

Education and Gaelic Committee-22 September 2026

Reduced Class Contact Time

Brief

This written submission has been provided to help inform the Education and Gaelic Committee about how plans to reduce class contact time are progressing and highlight any potential issues in delivering this. It covers how the number of teachers that local authorities employ and the distribution of these teachers (geographically and across subjects) will impact on delivery of a reduction of contact time.

BACKGROUND

Reducing class contact time (RCCT) is a Scottish Government policy commitment, introduced in the 2021 Programme for Government, to reduce teachers' class contact time by 90 minutes per week. In December 2024, as part of the 2025/26 budget agreement COSLA and the Scottish Government committed to work together on meaningful progress towards reducing class contact time for teachers alongside improved workforce planning.

Pay, terms and conditions for Scotland's teachers and associated professionals are negotiated via the Scottish Negotiating Committee for Teachers (SNCT), a tripartite collective bargaining body comprising COSLA (representing the 32 local authority employers), the Teachers Panel (made up of teaching trade unions), and the Scottish Government. Under SNCT conditions, all teachers in Scotland work a 35-hour week, of which up to 22.5 hours is currently allocated to class contact. The remaining non-class contact time comprises 7.5 hours for preparation and correction, and 5 hours for collegiate activity.

Based on the 2025 census figures, Scotland has 53,475 full-time equivalent (FTE). Teachers make up a quarter of the Local Government workforce, teaching in just over 5000 public funded education settings. About 20% are schools with less than 50 pupils. The pay bill for teachers is estimated to be £4.6bn, with 50% of all local government spending going to education. Education and social care are the only areas of local government spending which have seen real terms increases over the past decade, with all other service areas facing significant real terms cuts.

In February 2025, the EIS lodged a formal dispute with the SNCT after agreement could not be reached on how the additional 90 minutes (taken from contact time) would be used and the timescales for implementation. Planned industrial action by the EIS prompted intensive negotiations between the Scottish Government, EIS and COSLA. Ahead of COSLA Leaders' special meeting on 13 March, the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills and the EIS issued a [joint letter](#) to COSLA Leaders. The political decision on the Agreement was reached on 13 March, with the policy to be fully funded by the Scottish Government.

The [Joint Agreement](#) means that all teachers will have a maximum weekly class contact time of 21 hours, with Primary and Special Schools implementing from August 2027 and Secondary from August 2029. Further detail will be negotiated through the SNCT. The Joint Agreement also set out that Scottish Government would provide full funding for the implementation including all necessary workforce expansion and associated costs. The additional 90 minutes of RCCT will be allocated entirely as undirected “Professional Time”. This is the biggest change to teachers’ terms and conditions since the introduction of the original McCrone Agreement and requires considered implementation.

Governance Arrangements for Implementation

A Local Government RCCT Steering Group has been established to support implementation, comprising COSLA and senior advisers from Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE), Association of Directors of Education in Scotland (ADES), Directors of Finance (DoFs) and the Society of Personnel and Development Scotland (SPDS). The group will support planning, modelling and national coordination across councils. The Group will be a key source of advice to inform COSLA Leaders at important stages of implementation. Two subgroups have been established to support the RCCT Steering Group:

Finance Subgroup – comprising DoFs, SOLACE, and ADES representatives across different council types (i.e. varied sizes and geographies), to support discussions with the Scottish Government on funding requirements.

Equalities and Engagement Subgroup – comprising SOLACE, Society of Local Authority Lawyers & Administrators in Scotland (SOLAR), ADES, DoFs, SPDS and Scottish Councils Equality Network (SCEN) representatives, to support discussions on statutory equality obligations.

All negotiations on implementation will take place within the SNCT. This will include any changes required to terms and conditions. An SNCT Implementation Group has been established with the first meeting taking place on 23 September 2026. The group will develop a SNCT delivery plan setting out key milestones and steps for implementation of reduced class contact time, in line with the agreed phased delivery schedule.

Financial and Workforce Modelling

As indicated, the agreement is clear that the policy will be fully funded by the Scottish Government, and delivery is contingent on this. £40m non reoccurring funding has been committed in 2026/27 to support councils with preparatory activity. A multi-year budget will be provided by Scottish Government from 2027/28 onwards. To date £7.5m of the £40m funding has been agreed to be distributed across councils and COSLA to enable additional work in the following areas:

- Impact assessments – EQIA, CRWIA, Island Communities Impact Assessment and duties under the Education Act, UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act, including ASN
- Workforce planning, timetabling

- Delivery mitigation options development/implementation
- Finance, HR etc
- Any other preparatory work the council may require.

The additional capacity in councils will also be utilised to contribute to working on shared issues which are nationally coordinated to avoid duplication and/or unintended consequences elsewhere in the system.

It is anticipated that the balance of the £40m funding will be required to support a number of approaches including but not limited to addressing issues identified through EQIAs, CRIWAs etc; any other relevant engagement with young people to enable councils to meet legal duties; and, in due course, early recruitment activity.

As part of the joint agreement, there is a commitment to work with Scottish Government to refine the cost modelling and funding required for implementation for 2026/27 and future years. COSLA had previously estimated the annual cost of this policy as up to £250-310m per year. The agreement to phase implementation is expected to reduce the cost to a degree but it will still require significant investment in the teaching workforce, which risks the opportunity cost of resourcing other services.

With considerable support from ADES, modelling across all local authorities has now been undertaken to assess requirements for both the primary and secondary sectors, in line with the agreed implementation timescales. The Scottish Government modelling is currently being tested against the recently conducted ADES model and local knowledge of known requirements.

At this point in time COSLA and the Scottish Government are working constructively to jointly establish the costs of implementation to agree the funding envelope required to deliver RCCT. Work has not yet begun around establishing whether the necessary supply of teachers will be available to support delivery of the policy to the agreed timetable.

Statutory Obligations

COSLA Leaders have continued to raise significant concerns around this policy. 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.

Workforce Planning

The Scottish Government published an [independent report](#) in May 2024 on pupil projections and implications for teacher resourcing needs in Scotland education. The report provides a desk-top analysis of high-level information on pupil projections and when a reduction in class contact could be achieved nationally.

Updated teacher census data shows that the child population is falling more slowly than previously expected. If primary teacher numbers remain at 2023 levels, as part of the Scottish Governments policy for teacher numbers, reduced class contact time is likely to be several years away, even in theoretical terms.

The independent report does not fully reflect the complexity of delivery. Teacher availability varies by geography and subject, and Scotland cannot be treated as a single system in which teachers can simply be moved to meet demand. Crucially, the need for a teacher in any particular school cannot be assumed to reduce in proportion to a falling roll as it is not until an entire class can be removed that there is no longer any need for the teacher, it is not a direct liner relationship – a teacher is still required to teach a class of 7 as a class of 25. Some areas have rapidly growing populations, while many rural areas face significant recruitment constraints. These geographical and local challenges mean councils may be unable to implement reduced class contact time consistently.

Implementation timescales were set through national negotiation rather than on the basis of deliverability. Significant teacher shortages remain in parts of the country, and reductions in probationer numbers mean the system may not have enough teachers to meet the policy's requirements.

Teacher training recruitment targets have not been met in most subjects, with particular pressures in maths, English and the sciences. This is already affecting Initial Teacher Education (ITE) arrangements and probationer placements in local authorities. Councils have no control over how many student teachers enter university, choose secondary subject pathways, or decide where to train, work and live.

Professional advisers have consistently highlighted the complexity of delivering reduced class contact time given the geographical challenges and recruitment barriers already affecting parts of the country. Councils face pressures in particular subjects and locations, making it difficult to maintain subject choice for learners and complete school timetables. The commitment to reduced class contact time is likely to intensify these pressures.

Councils already use a range of recruitment initiatives to attract and retain teachers in hard-to-fill areas and posts and will continue to do so as they develop implementation plans. However, regardless of funding, reduced class contact time may not be deliverable in some parts of the country because of limited teacher availability.

Local authorities carry out detailed annual teacher workforce planning, taking account of pupil rolls, class sizes, curriculum and subject choices, existing and future

staffing levels based on probationer numbers, retirements, inter-local authority movement, family leave and vacancies. This is a complex process that requires significant local analysis and professional judgement. Annual funding arrangements limit councils' ability to plan beyond the academic year and can contribute to reliance on fixed-term contracts for teachers.

Primary implementation is expected to be more manageable than secondary implementation, based on projected numbers, although some councils will still face challenges. COSLA and professional advisers remain particularly concerned about secondary implementation. There are risks associated with implementing a phased approach and implementing only in primary and special schools.

A £1m Teacher Recruitment Assistance Fund (TRAF), separate from the wider £40m RCCT investment package, is intended to pilot interventions to address persistent teacher workforce shortages in rural and island communities and support wider workforce sustainability.

TRAF will provide additional funding to eligible rural and island local authorities to strengthen existing recruitment and retention incentives for teaching posts. It will complement, rather than replace, existing workforce investment. The fund will operate initially as a pilot, with any continuation subject to evaluation, demonstrated impact and future budget decisions. It will enable councils to offer more competitive packages to prospective teachers, including relocation support, housing assistance and other financial incentives tailored to local need. The aim is not only to fill immediate vacancies, but also to support sustainable workforce stability.

Full implementation is expected to be challenging in some parts of the country because of recruitment shortages in rural, remote and island communities, as well as in specialist subjects. COSLA is working with the Scottish Government and trade union partners to identify these issues and solutions. At this time, we do not know the value this policy will bring to children and young people in terms of their wellbeing and learning. We will seek to explore this further with Scottish Government.