

In addressing and building on previous accounts of the undoubted challenges facing the Irish-medium sector in Northern Ireland (see Purdy et al., 2021; O'Boyle et al., 2023; Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta, 2023; 2025), the current study has further highlighted the significant and at times overwhelming personal impact that the additional workload in the Irish-medium sector in Northern Ireland is having on individual teachers and principals.

Despite the very clear sense of commitment to Irish-medium education, and dedication to delivering the highest quality educational provision to the children and young people at the heart of the sector, there is clear evidence (both quantitative and qualitative) of a sector facing excessive workload with teachers struggling under the burden of resource creation, translation and assessment, exacerbated by the lack of existing textbooks, websites, past papers and support materials in Irish relevant to the Northern Ireland curriculum and examinations system. The study reports distressing examples of teachers at risk of burnout and younger teachers choosing either to leave the profession or to teach elsewhere, availing of higher salaries and more supportive and better resourced learning environments. As the sector continues to grow to meet parental demand, urgent action is needed to address a crisis which looks set to deepen in the years ahead, given the projected future demand for teachers (Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta, 2023). As the recent *Audit on progress on the Review of Irish-medium Education* has outlined (Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta, 2025), the challenges facing the sector are not new. Indeed, many of the issues identified in the current study, such as curriculum resources and ITE provision, are identified among the 24 recommendations of the 2008 *Review of Irish-medium Education* (DE, 2008), most of which have not seen only little or some progress in the intervening 17 years.

In light of the particular workload challenges highlighted in the current study, a series of seven specific recommendations are proposed below:

1. **Introduction of an Irish-medium-specific Teaching Allowance:** We propose the introduction of an IM-specific teaching allowance in recognition of the additional demands on those teaching in the sector, and in order to support the recruitment and retention of teachers with these high-order linguistic and immersion teaching competencies. This could be modelled on the existing "Teaching through Irish allowance" in the Republic of Ireland and also the 'Special Education Needs Allowances' which have long existed in Northern Ireland and which must be awarded to a teacher "in a special school, or one in a mainstream school who is engaged wholly or mainly in teaching pupils with statements of special educational needs whether in designated special classes or otherwise" (see EA 2008/2012, §4.9.1). The current SEN allowances equate to £2475 (Allowance 1) and £4886 (Allowance 2 where a teacher's experience/qualifications lead to an enhanced contribution). The cost of implementing such an allowance, calculated on the basis of 317.8 FTE[10] nursery/primary and post-primary teachers in the statutory Irish-medium sector, is calculated to be in the region of £1-1.2m. For instance, if one assumes that 50% of the FTE is at Allowance 1 and 50% at Allowance 2, the total cost would be £1.17m, whereas if one assumes that 75%

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[10] See Appendix 1: FTE and Headcount of IME teachers in NI 2014/15 to 2023/24

of the FTE is at Allowance 1 and 25% at Allowance 2, then the total cost would be £0.98m above current salary levels. It is argued, in line with Ó Ceallaigh and Nig Uidhir (2024), that the highly developed immersion language competences would merit consideration on a par with the similarly highly developed skills required to work "wholly or mainly" with children with special educational needs in mainstream or special schools.

2. **Additional Time for Planning, Preparation and Assessment (PPA):** We propose an additional 10% allowance for Planning, Preparation and Assessment (PPA) for teachers working in all phases (statutory nursery, primary and post-primary) of Irish-medium Education. This would represent an additional allowance of time, above and beyond the 10% PPA already established under the TNC 2020/1 agreement between management and the Teachers' Negotiating Committee. We propose that this should be ring-fenced and cannot be used for other duties such as covering other classes. Assuming a current FTE of 317.8, this would amount to a further 31.78 FTE across Irish-medium Education to accommodate the additional time. While it is recognised that this is an expensive option, and one which actually places an additional requirement to recruit Irish-medium teachers, we believe that this proposal would guarantee the highest quality of resource creation (i.e., by highly qualified teachers rather than by less well qualified teaching assistants). While it is difficult to estimate the additional cost of this, if we take a teacher on point M4 of the main pay scale earning £34,458 (as representing an average salary), then add pension contributions of £10,029 and National Insurance contributions of £4,755, the total cost per teacher would be £49,242. Given the additional FTE requirement of 31.78, a conservative additional salary cost would be in the region of £1.56m. Such a proposal is heavily contingent on the availability of suitably qualified Irish-medium teachers.

3. **Additional ITE places for Irish-medium Education in Northern Ireland:** We propose a significant additional investment in Initial Teacher Education for teachers to work within the Irish-medium sector in Northern Ireland. Teacher recruitment and retention have been clearly identified in this research as significant factors that contribute towards additional workload for those teachers already employed in Irish-medium schools and units, making class sizes larger, and preventing teachers from accessing professional development opportunities. As a solution, we propose that Northern Ireland learns from best practice in other immersion education contexts (e.g., Republic of Ireland, Wales, Scotland, the Basque Country) and introduced additional subsidised PGCE programmes and tailored professional masters aimed at immersion education, ensuring that teacher preparation is comprehensive and contextually relevant. Following the example set in Wales and the Republic of Ireland, Northern Ireland should introduce bursaries and education grants to support teacher training in Irish-medium Education. These incentives can reduce financial barriers and encourage more graduates to enter the sector. Additionally, establishing guaranteed placement schemes, similar to Scotland's one-year guaranteed post for newly qualified teachers, would enhance recruitment by providing a clear career pathway. Creating a specialised unit funded by the Department of Education dedicated to Irish-medium teacher recruitment, akin to Scotland's funded recruitment officer position within Bòrd na

Gàidhlig, would help ensure a strategic and cohesive approach to attracting high-calibre candidates. This role could oversee targeted outreach, liaise with Initial Teacher Education providers, and implement marketing campaigns highlighting the unique benefits of a career in immersion education. Implementing these recommendations would require a coordinated effort between the Department for the Economy, the Department of Education, and ITE providers. With strategic investment and clear policy direction, Northern Ireland can ensure that the Irish-medium sector becomes more attractive to new teachers. To meet the projected need for an additional 68 ITE places by 2027-28 (Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta, 2023), we estimate a cost to the Department for the Economy of £354k per annum (assuming 68x£5,200 per ITE place at St Mary's University College or Stranmillis University College and excluding tuition fee loans).

4. **Development of an Irish-medium Teacher Apprenticeship Model and Career Progression for Classroom Assistants:** We propose the establishment of an Irish-medium specific teacher apprenticeship model in Northern Ireland, drawing on the expanding framework already in place in England[11]. This model would enable classroom assistants with demonstrated Irish language proficiency to transition to fully qualified teaching roles through a structured, school-based apprenticeship. Apprentices would be employed within Irish-medium schools, where they would receive practical, on-the-job training (in Irish language and/or pedagogy) while concurrently studying for a bachelor's degree and gaining Qualified Teacher Status with an accredited university provider. This approach would significantly broaden the recruitment pool by providing an accessible career pathway for classroom assistants (and other suitably qualified staff) already contributing to the school environment. It would also address the shortage of Irish-medium teachers by nurturing talent from within the existing educational workforce. Apprentices would benefit from targeted language enhancement programmes, dedicated mentoring from experienced Irish-medium educators, and a curriculum designed to meet the specific challenges of immersion education. This partnership would ensure that the apprenticeship not only meets professional standards but also reinforces the cultural and linguistic goals of Irish-medium education. Ultimately, this model promises to enhance teacher retention, professional growth, and the overall quality of education in Irish-medium schools. A related proposal would be to develop a career progression framework to enable classroom assistants to gain additional relevant qualifications at Level 3 and 4 to become Teaching Assistants or Higher-Level Teaching Assistants, with additional responsibilities and increased remuneration. Such a model, also based on current practice in England[12], would help provide much-needed progression for classroom assistants, boosting retention and helping relieve pressure due to a lack of qualified teachers. Collaboration between the Department for the Economy, the Department of Education, and ITE providers would be crucial to develop both models of career progression for classroom assistants.

5. **Investment in the Schools Estate:** Investment in improving the condition of school buildings in the Irish-medium sector is essential for enhancing learning outcomes, boosting staff recruitment and retention, and reducing the additional workload placed

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[11] https://getintoteaching.education.gov.uk/train-to-be-a-teacher/teacher-degree-apprenticeships
[12] https://nationalcareers.service.gov.uk/job-profiles/teaching-assistant

on teachers. Research indicates that a positive school climate, including well-maintained physical environments, is directly linked to improved student achievement Conversely, substandard facilities have been shown to negatively impact learning and teacher morale. Data from this study reveals that many Irish-medium schools continue to operate in outdated, temporary, or inadequately resourced buildings, forcing principals and teachers to devote valuable time to securing resources and managing instability. This additional workload hampers curriculum planning, staff allocation, and overall educational delivery. Moreover, parents and prospective teachers draw unfavourable comparisons with well-resourced neighbouring English-medium schools, further discouraging teacher recruitment. It is therefore imperative for the Department of Education to prioritise targeted investment in the Irish-medium schools estate. Upgrading facilities will not only create a stable and conducive learning environment but also elevate the status of Irish-medium education, ultimately supporting improved educational attainment and staff well-being in Northern Ireland.

6. **Reforming External Assessment for Irish-medium Education:** This study has highlighted the additional workload associated with the currently unsatisfactory examinations system for Irish-medium pupils. It is recommended that external assessments for Irish-medium education be reformed to enhance transparency, efficiency, and fairness for students, teachers and examiners. The current translation process should be streamlined by moving away from the existing practice of forward and back translations and, potentially, implementing a cross-border service agreement with experienced professional translators to counter the current situation where salaries are higher in the Republic of Ireland, resulting in a shortage of available translators in Northern Ireland. Furthermore, post primary Irish-medium schools should be consulted to develop and adopt a list of agreed subject-specific terms, including standard questioning language and key terminology. These terms must be reviewed regularly and made freely available on the Department of Education website, ensuring consistency across teaching and assessment. Exam papers should be versioned for Irish-medium candidates and released simultaneously with their English counterparts to provide parity of access to study materials and past papers. An automatic procedure for grade adjustment in cases of translation errors should also be established, removing the burden from teachers. Finally, increased staffing within examination bodies, including reinstatement of dedicated programme managers for Irish-medium education, is essential to maintain quality assurance and improve overall educational outcomes. These improvements will significantly strengthen exam integrity and foster positive pupil outcomes.

7. **Exploring AI Support for Irish-medium Education:** Looking ahead, and although not proposed by the participants in this study, Artificial Intelligence (AI) has the potential to contribute to the reduction in workload of Irish-medium teachers in Northern Ireland, who face the highly-skilled and time-consuming task of translating and adapting educational resources from English to Irish. AI tools, such as machine translation (e.g., Google Translate) and large language models (e.g., ChatGPT), could offer valuable support by generating first drafts of teaching materials or assisting with routine translation tasks, thereby freeing up teachers' time for planning and pedagogy.

However, significant challenges remain. Current AI systems struggle with the nuances of high-level academic language, and the accuracy required for high-stakes assessments and examinations is not yet guaranteed. Furthermore, AI tools are not yet fully equipped to handle variations in Irish dialect with adequate consistency or accuracy. Despite these current limitations, with ongoing refinement and greater integration of dialectal data, the extremely rapid pace of AI development offers grounds for cautious hope. It is therefore recommended that the Department of Education and CCEA explore opportunities to invest in research and pilot projects focused on how AI technologies could support Irish-medium education, ensuring future solutions are both linguistically accurate and educationally robust.

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Appendix 1: FTE and Headcount of IME teachers in NI 2014/15 to 2023/24

Full-time equivalent and headcount of teachers in Irish Medium schools in NI, 2014/15 to 2023/24

		2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Primary[13]	Full-time equivalent	184.0	183.5	191.8	198.5	200.4	198.7	215.3	211.1	228.5	220.5
	Headcount	189	189	200	204	210	209	224	225	241	233
Secondary	Full-time equivalent	44.5	49.6	54.2	60.9	63.1	71.4	79.4	84.8	92.8	97.3
	Headcount	46	52	57	64	69	75	82	89	98	103

Source: Teachers' Pay and Pensions System

Notes:
1. The figures for full-time equivalent teachers are based on a working week of 32.4 hours.
2. The following types of teacher are included:
 - full-time permanent teachers;
 - part-time permanent teachers;
 - temporary teachers filling vacant posts, secondments or career breaks.
3. Excluded from all calculations are:
 - Substitute teachers;
 - Peripatetic teachers;
 - Classroom support staff.

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[13] Note: DE has included nursery class teachers within the total headcount and FTE for primary schools – there are currently no stand-alone statutory Irish-medium nursery schools in Northern Ireland.