

# It's about time:

## The impact of SENCO workload on the professional and the school

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## Foreword

I think many would agree that the last few years have been very challenging for people working in the field of SEND, not to mention for the children, young people and families themselves. My own experiences of being a SENCO over the last seven years have no doubt changed, as I've watched my teaching timetable increase, my Teaching Assistant team diminish, the range and intensity of needs become more pronounced and the availability of specialist help from the local authority dwindle. This perfect storm of factors has sometimes led me to feel an overwhelming sense of despair: How is this fair on students? And how is it fair on SENCOs to expect the 'same' depth and breadth of effectiveness in role with diminishing time available and smaller teams to deploy? It was in the midst of this turmoil that I began to perceive the need for a survey to explore the national picture in order to enable greater consistency of provision for children and young people, as well as time for the SENCOs who support them. And the National SENCO Workload Survey was born.

I, personally, have been greatly impacted by the stories that our data tells. It nationalises my own story of knowingly not being able to reach those whose difficulties were 'not bad enough' or who managed their challenges quietly, without complaint. The hypocrisy of wanting to champion the needs of the most vulnerable, yet tacitly having to ignore some, is an emotional burden that many SENCOs will feel very acutely. It can be incredibly distressing. The depth of compassion required to be a good SENCO is infinite – and yet, a SENCO's time is not.

In 1973, at Princeton University, forty theology students took part in an experiment<sup>1</sup>. These students had to complete a personality questionnaire and then go to another building to give a talk either about the vocation of religious ministry or on the parable of the Good Samaritan. Some of the students were told to hurry because they were late; others were put under less time pressure. During their individual journeys, each participant encountered an actor slumped in an alleyway. The results were stark: regardless of people's personality type, only 10% of those who were under great time pressure stopped to help the suffering man, whereas those who had more flexibility of time were more likely to come to his aid – 63% in fact.

If a fundamental expectation of a good SENCO is compassion for children's needs, and research indicates how compassion can be impacted by time pressure, then the fact that our education system currently does not protect SENCO time means it is likely to be disabling thousands of SENCOs from being able to execute the role effectively.

It's about time. It's been about time for a very long time. I believe we need to protect SENCOs' time so that we can empower them to be able to make the difference that is needed.



Hannah Moloney, SENCO and Founder of Generation CAN

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<sup>1</sup> Darley, J. M., & Batson, C. D. (1973). "From Jerusalem to Jericho": A Study of Situational and Dispositional Variables in Helping Behavior," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 27.

## Foreword

Of the two roles that are legally required in a school, the SENCO and the Headteacher, only the SENCO is required to be a qualified teacher. Furthermore, those appointed to the role of SENCO after 1st September 2009 are required to complete the masters-level National Award for SEN Coordination. This demonstrates the critical importance of the SENCO and why it matters that we give them the capacity to perform their role effectively.

For many years, nasen has been a champion, friend and protector of SENCOs and so we were delighted to offer our support to Hannah Moloney, Dr Helen Curran and Anne Heavey in conducting this timely research. With the introduction of the Children and Families Act in 2014 and a new SEND Code of Practice in 2015, SENCOs should now be feeling more empowered than ever to ensure their settings are meeting the needs of learners with SEND. However, as the results of this survey show, too many SENCOs are overwhelmed with administration and are not given the time they need to do their job effectively.

Given the limited time that SENCOs have, the overwhelming response to this survey demonstrates their commitment to the role. This research has amplified the voice of SENCOs and I hope that school leaders and policy makers with the power to make positive changes for this vital part of the workforce are listening. If we are serious about making our education system work for learners with SEND, then we need to value our SENCOs and to give them the time and resources they need.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Adam Boddison". The signature is written in a cursive style and is underlined with a blue horizontal line that extends slightly beyond the left and right edges of the text.

Dr Adam Boddison, Chief Executive - nasen

## Foreword

The National Education Union (NEU) welcomed the opportunity to work with Bath Spa University and nasen on this excellent and timely research.

While we know that workload is having an overwhelming impact on education staff across the board, this research demonstrates both the specific workload problems encountered by SENCOs and the impact on their capacity to do this vital job. More importantly, perhaps, it shows the impact on SENCOs as professionals, on their feelings of frustration and guilt at not being able to provide the support that their pupils need: these are the things that lead to burnout and to SENCOs walking away.

The NEU's workload campaign has produced a toolkit which includes useful checklists on how to use a collaborative approach to tackling workload in schools. We don't want SENCOs to feel isolated. Their role is crucial to supporting the work of all other teachers who, under the Code of Practice for SEND, are considered teachers of SEND. The significant workload issues highlighted by SENCOs must be addressed collectively by all staff in a school/college negotiating with the head.

This report is about the workload of SENCOs, and calls specifically for legally protected time for SENCOs to do their work. But many of the workload and time issues that have been revealed in this survey are driven by schools' chronic lack of funding. Head teachers and governors are left with impossible choices to make on a daily basis because of Government decisions. The report has further highlighted the important role that teaching and learning support assistants play in enabling inclusion in many schools and the effect that the many redundancies are having on the work of other staff.

Unfortunately, SEND funding was ignored completely in the 2018 October budget announcements. This makes a mockery of the fantastic work that SENCOs carry out each day in an increasingly difficult educational environment.

It is time for the government to start listening to SENCOs, teachers, support staff, parents and children themselves about the everyday realities that schools are facing - SEND pupils are not 'little extras'. There are many things that schools and SENCOs can do to support SEND pupils and build inclusive cultures.

The NEU welcomes the recommendations made in this report about time, status, collaboration and support for SENCOs. But if schools are not funded properly so that all SENCOs have the time and resources they need then children and young people with SEND will not reach their full potential.

Mary Bousted and Kevin Courtney  
General Secretaries of the National Education Union

## List of acronyms

BERA	British Education Research Association
DfE	Department for Education
DoH	Department of Health
EAL	English as an Additional Language
EHC plan	Education, Health and Care plan
LA	Local Authority
LAC	Looked-After Children
MAT	Multi-academy Trust
nasen	National Association of Special Educational Needs
NA SENCO	The National Award for Special Educational Needs Coordination
NEU	The National Education Union
Ofsted	The Office for Standards in Education
SEN*	Special Educational Needs
SENCO	Special Educational Needs Coordinator
SEND*	Special Educational Needs and Disability
SLT	Senior Leadership Team
TA	Teaching Assistant

\*Note: the terms SEN/ SEND are used interchangeably within the report.

With thanks to the NEU and to Sarah Chapman at Operation Diversity for helping to facilitate this research.

## Executive Summary

### It's about time:

## The impact of SENCO workload on the professional and the school

### Overview

In September 2018, Bath Spa University, nasen and the NEU launched the National SENCO Workload Survey. The survey aimed to understand the nature of the SENCO workload across varying contexts in order to capture the breadth and depth of the SENCO role. The survey sought to explore the key activities of the SENCO role, particularly post the 2014/15 SEND Reforms. Questions focused on how the role was managed, specifically exploring the time and support SENCOs were able to access to enable them to effectively facilitate their role. The survey received over 1900 responses.

### Key findings

- Nearly three-quarters (74%) of SENCOs stated that they do not have enough time to ensure that pupils on Special Educational Needs (SEN) Support are able to access the provision that they need.
- Less than a quarter (23%) of SENCOs felt that they had enough time to ensure that pupils with Education Health Care Plans (EHC plans) accessed the provision that they need, with 59% of SENCOs stating that they did not have enough time to ensure provision at this level.
- 95% of SENCOs think that they should have legally protected time to enable them to fulfil the demands of the role.
- 70% of SENCOs did not feel that they had enough time allocated to the role. In terms of time allocation, nearly half of all primary SENCOs (47%) and over a third of secondary SENCOs (36%) stated that they had two days or less per week to focus on the role.
- Only a quarter of respondents (26%) felt that the role was manageable for one person, with 78% of SENCOs stating that other roles and/or tasks routinely pulled them away from being able to carry out the SENCO role effectively.
- SENCOs are managing their workload by working extra hours in addition to their allocated SENCO time, with 43% of primary SENCOs and 71% of secondary SENCOs working in excess of an additional nine hours per week on SENCO duties. This is the equivalent of SENCOs working at least an additional full working day per week on top of any allocated SENCO time and does not take into account additional time spent on teaching/ other roles within the school.
- Almost a half (46%) of all SENCOs felt that their role was understood by senior leaders, however for SENCOs in secondary settings this figure decreased to 26%.

- Perceptions of how the role is understood by other school staff were more varied, with only 27% of SENCOs stating that they felt their role was understood by colleagues.
- 80% of SENCOs who work in settings where the National Award for SEN Coordination is mandatory have achieved, or are currently completing, the award.
- When asked if they intend to be in the role in 5 years' time, 34% of SENCOs responded positively. Of the 30% who stated that they did not intend to be in the SENCO role, nearly half (49%) of SENCOs cited workload as the primary reason for leaving and 45% stated that they did not intend to be in the role due to a lack of funds allocated to SEN.
- Whilst this survey focused on SENCO workload, other factors were identified that prevent SENCOs from ensuring appropriate provision for children with SEN. These included a lack of time for staff to liaise with the SENCO and the lack of sufficient funding to provide appropriate levels of support.
- Despite the challenges reported above, 71% of SENCOs stated that they enjoy the role most, or all, of the time.

## Recommendations: For Department for Education

- The SENCO role should have legally protected time to enable SENCOs to effectively manage the demands of the role. This should be in addition to time allocated to other responsibilities which the SENCO may hold.
- Further work should be undertaken to ascertain a minimum time requirement to enable SENCOs to effectively execute the role. Factors including the proportion of identified SEN within the school, the size of school and geographical location should all be considered as part of this research.
- However SENCOs should have, as a minimum, 1 ½ days per week allocated to the role. In some cases it will be appropriate for SENCOs to have a full, non-contact timetable, depending on the specific circumstances of the school.
- A SENCO specific strand should be incorporated within the DfE Workload Project.
- Further guidance, in addition to the SEND Code of Practice, should be developed and disseminated to school leaders and governing bodies regarding the responsibilities of the SENCO role and how this can be facilitated in various school settings, including Multi-Academy Trusts. This should be based on further research which takes into account recent wider systemic changes to the educational system and should also include guidance regarding the leadership and status of the role, and related pay.
- To enable timely and effective communication with SENCOs, as well as providing a platform for review of SENCO workload, recruitment and retention, it is recommended that the January census is utilised as a tool through which SENCO data can be collected, including the name and email of the SENCO and whether they have completed the National Award for SEN Coordination.
- A thought leadership session should be convened to enable wider stakeholders to engage with the issues identified within this report.

## Recommendations: For Senior Leaders within schools

- Currently SENCOs do not have legally protected time, yet this research illustrates the impact on the professional and the school if there is insufficient time to fulfil the role. Therefore, we call upon school leaders and governing bodies to make a pledge to protect SENCO time in their schools.
- SENCOs who are seeking to leave the role are citing workload as a primary reason. SENCOs are also lacking time to adequately reflect and evaluate the effectiveness of provision in their settings. The financial cost of these factors is high. Therefore, we recommend that senior leaders review the SENCO role in terms of time and support to encourage experienced SENCOs to remain in post.
- We recommend that senior leaders review the responsibilities of the SENCO role and share this with the governing body and wider staff to raise the profile, and understanding, of the SENCO role. A focus should be on the coordination nature of the role, with an emphasis on 'every teacher is a teacher of learners with SEN'.
- Head teachers should structure and protect the SENCO role to afford the SENCO the necessary status and seniority to influence school policy at strategic level.
- Consideration should be given to how schools can work with their SENCO to build capacity, distribute responsibility and enable support. Where funding/ resourcing allows, it is recommended that the development of a team around the SENCO, for example through department SEN champions, assistant SENCO support, administrative support and /or wider SEN teams, is given consideration as a way in which immediate additional support can be provided for the SENCO and, as a consequence, improve outcomes for children and young people with SEN.

## Recommendations: For SENCOs

- Share the findings of this report with your head teacher/ line manager, governing body and other colleagues as appropriate.
- In light of the above, review your job description with your head teacher and SEN governor with a view to determining the amount of protected time you require to facilitate your role.
- Join a professional community of SENCOs, for example nasen. There are also a number of active social media groups which can lend virtual support.
- Consider developing your own support networks both in and out of school. This may include support from within your Multi-academy Trust, your cluster of schools or from within the Local Authority. You can also find out what support your union can offer.

## Introduction

In September 2018, Bath Spa University, nasen and the NEU launched the National SENCO Workload Survey. The survey aimed to understand the nature of the SENCO workload across varying contexts in order to capture the breadth and depth of the SENCO role. The survey sought to explore the key activities of the SENCO role, particularly post the 2014/15 SEND Reforms. Questions focused on how the role was managed, specifically exploring the time and support SENCOs were able to access to enable them to effectively facilitate their role. The survey received over 1900 responses.

## Background to the research

The Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice: 0 – 25 years (hereafter referred to as the 2015 Code) states that, ‘the SENCO has day-to-day responsibility for the operation of SEN policy and co-ordination of specific provision made to support individual pupils with SEN, including those who have Education, Health and Care plans’ (DfE and DoH, 2015: 108). In addition to this, the SENCO has ‘an important role to play with the head teacher and governing body, in determining the strategic development of SEN policy and provision in the school’ (DfE and DoH, 2015: 108). It is a statutory requirement for every mainstream maintained or academy school in England to appoint a SENCO. The post-holder must be a qualified teacher and, if appointed after 1<sup>st</sup> September 2009, they must achieve the National Award for SEN Coordination within three years of taking up the role.

Whilst statutory guidance has detailed suggested responsibilities for the SENCO role (DfE and DoH, 2015), there has been a clear issue relating to a disparity between the description of the post in policy and the practical execution of the role (Pearson, 2010). In addition to a lack of clarity regarding the role, two key factors have impacted the effective execution of the role: seniority and time (Qureshi, 2014). While it is recommended that SENCOs are part of the school Senior Leadership Team, this is not mandatory (DfE and DoH, 2015). Research suggests that SENCOs are not typically in a senior position, with suggestions that SENCO membership of the SLT could be between 50% (Tissot, 2013) and 19% (Pearson et al., 2015). Consequently, the role itself can be ineffective at influencing whole school policy (Pearson, 2008).

In addition, the 2015 Code (DfE and DoH, 2015) does not stipulate how much time is necessary or should be protected, for the SENCO to fulfil their duties. School and local contexts are imperative. However, since the introduction of the role in 1994 (DfE, 1994), it has been frequently reported that SENCOs often have inadequate non-contact time to fulfil their responsibilities (Cowne, 2005; Mackenzie, 2007). Overlapping roles and shifting priorities can also impact on the time a SENCO may have to dedicate to the role; with time to execute the strategic and operational aspects varying widely (Cole, 2005; Mackenzie, 2007; Szwed, 2007).

Initiatives have been introduced to try to raise the status of the SENCO, so that the post has the necessary authority to execute its function. Primarily this was through the introduction of the National Award for SEN Coordination, a mandatory postgraduate qualification for all SENCOs new to post since 1<sup>st</sup> September 2009. The SENCO is the only position in school which is required, by law, to have a Master's level qualification. While it has been argued that this has positive benefits for SENCOs regarding conceptualisation of the role, and the integration of theory and practice (Griffiths and Dubsy, 2012), questions remain regarding the additional workload the NA SENCO can bring to a role which is already problematic in its execution.

Furthermore, it could be argued that the aforementioned issues have been compounded since the introduction of the SEND reforms; notably the introduction of the 2014 Children and Families Act and the related statutory guidance, the 2015 Code (DfE and DoH, 2015). The SEND reforms are based on principles which aim to keep the child and family at the centre of the decision-making process as well as ensuring early identification and an outcome focused system (DfE and DoH, 2015). It could be argued that, at a school level, there has been a central actor navigating, mitigating and narrating the changes in policy; the SENCO. It could equally be argued that the remit of the role is expanding; in part due to SENCOs individually replicating or replacing services which they can no longer access, possibly due to the changes in Local Authority structures and related SEN services; all of which have impacted not only on time, but also the strategic nature of the role (Curran, 2017).

In response to the above issues, Hannah Moloney, secondary SENCO, decided that 'it's about time'. Keen to explore whether evidence-based specific guidance could be created and provided to headteachers to enable decisions regarding the time given to SENCOs to execute the role effectively and endeavour to bring more consistency across the nation, Hannah brought together colleagues from Bath Spa University, nasen and the NEU, and they developed the National SENCO Workload Survey.

## Research aims and scope

The research aimed to explore the role of the SENCO, post the 2014/15 SEND reforms. Specifically, the research sought to understand the extent of the role amid well-documented concerns related to teacher workload with specific consideration given to the impact workload has on the SENCO and their capacity to undertake their role effectively.

The primary aims of the research were to:

1. Update current understanding regarding the SENCO demographic, post the SEND reforms. Particularly in relation to:
  - a. Experience
  - b. Training
  - c. Support

- d. Nature of the role
  - e. Time to execute the role
  - f. Additional responsibilities
  - g. Seniority/ SLT status
2. Provide clarity to school leaders and further stakeholders, including the Department for Education, regarding the depth and breadth of the SENCO role, with a view that such information can be used to inform strategic decision making, and improve the consistency of provision nationally.
  3. Identify factors which impact on the effective execution of the SENCO role.
  4. Provide guidance to policy makers regarding the effective execution of the SENCO role.

# Key findings

## The SENCO role in 2018

The survey sought to explore the nature of the SENCO role, post the SEND reforms, and particularly focused on the key activities of the SENCO role and any additional roles the SENCO may hold. The findings illustrated the following:

- Over half of SENCOs (54%) reported that they have teaching responsibilities in addition to their SENCO role.
- There is some variation between primary and secondary settings. Nearly half (48%) of primary SENCOs stated that they had teaching responsibilities. However, for secondary colleagues, this figure increased to 78%. Only 8% of all respondents stated that they held no other responsibilities.
- 1.6% of SENCOs also held the post of headteacher, with over half of this group (57%) working in primary settings.
- Furthermore, the findings indicated that SENCOs hold a wide range of responsibilities, in addition to teaching and the SENCO role, with Safeguarding Lead, Designated Teacher for Looked After Children and EAL Lead the most commonly cited additional responsibilities (see Table 1).

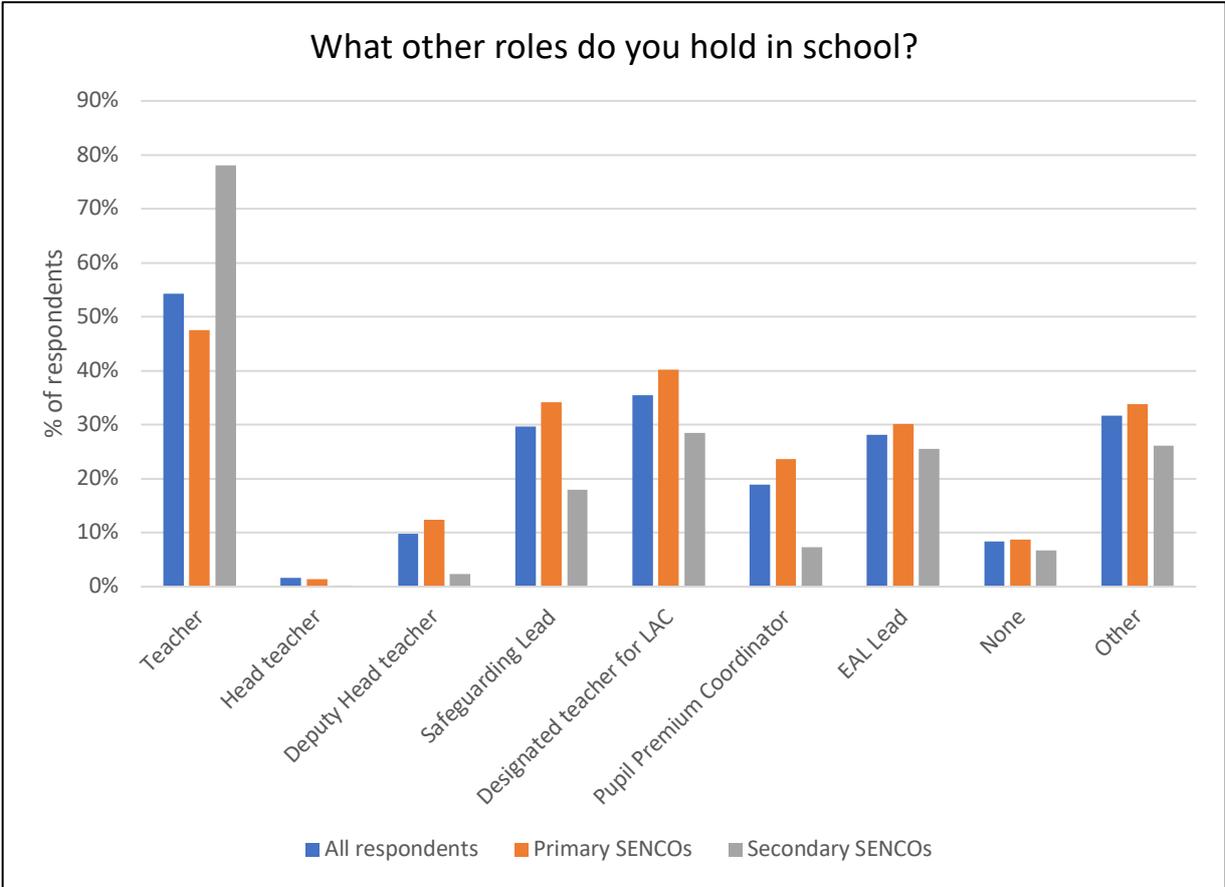


Table 1

- In terms of SLT membership, there is a contrasting picture. Overall 50% of SENCOs stated that they were part of the SLT, due to the SENCO role. However, this increased for primary SENCOs to 62% and decreased for secondary SENCOs to 21% (see Table 2).

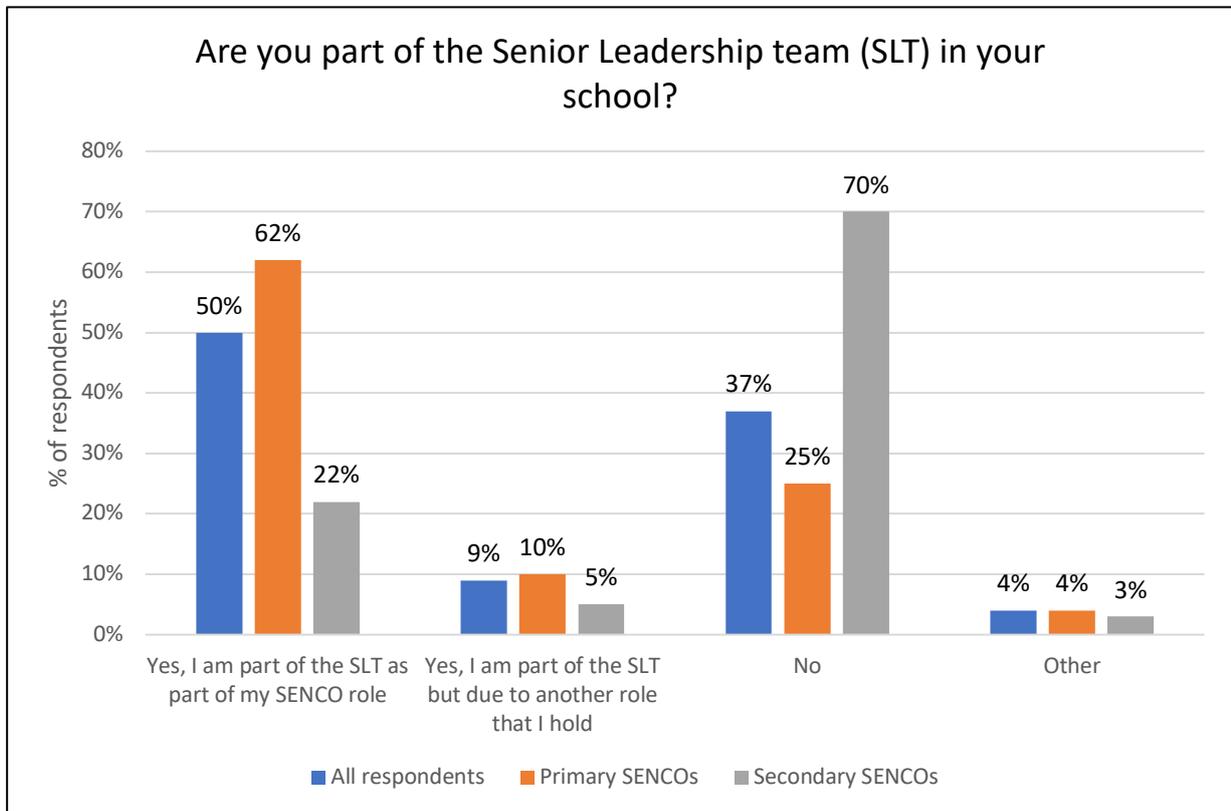


Table 2

- In terms of the day to day operation of the SEN policy, the majority of SENCOs (71%) reported that administrative tasks, including data analysis, completing referrals and annual review paperwork, accounted for the majority of SENCO time in the average week. Meetings, including annual reviews, liaising with external agencies and meeting parents, were ranked as the second most common time-consuming activity in the average week.

- SENCOs were asked whether they felt colleagues within their setting understood the role of the SENCO. Table 3 illustrates the SENCOs who agreed or strongly agreed that colleagues understood their role.

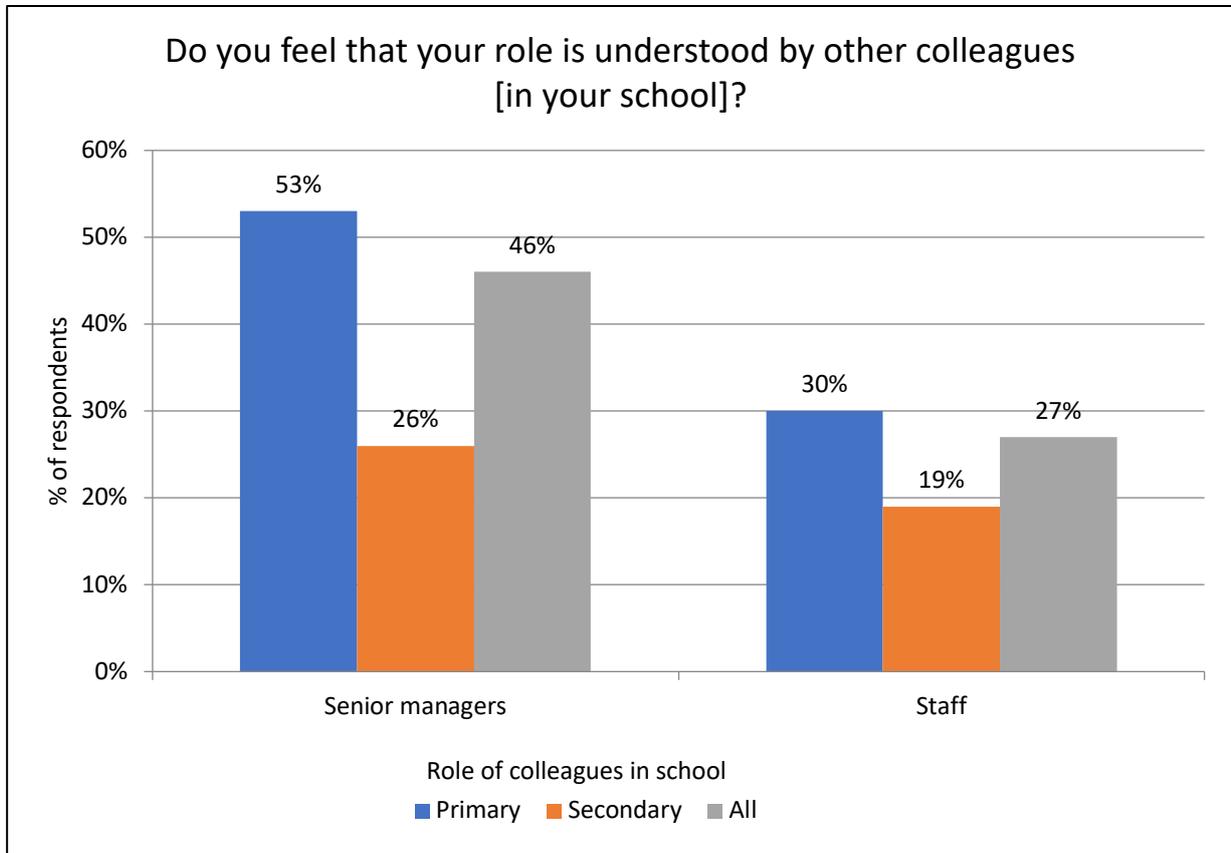


Table 3

*My role is understood by the head, but not understood by governors and leaders of the MAT. They want me in class teaching rather than trying to meet the needs of SEND pupils. There is an outcry when SEND pupils don't make progress, but funds are directed towards underachievers rather than genuine SEND pupils. This is because performance management focuses on SATs progress and scores rather than the challenge of closing the gap for SEND pupils.*

*I don't think any of the Senior Leadership team realise how big a job the SENCO is. Our head is very supportive but is very busy himself. Splitting yourself into a million pieces (the biggest being a full-time class teacher) and managing SEN is extremely hard. I would say once a half term, I feel completely overwhelmed.*

- Early Years colleagues felt that their SENCO role was more widely understood by wider staff, with 34% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing that their role was understood by colleagues.
- Three-quarters of respondents (76%) have completed, or are completing, the NA SENCO. This figure increased to 80% in settings where the NA SENCO is mandatory for those who took up the post after 1<sup>st</sup> September 2009. 27% of SENCOs working in Early Years or nursery settings have completed, or are currently completing, the NA SENCO.
- In addition to the NA SENCO, 34% of primary SENCOs and 55% of secondary SENCOs have completed, or are completing, additional qualifications. In secondary schools, this predominantly related to access arrangements, although additional training and qualifications at both primary and secondary level tended to be focused around specialist assessor dyslexia training, a two-year Level 7 course.
- 36% of SENCOs stated that they do not receive any additional pay for undertaking the role. 43% of SENCOs who are part of SLT, either due to their SENCO role or another role, do not receive an additional payment for the SENCO role. 80% of Early Years SENCOs do not receive any additional pay.

# Managing the SENCO role; time and support

The survey explored how SENCOs managed the time they had allocated to the role and whether they felt that this was sufficient. Overall, the findings illustrated a mixed picture regarding the time SENCOs have allocated to the role and this demonstrates the variation in how the role is executed in schools and other settings (See Table 4).

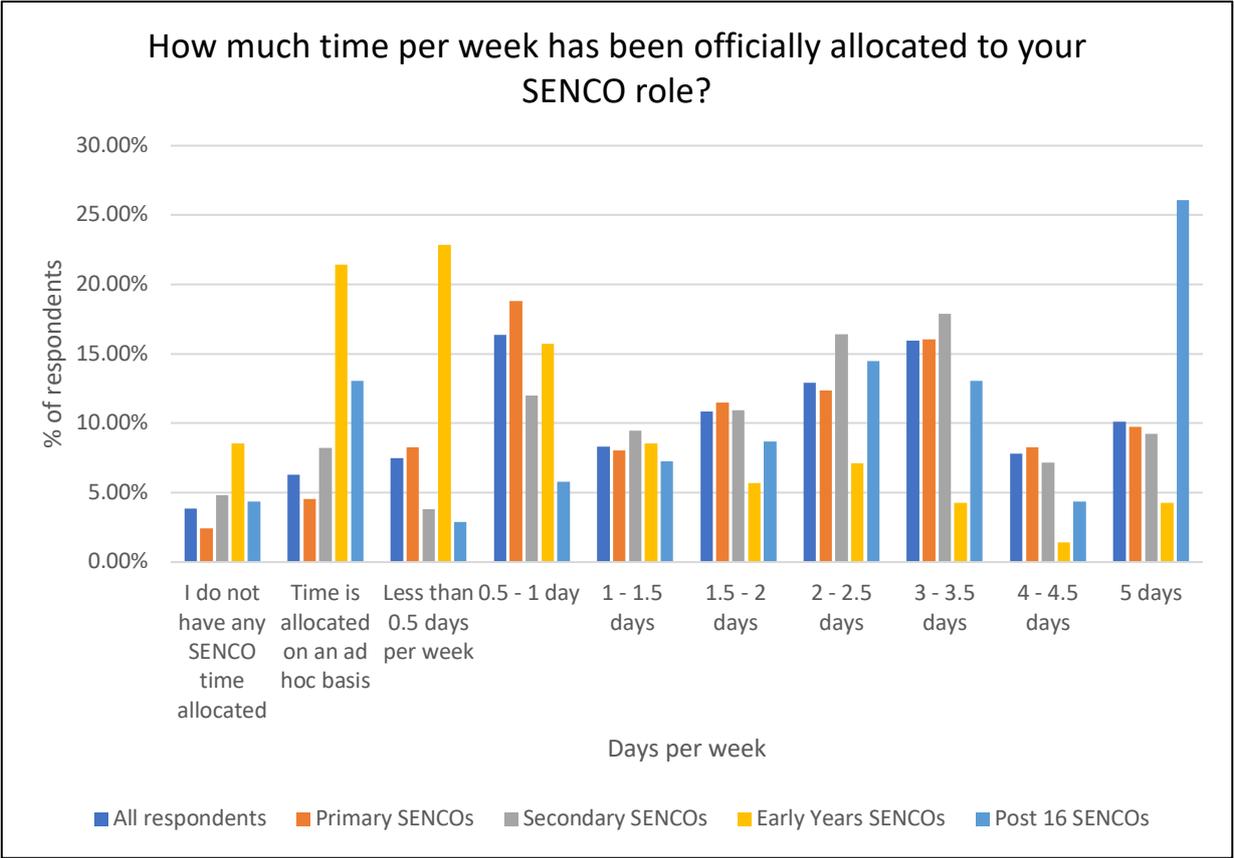


Table 4

- The picture was variable between phases. Primary SENCOs cited 0.5- 1 day as the most common amount of time allocated to the role (19%), whilst secondary colleagues stated between 3 – 3.5 days per week (18%). However, nearly half of all primary SENCOs (47%) and over a third of secondary SENCOs (36%) stated that they had two days or less per week to focus on the role. 5% of secondary SENCOs stated that they had no time allocated at all. Approximately a quarter of SENCOs (26%) working in post-16 settings had five days allocated to the role.
- SENCOs were asked what regular, deployable support that had in school to support them with their workload (See Table 5).

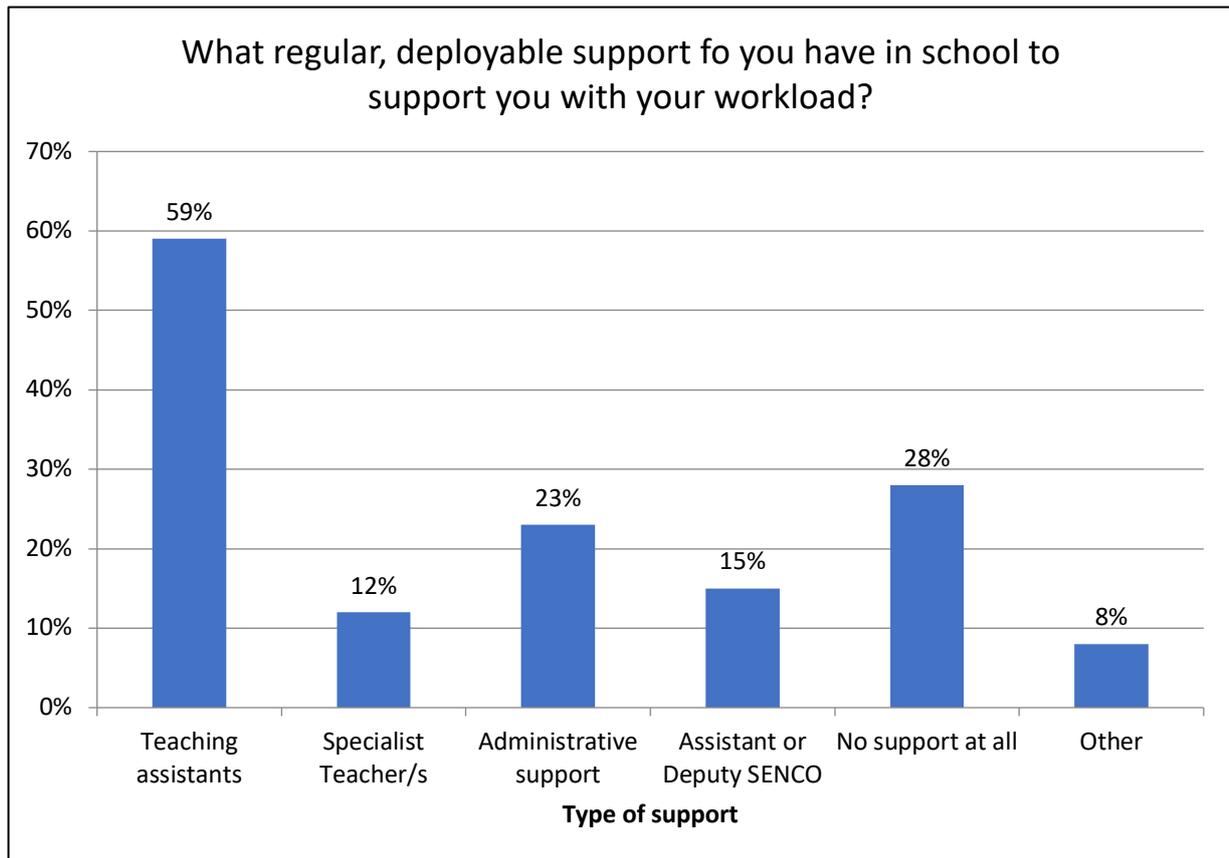


Table 5

- Whilst 59% of SENCOS cited TAs as the most common regular support to help with workload, this increased to 84% of secondary SENCOS and decreased to 51% of primary SENCOS.
- Secondary school colleagues were more likely to be able to access support from an assistant or deputy SENCO; 32% reported that they had access to this type of support. This appeared specific to this phase, with only 9% of primary SENCOS stating that they were able to access this support.
- Despite administrative activities being the most commonly cited SENCO activity, only 15% of primary SENCOS stated that they had access to regular, administrative support for workload.
- However, 28% of SENCOS said that they do not have any regular support with workload, with nearly half (49%) stating that they are not able to access any support from outside of their setting to support with workload.
- 70% of all SENCOS stated that they do not have enough time to complete the demands of the role with nearly three quarters (74%) stating that they frequently feel frustrated by the lack of time to undertake the role.
- Overall the findings illustrated that SENCOS do not feel that they have enough time or support to meet the workload demands of the role. When asked how many hours **in addition** to their allocated SENCO time they worked in the average week 50% of all respondents stated that they were spending at least an extra 9 hours or more on SENCO tasks every week. This is the equivalent of SENCOS spending at least one extra

working day per week, on top of SENCO time allocated, on SENCO activities alone. This is on top of any additional work associated with classroom teaching and/ or other roles held.

- However, nearly three quarters (71%) of secondary SENCOs stated that they spent an extra 9 hours or more on SENCO activities, **in addition to their officially allocated time**, with 16% stating that they regularly spend an additional 24 hours or more on SENCO tasks every week.
- Only a quarter of SENCOs (26%) felt that the role was manageable for one person.
- SENCOs were asked if they worked additional hours and if they did, how did they fit these additional hours into their week. They were asked to select all that applied to their working week (see Table 6).

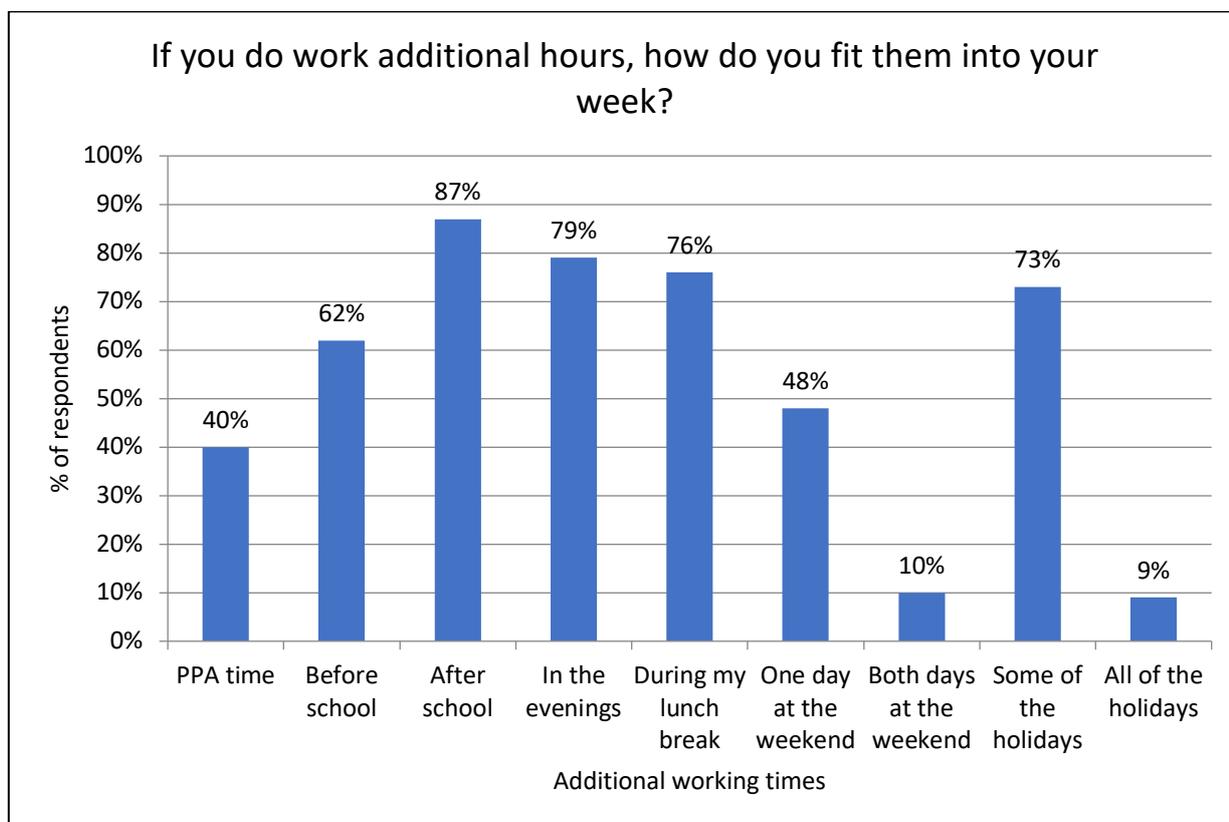


Table 6

- Further responses from SENCOs illustrated that those who work part-time reported that they regularly worked during their days off.

*I am meant to be part-time, working three days a week, but I also work on my two days off without any payment.*

*I am only contracted for 2.5 days a week, so use the 2.5 days I do not work to complete paperwork at home (unpaid).*

*I work part-time (4 days) and regularly work on my non work day.*

*I am part-time and work during the day sometimes on all of the days I do not work, but as an average, I would say I work 1.5 of my non- working days but I have been told that is part of a SENCOs role so sometimes I don't and I get behind.*

- In addition to working extra hours, SENCOs stated that they were routinely pulled away from SEN tasks, due to other roles and responsibilities. 78% of SENCOs stated that this was an issue, citing the need to support staff and pupils with 'behaviour management', as well as responsibilities linked to their roles as Designated Teacher for Looked After Children or Safeguarding Lead. In addition to this, SENCOs stated that they were regularly called to cover classes. When asked to expand on why they have routinely pulled away from SENCO related tasks, respondents stated:

*I rarely get my allocated SENCO time as it gets used covering classes or dealing with behaviour management.*

*Crisis management of pupils with major behavioural/ safeguarding issues. Not enough adult support in terms of TAs to help with these incidents so I can get on with the rest of my job.*

*Dealing with children with challenging/disruptive behaviour. I get called to help deal with these situations as first response on my SEN days.*

*Being called to support individual pupils with behaviour support.*

## SENCO workload and the impact on provision for children with SEN

The survey asked SENCOs to consider how their workload impacted on children identified with SEN, at both an operational and strategic level.

- Nearly three-quarters (74%) of SENCOs stated that they do not have enough time to ensure that pupils identified as requiring SEN Support are able to access the provision that they need.
- Only 14% of SENCOs agreed that they currently have enough time to ensure that pupils identified at SEN Support can access the provision they need.
- Only 9% of secondary SENCOs felt that they had enough time to ensure pupils at SEN Support accessed provision they need.
- Less than a quarter (23%) of respondents felt that they had enough time to ensure that pupils with Education Health Care Plans (EHC plans) accessed the provision that they require.
- 59% of SENCOs stated that they did not have enough time to ensure pupils with EHC plans accessed the provision that they require.
- Whilst this survey focused on SENCO workload, other factors were identified that prevent SENCOs from ensuring appropriate provision for children with SEN. These included a lack of time for staff to liaise with the SENCO and the lack of sufficient funding to provide appropriate support.

*Too much time is spent on repetitive paperwork for EHCPs and other referrals; I spend way too much time on paperwork recording what we do to support students, instead of doing or arranging that support. It is "justifying our existence" paperwork, which actually does nothing to actively improve things for our pupils.*

*The level of need in my school is such that the high needs children take up all my time so those who are just SEN support get very little of my attention. Pupils with SEMH [Social, Emotional and Mental Health] particularly dominate. My head teacher is very understanding and supportive but there is not enough money in the budget to allow for more SENCO hours.*

*I am frequently pulled to focus on other things, particularly safeguarding, which makes planning time to do things difficult. Although some colleagues understand the importance of the role, they don't understand how long the paperwork takes. In a school with limited funding, it is difficult to support all children in the best way.*

- Whilst 59% of SENCOs felt that they were able to contribute to strategic decision making in their setting, less than a quarter of respondents (23%) felt that they had enough time to reflect and evaluate on the effectiveness of SEN provision. This figure decreased for secondary colleagues, with less than a fifth (18%) stating that they felt they could evaluate provision in their settings.

*I would like there to be more time to work with students and for strategic planning but most of the time seems to be taken up with firefighting minor emergencies and overcomplicated paperwork.*

*The role feels like it comprises of a frantic and never-ending cycle of paperwork - referrals, Ars [annual reviews] and meeting records. There is not time for strategic work with impact nor the time to thoughtfully explore the best provision for vulnerable pupils with or possibly with SEN. This leads to long periods of time they are not having their needs met.*

## Impact on the SENCO as a professional

The survey sought to explore the impact of SENCO workload on the professional, with a view to understanding how SENCOs felt about the role and the impact the role had on them professionally and personally.

- Positively, nearly three-quarters (71%) of SENCOs stated that they enjoy their role most, or all, of the time.

enjoy role rewarding time love job work passionate school want  
enjoy needs role SENCO love pupils support make difference  
children teaching job feel

- Despite their enjoyment of the role, the findings illustrated that SENCOs feel a keen sense of moral and ethical responsibility in relation to their work. SENCOs expressed concern about the decisions they were having to make in isolation and the impact that this may have on staff, parents and children. They expressed concern that they could not provide the support required, due to a lack of time and money.

*I love my role as a SENCO. What I find isolating is not being a member of SLT and as a result, making crucial decisions independently with no support.*

*I love my job, but I hate that I feel almost complicit in not being able to offer all the support I believe our students need because of funding constraints.*

*It is frustratingly hard to find time to reflect and change provision - my time feels to be mainly fire-fighting and I simply don't have the capacity to be as proactive as I would like to be. With no admin support or anyone else to share the load, I am permanently working behind. The dire lack of funding for SEND makes the job even harder.*

- The theme of isolation permeated other aspects of the role, with wider feelings of loneliness within the role evident.

*Socially, within the workplace, I feel that SENCOs are often isolated from the staff, whether through choice or situation. I feel that since taking on the SENCO role I feel less inclined to attend social gatherings and lunch with other staff members. The quality*

*of life when I am at work is poor compared to other staff. I also feel that I spend a lot of time worrying about tasks I haven't managed to complete. Sometimes this can affect sleep and mood at home. I literally need half an hour break before I can go home and be civil with my family.*

## The future of the SENCO workforce

- Whilst 71% of SENCOs stated that they enjoyed the role, approximately only one-third of SENCOs (34%) intend to be in the role in five years' time. Reasons for continuing in the role include:

*Because I am passionate about this role and supporting children with additional needs.*

*The role is challenging but I enjoy what I do. I am lucky to be a dedicated SENCO and accept that a lot of my personal time goes on the role. I really hope that more money will be allocated to SEN to provide the pupils with what they need. The pupils need me to fight their corner and provide what I can.*

*I love the sense of achievement in providing for and supporting children who really need it. I also find working with other agencies really interesting and enjoyable.*

- Of those who stated they did not intend to be in the role (30%), nearly half (49%) cited workload as their reason for leaving, with 45% stating that a lack of funding would make them consider leaving the role. Just over one quarter (27%) were seeking to progress into a different senior role, for example, deputy head teacher or head teacher.
- The findings illustrated that SENCOs felt conflicted about their role in these circumstances:

*I love being a SENCO, but I just don't know if I can cope with the level of stress for a long period of time. It's a very frustrating, upsetting role. It's our job to support vulnerable children and we very often can't.*

*I love my role because I believe I can make a difference to the lives of students - I do not think I can continue long term in my role because I am exhausted at the end of every day and that has an impact on those at home.*

*No time what so ever to do the role, undervalued and appreciated, I only do it for the children, although I can't continue for much longer*

*I am firefighting the entire time. Filling out paperwork to access services, liaising with parents and answering emails takes all of my allocated SENCO time. I have 55 with significant needs on SEND register, 9 staff to mentor for performance management*

*for whom I am directly responsible for 1.5 days to do all this is a joke!!!! Am also teaching my own class for 3 days a week. I have 2 full-time jobs. It is about time that schools were funded properly to support children with SEND. Currently, the system is only working because dedicated staff do everything possible to support pupils. HELP the system urgently needs to change.*

- 95% of SENCOs stated that they think the role should have legally protected time.

*It should be a protected role - nationally there should be a minimum statutory time allowance per week allocated to SENCOs which should be honoured by all schools.*

- 26% of SENCOS stated that non-contact time should be 5 days per week. With just over a half (54%) of respondents stating that they think that they would need to have 3 or more days per week in order to complete the demands of their role effectively.
- When asked if they could change one thing about the role, the most common responses cited an increase in time to complete the role, a reduction in paperwork, more support for the SENCO and for children and increased funding.

staff<sub>money</sub> school<sub>SEN</sub> children<sub>SENCO</sub> needs<sub>Less</sub>  
paperwork<sub>admin</sub> time<sub>teaching</sub> support  
amount paperwork<sub>funding</sub> understanding<sub>role</sub> teachers<sub>work</sub>  
Less paperwork

*More time to spend supporting staff and children and less time completing paperwork given by the LA or outside agencies.*

*Having more time and support. The workload is huge and often unmanageable. I work over 60 hours a week.*

*Less paperwork. More straightforward routes to funding. Better communication with our local authority. More time for tasks and understanding of why this time is needed from other staff and SLT.*

## Methodology

A two-phased approach was taken to the research.

- Phase One: Online focus groups were undertaken with fifteen SENCOs participating. Focus groups explored key issues related to SENCO activities, time to complete the role, enablers and barriers to facilitating the role and seniority. The data was thematically analysed and then related to previous literature and policy. This phase of the research informed the content of the second phase, the wider online survey, by providing the perspective of current SENCOs in post.
- Phase two: A national online survey based on the responses and information gathered from Phase One, policy and previously undertaken research. Questions sought to gather key information regarding the current SENCO demographic, whilst also exploring key tasks, time to undertake the role, enablers and barriers and seniority.

## Research procedures

Both phases of the study were piloted prior to their release. The focus groups were piloted with three small SENCO groups, with minor amendments following. The survey was piloted with twenty-one SENCOs from various settings and latterly with three educational professionals. A number of amendments were made to the survey prior to its release. Feedback from pilot participants predominately related to technical aspects, including layout or clarity of phrasing. However, some additional questions, specifically around leadership, were included as a result of the pilot.

The survey opened on Monday 17<sup>th</sup> September 2018 via the online platform 'survey monkey' and closed on Wednesday 10<sup>th</sup> October 2018. The survey was distributed through various channels including:

- The National SENCO Workload Survey website
- The National SENCO Workload Survey mailing list
- The NEU SENCO mailing list
- Information was sent to Providers of the National Award for SEN Coordination
- Social media, predominantly twitter and Facebook
- nasen mailing list.

Ethical approval was granted by the Institute for Education, Bath Spa University. Dr Helen Curran is a member of BERA and as such the research project follows BERA guidelines (2018) as part of the Association's Code of Conduct. Potential participants had access to information and consent documents. Prior to completing the survey participants were asked to provide their consent for their response data to be used and reported as part of the research project. SENCOs were made aware that participation was voluntary, and they could withdraw at any time, without reason. All responses to the survey have been contributed anonymously.

## Participants

In total, of the 1940 responses received, 1903 SENCOs stated that they were currently practising as a SENCO and consented for their data to be reported as part of the survey. The findings reported are only drawn from data for which consent has been given. In order to capture the breadth and depth of the SENCO role in varying contexts, SENCOs where the role is non-statutory were also asked to contribute. Therefore, SENCOs who work in early years, specialist provision and the independent sector, amongst others, are included within this survey in addition to those who work in settings where the role is mandatory.

The majority of respondents, 91%, were from mainstream settings, with 3.7% in Early Years settings and 3.9% working in specialist settings (including special schools, alternative provision and pupil referral units). SENCOs who worked in primary settings, including first, infant and junior schools, accounted for the majority of respondents, with 67% stating this was their current context. A quarter of SENCOs (25.5%) stated that they worked in a secondary setting, including middle and upper school contexts.

86% of SENCOs reported that they work in a mainstream, Local Authority maintained, academy or free school, with 85% (n=1610) of respondents stating that they work in a state funded, mainstream school in England. Overall 55% of SENCOs, and 66% of primary SENCOs, reported that they work in a local authority maintained school. The majority of secondary SENCOs, 65%, stated that they work in an academy, either as a stand-alone academy or as part of a Multi Academy Trust. 4.5% of respondents reported that they work in the independent sector.

Respondents were predominantly based in England (98%), with the South East the most represented area (22%). The majority of SENCOs respondents identified as female, 94%, although in secondary schools 12% of SENCOs identified as male.

In terms of time in post, this varied. 25% of SENCOs reported that they have been in post for 8 or more years, with 43% in their first, second or third year.

## Reporting of findings

The findings discussed in this report are derived from the online survey data. All data from the focus groups and both pilot studies have been discarded. For the purposes of the discussion, data reported reflects the views of all respondents, unless otherwise stated where relevant, for example, primary/ secondary settings. The data collected is predominately quantitative and has been reported as such. Questions which elicited further responses from participants has been thematically analysed and used for illustrative purposes.

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## Appendix 1

### Guidance for SENCO time allocation by school size and cohort

The recommendations in the tables below are drawn from respondents who identified as mainstream SENCOs working in a local authority maintained, academy, multi-academy trust, or free school. Primary SENCO data was drawn from those SENCOs who identified as working in a first, infant, junior or primary school setting; secondary SENCOs were identified as working in a secondary, middle or upper school setting.

The guidance is based on data from the question “how much time in total do you think you would need each week to be able to complete the demands of your SENCO role effectively?”

The data has been formulated through averaging the responses from SENCOs by different setting type, size of school and percentage of SEN Support. The data was also reviewed by geographical area (urban, rural and coastal), however the responses did not show significant enough variation to be distinguished into their own categories. The greatest number of responses were from SENCOs in urban settings (68%), followed by rural (27%).

This data was also reviewed by number of EHCPs in the setting. Regardless of setting or SEN Support percentage, there was a clear trend that the number EHCPs increased the demand for SENCO time. As such further advice and guidance has been provided to enable SENCOs and headteachers to decide on a precise time allocation bespoke to each setting, including consideration of other factors identified through the data which also cause SENCOs to need more time. These include:

- Higher numbers of EHCPs in the setting
- Further qualifications which can increase workload, e.g. assessing for access arrangements
- A child or children whose needs required a great deal of support [in terms of time], e.g. those with very high levels of SEMH difficulties.

This data is not drawn from, or comparable to, SENCO time allocations in the independent or special school sectors, given the different requirements and demands of each, and therefore should not be used as a guideline for time in these settings.

This data also does not include time required for other responsibilities that are not part of the SENCO role e.g. teaching; planning, preparation and assessment (PPA) time; Designated Teacher of LAC; Safeguarding; management of a Specialist Resource Provision; or non-SEN related SLT responsibilities.

Additionally, this data does not demonstrate the size or nature of the deployable support team around the SENCO but assumes that there is one and that the size of the team is proportionate to the size and demographic of the school. A team might include a number of teaching assistants, administrative support, pastoral support workers etc. Further free guidance about maximising the impact of teaching assistant time can be found through the SEND Gateway, hosted by nasen.

## Smaller than Average Size Schools

The average primary school has 260 pupils (1.5 class entry); the average secondary school has 910 pupils (6 class entry.)

### Percentage of SEND (EHCP/SEN Support): Lower than average

For the purposes of this survey 'lower than average' is considered to be 6.7% or less.

School Type (Smaller than average size)	Recommended Time Allocation	Other Advice & Guidance to support decision making
Primary	1.5-2 days	Factors which would evidence need of the higher, or even additional, time requirements would include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 6 or more EHCPs</li> <li>• Additional qualifications held by the SENCO, especially qualifications to assess (e.g. CCET, L7 SpLD)</li> <li>• A child in crisis requiring immediate and time-intensive support e.g. significant SEMH</li> </ul>
Secondary	2.5-3 days	

### Percentage of SEND (EHCP/SEN Support): Average

For the purposes of this survey 'average' is considered to be 11.7% (+/- 4%).

School Type (Smaller than average size)	Recommended Time Allocation	Other Advice & Guidance to support decision making
Primary	2-3 days	Factors which would evidence need of the higher, or even additional, time requirements would include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 6 or more EHCPs</li> <li>• Additional qualifications held by the SENCO, especially qualifications to assess (e.g. CCET, L7 SpLD)</li> <li>• A child in crisis requiring immediate and time-intensive support e.g. significant SEMH</li> </ul>
Secondary	3-4 days	

## Percentage of SEND (EHCP/SEN Support): Higher than average

For the purposes of this survey 'higher than average' is considered to be 16.7% or more.

School Type (Smaller than average size)	Recommended Time Allocation	Other Advice & Guidance to support decision making
Primary	3-4 days	Factors which would evidence need of the higher, or even additional, time requirements would include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 6 or more EHCPs</li> <li>• Additional qualifications held by the SENCO, especially qualifications to assess (e.g. CCET, L7 SpLD)</li> <li>• A child in crisis requiring immediate and time-intensive support e.g. significant SEMH</li> </ul>
Secondary	4-5 days	

## Average Size Schools

The average primary school has 260 pupils (1.5 class entry); the average secondary school has 910 pupils (6 class entry.)

## Percentage of SEND (EHCP/SEN Support): Lower than average

For the purposes of this survey 'lower than average' is considered to be 6.7% or less.

School Type (Average size)	Recommended Time Allocation	Other Advice & Guidance to support decision making
Primary	2-3 days	Factors which would evidence need of the higher, or even additional, time requirements would include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 10 or more EHCPs</li> <li>• Additional qualifications held by the SENCO, especially qualifications to assess (e.g. CCET, L7 SpLD)</li> <li>• A child in crisis requiring immediate and time-intensive support e.g. significant SEMH</li> </ul>
Secondary	3-4 days	

## Percentage of SEND (EHCP/SEN Support): Average

For the purposes of this survey 'average' is considered to be 11.7% (+/- 4%).

School Type (Average size)	Recommended Time Allocation	Other Advice & Guidance to support decision making
Primary	3-4 days	Factors which would evidence need of the higher, or even additional, time requirements would include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 10 or more EHCPs</li> <li>• Additional qualifications held by the SENCO, especially qualifications to assess (e.g. CCET, L7 SpLD)</li> <li>• A child in crisis requiring immediate and time-intensive support e.g. significant SEMH</li> </ul>
Secondary	4-5 days	

## Percentage of SEND (EHCP/SEN Support): Higher than average

For the purposes of this survey 'higher than average' is considered to be 16.7% or more.

School Type (Average size)	Recommended Time Allocation	Other Advice & Guidance to support decision making
Primary	4-5 days	Factors which would evidence need of the higher, or even additional, time requirements would include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 10 or more EHCPs</li> <li>• Additional qualifications held by the SENCO, especially qualifications to assess (e.g. CCET, L7 SpLD)</li> <li>• A child in crisis requiring immediate and time-intensive support e.g. significant SEMH</li> </ul>
Secondary	5+ days*	

\* A SENCO in this type of School may need another qualified SENCO to work additional 1-2 days to support workload. This may be in the form of an Assistant SENCO or job share.

## Larger than Average Size Schools

The average primary school has 260 pupils (1.5 class entry); the average secondary school has 910 pupils (6 class entry.)

### Percentage of SEND (EHCP/SEN Support): Lower than average

For the purposes of this survey 'lower than average' is considered to be 6.7% or less.

School Type (Larger than average size)	Recommended Time Allocation	Other Advice & Guidance to support decision making
Primary	3-4 days	Factors which would evidence need of the higher, or even additional, time requirements would include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 10 or more EHCPs</li> <li>• Additional qualifications held by the SENCO, especially qualifications to assess (e.g. CCET, L7 SpLD)</li> <li>• A child in crisis requiring immediate and time-intensive support e.g. significant SEMH</li> </ul>
Secondary	4-5 days	

### Percentage of SEND (EHCP/SEN Support): Average

For the purposes of this survey 'average' is considered to be 11.7% (+/- 4%).

School Type (Larger than average size)	Recommended Time Allocation	Other Advice & Guidance to support decision making
Primary	4-5 days	Factors which would evidence need of the higher, or even additional, time requirements would include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 10 or more EHCPs (primary); 16 or more EHCPs (secondary)</li> <li>• Additional qualifications held by the SENCO, especially qualifications to assess (e.g. CCET, L7 SpLD)</li> <li>• A child in crisis requiring immediate and time-intensive support e.g. significant SEMH</li> </ul>
Secondary	5+ days*	

## Percentage of SEND (EHCP/SEN Support): Higher than average

For the purposes of this survey 'higher than average' is considered to be 16.7% or more.

School Type (Larger than average size)	Recommended Time Allocation	Other Advice & Guidance to support decision making
Primary	5+ days*	Factors which would evidence need of the higher, or even additional, time requirements would include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 16 or more EHCPs</li> <li>• Additional qualifications held by the SENCO, especially qualifications to assess (e.g. CCET, L7 SpLD)</li> <li>• A child in crisis requiring immediate and time-intensive support e.g. significant SEMH</li> </ul>
Secondary	5+ days*	

\* This data is predicted data based upon the number of SENCOs requesting 5 days, considering also the trend throughout the data from other settings which is reflected here. This data is predicted as there was not an option provided for more than 5 days (a limitation of the survey.) Using this predicted time need, a SENCO in this type of School may need another qualified SENCO to work additional 1-2 days to support workload. This may be in the form of an Assistant SENCO or job share.