

Response of the Educational Institute of Scotland to the Education and Gaelic Committee of the Scottish Parliament in relation to the Reduction in Teachers' Weekly Class Contact Time

Introduction

The Educational Institute of Scotland (EIS), Scotland's largest teaching union, representing nearly 65,000 teachers and lecturers at all grades and in all sectors of Scottish education, welcomes this opportunity to provide written evidence to the Education and Gaelic Committee in relation to reducing teachers' weekly class contact time.

Alongside other recognised teaching trade unions the EIS is represented and has the majority of seats on the SNCT Teachers' Panel, which makes up the teachers' side of the tripartite Scottish Negotiating Committee for Teachers (SNCT)- the national collective bargaining forum for teachers working in the public sector in Scotland.

The National Scheme of Salaries and Conditions of Service for Teachers and Associated Professionals is negotiated and agreed at the SNCT, with agreed conditions of service being set out in the SNCT Handbook. As well as national conditions of service, there are a number of designated devolved matters that are negotiated locally between local councils and teaching unions. These negotiations take place at Local Negotiating Committees for Teachers. The SNCT Handbook also makes clear a tripartite commitment across teaching unions, COSLA and the Scottish Government to the following:

- valuing the contribution of all who work within Scottish education;
- promoting equality and diversity within Scottish education and its communities;
- challenging discrimination;
- promoting core values of social justice, equality and diversity;
- integrating equality and diversity into all its activities; and
- reviewing and monitoring its procedures, agreements and policies to ensure legal compliance.

Furthermore, the SNCT has a stated commitment to upholding the principles of collegiality and professionalism embedded in *A Teaching Profession for the 21st Century* agreement.

The weekly class contact time for teachers forms a national condition of service and is outlined in Part 2, Section 3 of the SNCT Handbook. Currently and before the Joint SNCT Agreement on reducing weekly class contact time takes effect, the conditions of service outlined in the SNCT Handbook divide the 35-hour working week into three separate components:

- A maximum of 22.5 hours of class contact.
- A minimum of one third of a teachers' class contact time being protected for "preparation and correction".
- Five hours per week for collective activity (agreed collegially at school level).

The [SNCT Working Time Code of Practice](#) already acknowledges, in the national criteria, the importance of preparation and correction as key elements of the work of teaching professionals:

"For most teachers, preparation and correction will be the most time consuming activities outwith class contact time. This requires to be reflected in the way that a teacher's working time is deployed".¹

Preparation and correction cover a wide range of activities and with the increasingly diverse profile of learners in our schools, the increased focus on meeting individual learners' needs and inclusive pedagogy, these activities consume even more time.

Campaigning for the delivery of quality learning and teaching and addressing the unsustainable, unfair and unhealthy levels of workload being endured by teachers in Scotland's schools have been longstanding goals of the EIS and form central aspects of the EIS's Stand Up for Quality Education campaign.

As a result of EIS campaigning to bring Scottish teachers' conditions of service more closely in line with OECD counterparts by reducing class sizes to a maximum of 20 and teacher class contact time to a maximum of 20 hours per week, the SNP's 2021 election manifesto contained a commitment to reduce the weekly class contact time of teachers to 21 hours as a step forward in reducing teacher workload. This commitment came alongside a pledge to recruit 3,500 additional teachers, in recognition that the reduction would require increased numbers of teachers in schools across Scotland, and taking account of the overall reduction in teacher numbers since 2007.

The Educational Rationale for Reducing Class Contact Time

Scotland's teachers, as evidenced in the OECD's 2021 review of the implementation of Curriculum for Excellence, are contracted to deliver one of the highest rates of class contact across OECD countries. Highlighting that teachers in Scotland are curriculum leaders, the review points to the relatively high level of contact time and cites the 'obvious tension' between these levels and delivery of this role. By way of response, it recommended "*the provision of additional dedicated and ring-fenced time for all teachers, for curriculum planning, for monitoring of student achievement and in support of moderation of assessment outcomes*".

The delivery of quality education goes beyond what takes place in the classroom. In order to ensure the best possible outcomes for young people, teachers must plan and prepare teaching, learning and assessment activities. In practice this covers a wide range of activities from sourcing appropriate resources, planning differentiated lessons, reflecting on learners' engagement and outcomes, assessing progress and providing individualised feedback, using a variety of different tools. Such work is undertaken by Scotland's teachers in the non-directed time for "preparation and correction" in Part 2, Section 3 of the SNCT Handbook.

With rising levels and complexity of need in schools across Scotland, and the systemic under-resourcing of Additional Support Needs (ASN) provision, the importance of reduced class contact time being devoted to the planning and preparation of learning, teaching and assessment is self-evident. In 2025, 43% of the school population were identified as having an identified additional support need. Critically, this rise in demand has not been reflected in resourcing. The EIS has long raised concerns over dramatically declining numbers of specialist staff and unsustainably large class sizes, as well as a lack of access to allied support professionals at the point of need, leaving significant gaps which are being filled by class teachers.

Inclusive education is dependent on adequate resourcing to meet the needs of all pupils but also crucially on teachers having sufficient time to plan for differentiated lessons; to implement inclusive pedagogy and support strategies; to reflect; to assess and evaluate progress on a continuing basis; to engage with parents and partner agencies in line with GIRFEC principles. Additionally, teachers are expected to complete ever-increasing levels of paperwork, much of which is superfluous to the real business of learning and teaching, but which is demanded for accountability reasons.

Independent research, commissioned by the EIS in 2024, made clear that Scotland's teachers were spending, on average, over 11 additional hours

beyond their contracted 35 hour working week each week carrying out the tasks that should be undertaken in time for “preparation and correction”.

The evidence drawn from this independent research also set out, in clear terms, the significant numbers of teachers reporting the negative impact unsustainable workload on their physical health, mental wellbeing and personal lives. OECD research and commentary has highlighted the very clear link between teacher wellbeing and the educational outcomes of young people. As such, the EIS is clear that significant steps to address unsustainable workload, such as reducing weekly class contact time, are imperative for both teachers and young people as learners.

The Scottish Government has made eradicating the poverty-related achievement and attainment gap a key priority. However, ultimately identifying and closing the gap requires front-line interventions which can only be accessed as a result of teachers observing and evaluating, planning and implementing direct interventions at classroom level. Without this additional time, the gap will continue to grow.

Professor Ken Muir, in his report, “Putting Learners at the Centre”, reflected the importance of structural education reform being accompanied by cultural change. This was also acknowledged in the final report of the National Discussion¹, which made a call for human centred educational improvement to be led by the education profession, using their professional expertise and judgement to inform decisions and actions. This approach and an Empowered School System is underpinned by principles of professional trust and teacher autonomy. If teachers are to be supported to design a curriculum which is responsive to the needs of the learners in their class, they need to be supported to do so through the provision of sufficient time and by being afforded the professional trust to determine how best to use that time for delivery of quality teaching and learning.

The Joint SNCT Agreement on Reducing Weekly Class Contact Time

Despite the manifesto commitment made to the Scottish electorate by the SNP who were returned as the Scottish Government in 2021, SNCT negotiations were protracted and lasted until the final days of the 2021-2025 parliamentary term and only days before EIS members were due to commence a sustained programme of industrial action, including strike action and action short of strike.

¹ “All Learners in Scotland Matter: the national discussion on education”

From the outset of negotiations, the EIS and subsequently the SNCT Teachers' Panel, maintained the position that the 1.5 hours' reduction that would result from reducing weekly class contact time to 21 hours must be used to increase the time required for the preparation of learning, teaching and assessment (what was termed time for "preparation and correction" within the SNCT Handbook). This position was informed by the educational rationale detailed earlier in this document.

The final agreement reached, ratified by the SNCT in March 2026, committed the Scottish Government, COSLA and the Teachers' side to the following:

- A reduction of weekly class contact time to a maximum of 21 hours.
- A redefinition of time for "preparation and correction" as "undirected Professional Time" in the SNCT Handbook.
- The 1.5 hours resulting from reducing weekly class contact time to 21 hours, being used to set a minimum of 9 hours "Professional Time" each week.
- Implementation of the revised conditions of service from the commencement of the academic year in August 2027 for primary and special schools.
- Implementation of the revised conditions of service from the commencement of the academic year in August 2029 in secondary schools.
- A reaffirming of the principles of *A Teaching Profession for the 21st Century*.
- An agreement that the Scottish Government will provide the full funding required to implement the reduction in weekly class contact time to 21 hours.

This joint SNCT agreement represents a step forward in tackling unsustainable, unfair and unhealthy levels of teacher workload, by increasing the time each week that teachers have available to undertake the preparation of learning, teaching and assessment, in turn enhancing educational outcomes for young people. The staggered implementation, between primary/special schools in August 2027 and secondary schools in August 2029, was agreed in recognition that there requires to be significant recruitment of secondary teachers across Scotland in order to implement class contact time reduction.

Current Position

Work has now commenced, at the SNCT, on implementing the Joint Agreement on Reducing Weekly Class Contact Time.

Under the direction of the SNCT, the SNCT Joint Secretaries have agreed the changes required within the relevant sections of the SNCT Handbook that will come into effect from the commencement of the academic year in August 2027. A Joint Secretaries' letter of advice, one of the mechanisms by which information is shared from the SNCT nationally to each of the 32 LNCTs, will be issued advising that this work has been undertaken.

The SNCT has also agreed to establish a working group focused on the implementation of the reduction in weekly class contact time to 21 hours. The agreed terms of reference for this group are:

- To develop an SNCT delivery plan which sets out key milestones and steps for implementation of reduced class contact time, in line with the agreed phased delivery schedule.
- Set out the local and national workforce implications of delivering this schedule.
- Consider broader dependencies which will allow and support implementation.
- Identify key risks to implementation and develop a joint plan to mitigate those risks, where possible.
- Provide a forum to receive regular updates on modelling work being undertaken both locally and nationally.
- Receive updates and assess progress of all workforce planning being undertaken to ensure implementation as agreed.

Through what has been reported to the SNCT, the EIS understands that discussions between the Scottish Government and COSLA have been taking place over recent months to ensure that the Scottish Government's commitment to fully fund the reduction in weekly class contact time is met. The EIS further understands that these discussions have involved consideration of modelling of the teacher numbers required to implement the agreement. Given the role of the SNCT in overseeing implementation, the EIS looks forward to engagement with this modelling work through the SNCT implementation working group.

The Teachers' Side of the SNCT has received assurances from the Scottish Government that said modelling is predicated on in-person teaching, as opposed to any default to digital delivery of teaching and learning. Such assurance is welcome, as the EIS remains steadfast in its view that quality education is and must continue to be delivered through human centred, in-person teaching and learning. Given the centrality of this to young people's social, emotional and cognitive development, this should not be replaced by pedagogically substandard models of digital delivery. In relation to the implementation of the agreement on 21 hours, the EIS

notes that significantly more detail than has been reported to the SNCT, has been provided by COSLA and ADES on the work already being undertaken by COSLA and the Scottish Government, within the written evidence they have presented to the Scottish Parliament's Education and Gaelic Committee. The SNCT Joint Agreement on Reducing Class Contact Time commits all three sides of the SNCT to the following:

"... the central role of the Scottish Negotiating Committee for Teachers (SNCT) in overseeing the implementation of this Agreement and developing detailed implementation plans, with engagement continuing through LNCTs to ensure that implementation is responsive to local contexts while aligned to national principles."

The effective implementation of the Joint SNCT Agreement on Reducing Weekly Class Contact Time will require constructive collegiate working between all sides of the SNCT. As such, the EIS expects that future discussions at the SNCT will include all relevant work, in all areas of the Scottish Education system, and that this will be considered appropriately.

In the coming months and years, the EIS, through the SNCT Teachers' Panel, will seek to engage constructively and collegiately in the work of the SNCT in ensuring the effective implementation of the class contact time agreement on 21 hours. It is the expectation of the EIS that both the Scottish Government and COSLA engage in a similarly constructive and collegiate manner to implement what will represent a significant step forward in addressing the unsustainable, unfair and unhealthy levels of workload being endured by teachers across Scotland at present.