

Pre-Budget Scrutiny: Reducing Class Contact Time (RCCT)

“We want to explore how plans to reduce contact time in Scottish schools are progressing. We are also keen to understand and share any potential issues in delivering these plans.”

Introduction

The Association of Directors of Education in Scotland (ADES) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Committee's pre-budget scrutiny on the reduction of class contact time.

Local authorities remain committed to supporting improvements in educational outcomes for children and young people.

The 2015 OECD review—led by Andy Hargreaves and Helen Timperley—made twelve system-level recommendations, including a clear call for:

- More protected time for teachers to plan learning
- More time for assessment and moderation
- More structured time for professional collaboration
- Strengthening collective capacity for system improvement

The OECD emphasised that high-performing systems invest in collaborative professionalism. It concluded that without change, policy ambitions would continue to outpace delivery. It was also clear the status quo was a structural issue and not an individual workload problem.

A further reduction of class contact time (RCCT) became a Scottish Government policy commitment, introduced in the 2021 Programme for Government, to reduce teachers' class contact time by 90 minutes per week.

Reducing class contact time is intended to provide teachers with additional time for preparation, planning, assessment, professional learning, collegiate activities, and wider school and system improvement work. Local authorities continue to work collaboratively with national partners to support this ambition.

- The current national contractual maximum class contact time for teachers is 22.5 hours per week under Scottish Negotiating Committee for Teachers (SNCT) arrangements. The agreement is to reduce this to 21 hours per week, equivalent to a reduction of 1.5 hours per week for a full-time teacher.
- Delivering the RCCT across Scotland requires additional teaching capacity to ensure that pupils continue to receive their full entitlement to learning and teaching time.
- Workforce challenges remain a significant factor in implementation. These challenges are often most acute in rural areas and in secondary school subject specialisms where recruitment has historically been more difficult.
- Scottish Government, COSLA and ADES have agreed a workforce calculation factor of 7.14% additional teaching capacity per teacher to support the reduction in class

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contact time. This reflects the additional teaching capacity required to reduce maximum class contact time from 22.5 hours to 21 hours per week.

Progress to Date

Since the national commitment to reduce class contact time was agreed, local authorities, working in partnership with COSLA, have undertaken significant modelling to determine the additional staffing and financial requirements across Scotland.

This work has included the development of workforce and funding models to support implementation across the Primary, Early Learning and Childcare, and Special School sectors from August 2027, and within Secondary Schools from August 2029. The modelling has sought to identify the additional teaching capacity required to maintain pupils' entitlement to learning and teaching while reducing teachers' maximum class contact time.

At a local level, school leaders have been reviewing school timetables, curriculum models, staffing structures and deployment arrangements to understand the practical implications of implementation within individual establishments. This work has helped inform workforce planning and identify potential challenges associated with teacher supply, curriculum delivery and school organisation.

In parallel, local authorities have continued to engage with school leaders and trade union representatives to support planning in the local context. While preparatory work has been undertaken, the successful delivery of RCCT remains dependent on the availability of sufficient teaching staff and sustainable funding to meet the additional workforce requirements.

Continuity of learning in ELC, primary and special schools

With the proposed model of RCCT, children will only have 21 hours of contact with a class teacher (or job share teachers) and, additionally will now have 4 hours of learning provided by other staff. This could impact on:

- Progression in learning
- Consistency of support
- Need to consider peripatetic models for staff particularly in ELC

It will be essential that careful consideration and planning is undertaken at a school level around how the 4 hours are used e.g. Use of specialists (PE, French, Music) and/or the way the time is provided e.g. 2.5 hours and 1.5 hours. Consideration needs to be given to ensuring coherence in the overall curricular experience for pupils, and that staff are not only delivering the curriculum in silos. There is the potential for negative impact on children's interdisciplinary learning and for de-skilling of staff.

Consideration will need to be given to specific pupils and the planning required to meet their needs. Continuity of experience for learners needs to be considered as part of the discussions for refreshed professional time. LNCTs will play an important role in this. The need to track progression of skills through careful planning to ensure continuity in learning and that learners experience the full curriculum.

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There will need to be flexibility to manage peripatetic staff e.g consideration of cluster colleagues who move across schools/ELC in the same cluster to support continuity and relationships.

LA.s are considering professional learning for HTs on how best to develop appropriate planning models that ensure deliverability and continuity of learning.

Workforce Considerations

The availability of suitably qualified teachers is one of the key factors influencing the successful delivery of the reduction in class contact time (RCCT).

Local authorities continue to experience recruitment challenges in certain geographical areas and across a number of secondary subject specialisms. While recruitment patterns vary across Scotland, some authorities face greater challenges in attracting and retaining teachers, particularly in rural and remote communities.

Both the Scottish Government and Audit Scotland are undertaking work with local authorities to assess teacher workforce vacancies and identify areas of unmet demand within schools. Nationally, shortages remain particularly acute in secondary subjects such as Mathematics, Home Economics, and Craft, Design & Technology, where demand continues to exceed the supply of qualified teachers.

The implementation of RCCT will require a significant increase in teaching capacity across school settings. This is not solely a question of increasing overall teacher numbers; it also requires the availability of teachers with the appropriate qualifications, skills and experience to meet local workforce needs.

Where vacancies already exist, local authorities must balance the need to maintain high-quality educational provision with progress towards RCCT implementation. In secondary schools, existing recruitment challenges within specific subject areas may become more pronounced as additional staffing is required to support reduced contact time. This may require headteachers to review timetabling arrangements, curriculum models and staffing deployment in order to maintain a sustainable curriculum offer.

It is worthwhile noting that there had been an intent to have some pilots of how a further reduction in class contact time might operate in different areas. This was considered by ADES to have little overall benefit given that any pilot would require a sufficiency of suitably qualified teachers to enable it to be taken forward. RCCT has been operating in schools since the early 2000s. It required careful planning and the required number of teachers; piloting an extension of what already was in operation was not considered a good use of time as the issues around implementation related to their being sufficient funding and sufficient staff. Pilots in areas where both aspects were available would be of no use/learning in areas where one or both of these aspects were insufficient. (By way of background, the implementation of the original McCrone Agreement was undertaken between 2001 and 2006:

- **2001:** Agreement signed; pay restructuring and new career framework began.

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- **2001–2006:** Progressive introduction of new terms and conditions, CPD entitlements, chartered teacher scheme, and class-contact time limits.
- **August 2006:** Final elements completed; the agreement fully in force across Scotland.

This time around will see different sectors implement the changes to terms and conditions in different years. This has already caused concern amongst some of the teacher trade unions who do not consider it an appropriate approach.

Distribution of Teachers

The national distribution of teachers is an important consideration in implementing reduced class contact time. The challenges are often different between urban, rural, and island communities. Small schools, schools in remote locations, and some secondary subjects can present workforce planning difficulties.

Local authorities seek to deploy available staffing resources in a way that supports equity of educational opportunity for young people. However, where teacher supply is constrained, achieving an appropriate balance between workforce availability, curriculum delivery, geographical location and reduced class contact time can be challenging. As a result, the successful implementation of RCCT will depend not only on the overall number of teachers available nationally, but also on the ability to recruit, retain and deploy teachers in the locations and subject areas where additional capacity is required.

Equality Impact Assessments

Concerns have been raised about this policy intent by local authority political leaders. This includes concern that sufficient meaningful consultation and engagement with children and young people has not been undertaken. Local Authorities and national government have separate but complimentary legal responsibilities to ensure appropriate equality impact assessments, island assessment and consultation is undertaken prior to implementation.

As part of the ongoing work to support member councils the Local Government RCCT Equalities and Engagement Subgroup has been established to help identify what work can be done nationally to support local assessments.

This will include advice regarding equality, children's rights and island impact assessments. The group is also supporting the development of communications to support consistent messaging of this issue throughout engagement.

Financial Implications

Delivering the reduction in class contact time requires sustained and recurring investment. In partnership with COSLA, ADES has contributed to detailed financial modelling to support implementation, with discussions on funding requirements continuing between COSLA and the Scottish Government.

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The financial implications of implementation are not linked directly to pupil numbers. Rather, they are determined by local staffing models, school structures and workforce requirements. These arrangements must be developed in accordance with national Scottish Negotiating Committee for Teachers (SNCT) terms and conditions and agreed locally through Local Negotiating Committees for Teachers (LNCTs).

Long-term delivery should be supported by sustainable funding arrangements that provide certainty for workforce planning, recruitment and retention. Stable and predictable funding enables local authorities to make informed decisions regarding staffing and service delivery, supports longer-term workforce planning, and helps ensure that the benefits of reduced class contact time can be realised consistently across Scotland. In simple terms, the approach to funding the required number of teachers in every local authority needs to follow the normal financial distribution model for funding.

The distribution of an initial £7.5m was confirmed on 15th September to enable local authorities to begin planning immediately and determine their implementation plans during autumn 2026, ahead of the phased introduction of RCCT from August 2027 with local authority recruitment usually commencing early in the new year. Some of this funding will be used to support the required EQIAs (equality impact assessments).

A final consideration

Given the significant, additional national investment in realising this policy ambition, there are currently no clear metrics of impact/success that will be able to be monitored, evaluated and reported. An investment on this scale merits such an approach and this may be something that the Committee is already given some thought to how, and by who, this will be undertaken.