

# **An International Comparative Study on the Working Conditions of School Personnel**

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## Summary

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

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

### **1. Teachers' Working Conditions in Japan**

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

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

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

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

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

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

#### (2) Less time to prepare for classes

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

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

#### (3) Pressed with changes with education policy and with the attitudes of students/families

Survey asked respondents to answer on a 5-point Likert scale regarding items to evaluate their work, schools, and working conditions, with 5 being a “strongly agree” on a given statement.

- A similar trend was seen in all four countries/regions to give a high score on a statement “I feel busier than before.” However Japan marked the highest score among the four: Japan (4.3), England (4.1), Scotland (4.0), and Finland (3.3).
- Statements on which Japan markedly scored higher than other three were “The work load is too much to continue the job” (Japan 4.0; England 2.2; Scotland 1.9; Finland 1.7), “Communicating with students and their caregivers is tiring” (Japan 3.7; England and Scotland 2.2; Finland 2.1), and “My current knowledge is not enough” (Japan 3.3; England and Scotland 2.0; Finland 1.9).

- Considering the fact that numerous changes have been continuously being made on educational policy in Japan, such as a renewed system of teacher evaluation, modifications of national school curriculum, re-introduction of national academic assessment tests, and recent inauguration of Special Needs Education modifying its older special education system, the high score given on the last statement (“My current knowledge is not enough”) by Japanese teachers may indicate that they are pressured and confused by those frequent changes affecting their jobs.

#### (4) Teachers’ conception of “teachers’ jobs” and what they actually do

The survey asked the teachers to mark items that they considered as “teachers’ jobs” out of 16 items.

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

On the same 16 items, the survey also asked who actually do them – teachers, non-teaching school staff, educational administrative offices, parents/caregivers, people in community, or others – and we calculated the difference between what the teachers believed to be their jobs and what they actually did in reality.

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

#### (5) Difficulties with taking breaks and day-offs

On a 5-point Likert scale, Japanese teachers scored the highest (i.e., stronger agreement) on the statement “I don’t feel I can take breaks easily at school.” The scores were as

follows: Japan (3.5), England (2.4), Scotland (2.2), and Finland (2.3). Reflecting such a response, on average Japanese teachers took shortest breaks, only about 20 minutes a day, much shorter compared to 45 minutes a day (England and Finland) and 50 minutes a day (Scotland).

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

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

### **(1) England**

- Busy teachers – On a 5-point Likert scale, teachers from England scored the second highest to the statement “The work is too busy to enjoy my life.” The scores were 3.3 (Japan), 3.2 (England), 2.7 (Scotland), and 2.2 (Finland). Similarly, 41% of English teachers marked “strongly agree” to the statement “I feel busier than before.” It was again the second highest next to Japanese teachers, 54% of whom indicated the strongest agreement to this statement.
- High stress – The survey included 18 items related to stress, for which English teachers showed the highest overall scores among the four: Japan (3.4), England (5.5), Scotland (4.9), and Finland (3.3). Particularly, the stress level in the area of communication (communication with students, caregivers, colleagues, etc.) was noticeably high compared to other three.
- Shorter summer vacation – English teachers on average reported the second shortest days of summer vacation, which was shorter than Scotland (37 days) and Finland (65 days).
- England’s implementation of national academic testing system may have contributed to these results, as well as its strict policy to define the contents of each class and at what speed the curriculum should be taught to all students in England.

### **(2) Scotland**

- Working hours – Owing to the negotiation on teachers’ labor conditions made between the government and teachers’ union in 2001 (Resulting document titled “*A Teaching Profession for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*”), the survey showed that teachers in Scotland spent on average 42 hours per week at school. Combined with the reported hours of working at home, about 7 hours per week, the total working hours of Scottish teachers still exceed what was agreed in the 2001 negotiation, which was 35 hours per week. However, it is

much fewer than the working hours of Japanese teachers (about 61 hours) and also fewer than that of English teachers (about 51 hours).

- How teachers use their time – 71.1% of Scottish teachers said they used the time after all the classes were finished and before they left school to prepare for teaching five days a week, which was much greater than 54.1% of Japanese teachers who said the same thing. Teachers in both England and Scotland used their time more frequently on preparing for classes compared to those in Japan and Finland. Approximate numbers of how many times teachers engaged in class preparation per month were Japan (35.0), England (49.6), Scotland (48.1), and Finland (34.0). But unlike England, teachers in Scotland did not use much of their time on paperwork: They engaged in paperwork only 13.4 times per month, which was about two thirds of England data (18.8 times).

### (3) Finland

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

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

- Secure more time for teachers to prepare for classes and to work directly with students.
- For that, it is essential to secure more numbers of full-time school personnel, and to decrease the overtime working hours and the amount of work that teachers bring back home by:
  - Promoting smaller classes,

- Employing more professional staff other than teachers, and
  - Removing the supervising of lunchtime and of extracurricular club activities from teachers' work responsibilities.
- Like the “Planning, Preparation and Assessment time” (PPA) system of England and a similar system in Scotland, install a policy that secures the time for teachers to do the class preparation.
- Secure a long vacation, at least for 2 weeks, so that the teachers can engage in voluntary teacher training activities held in various places.
- The education Ministry, the prefectural and city education boards, and associations of school principals should carefully consider and limit the numbers of various model programs and projects. Limit also the number of study groups.