

Pre-budget scrutiny 2027-28

23 September 2026

NASUWT evidence to the Education and Gaelic Committee

The NASUWT's submission to the Scottish Education and Gaelic Committee sets out the Union's views on the key issues which should be explored by the Committee during their focus on class contact time within school education: exploring how plans to reduce contact time are progressing; highlighting any potential issues in delivering this; and considering 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.

The NASUWT's evidence is informed directly by serving teacher and headteacher members and also by the work of its representative committees and consultative structures, made up of practising teachers and school leaders working in the education system.

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Context

Data from the OECD shows the class contact time figure in Scotland as 855 hours (38 weeks x 22.5 hours) which is higher than most other OECD countries. The commitment to reduce class contact time was part of the SNP's 2021 election manifesto and was then enshrined in the Programme for Government that same year. The commitment on class contact time was a recognition by the Scottish Government that additional time away from the classroom was necessary to give teachers sufficient time and space to plan, prepare and assess pupils' work in order to help students achieve their best and raise attainment.

Workload

Teachers' working conditions are children's learning conditions. The quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers and the conditions in which they work.

The Scottish Government needs to ensure that it is 'Getting It Right For Every Teacher' if it wants to achieve its ambitions of 'Getting It Right For Every Child'. As part of our 2025 manifesto calls, NASUWT advocated for the next government to inter alia:

- deliver the promised reduction in class contact time;
- establish a workload taskforce to review why key recommendations from the Curriculum for Excellence Working Group on Tackling Bureaucracy (2015) were not fully implemented, with a particular focus on: Forward Planning in the Primary Sector; Assessment in the Secondary Sector; Self-Evaluation and Improvement Planning; Monitoring and Reporting;
- implement a revised and improved approach to rebuild and transform Additional Support Needs (ASN) provision so pupils and teachers receive the support they should be entitled to expect and which recognises the important role of off-site provision;

- commit to lower staffing ratios for specialist provision and support a review of staffing ratio formulas in mainstream classes, dependent upon the number of pupils with an identified ASN in each class;
- agree a consistent and publicised national approach to supporting supply teachers across local authorities, recognising the vital contribution they make to securing high educational standards for all children and young people.

Excessive workload has a huge impact on teachers' health, safety and wellbeing and undermines teachers' ability to teach effectively.

Data and assessment requirements, admin and clerical tasks and pastoral care continue to be the biggest three drivers of excessive workload, according to teachers in our Big Question annual survey.

Workforce

Four in every five teachers in our Big Question Survey say that their workload and the stress of the job have increased, over half of teachers say that their job has negatively affected their physical health in the last twelve months and four in five say their job has adversely affected their mental health. Two thirds of teachers tell us that they are seriously considering leaving the profession because of concerns about excessive workload.

88% of teachers in Scotland have seen their workload increase in the past year, up from 79% in 2025. This includes 92% of teachers in Scotland aged 25 to 29 years old and 98% of teachers aged 30 to 39 years old

Two thirds of teachers (67%) in Scotland have seriously considered leaving the profession, up from 56% in 2025. Only 11% would recommend teaching as a career

76% of primary school teachers have considered leaving the profession compared to 60% of secondary school teachers

Teachers responding to the Big Question survey reported a sharp increase in their typical working hours per week, from an average of 41 hours per week in 2025 to an average of 53 hours in 2026.

Teacher workforce planning

Criticisms of workforce planning processes in Scottish education are not new. In the Education and Skills Committee 'Inquiry on Recruiting and Training New Teachers' in February 2020 NASUWT stated:

The key to identifying appropriate training places is workforce data. Simply put, there needs to be a solid evidence base on which to determine how many teachers should be recruited. The NASUWT has significant concerns that the data available is not robust, nor easily accessible to policymakers.

The NASUWT shares the concerns of the UK Government Migration Advisory Committee that there is very limited data to draw on to assess the shortage of teachers by subject in Scotland. Improved data is necessary to support accurate teacher workforce planning, including any assessment of diversity, and this data should be reviewed regularly and be open and transparent to all the workforce.

The Union is calling for a review of the way in which teacher workforce data is collected and reported as a matter of urgency.

At our 'Education at a Crossroads' fringe meeting at the SNP Conference in 2024, we urged the then Cabinet Secretary, Jenny Gilruth, to address weaknesses in workforce planning.

Motions at NASUWT Scotland Conferences in 2025 and 2026 also set out the Union's deep concerns which were thereafter picked up with Scottish Government, SBTE and others:

Scotland Conference 2026: Scrutiny and Fairer Workforce Planning

Conference is appalled at the absence of national workforce planning data. Conference believes that a national mechanism is urgently required to collate and analyse workforce data.

Conference calls on the Scotland Executive Council to lobby Scottish Government to adopt a national system for workforce data collection which:

- (i) Is transparent;
- (ii) Coordinates data from across Scottish Government, local authorities and GTCS
- (iii) Is able to provide accountability for national spending on education

Conference further calls on the Scotland Executive Council to lobby for a system where:

- (a) local authorities who have failed to uphold nationally funded and agreed teacher numbers, will have the allocated funding unused revoked;
- (b) education funding is ring-fenced; and
- (c) teaching is no longer part of the gig economy.

Conference finally considers that

- (i) the current model of education inhibits some schools and local authorities from being able to provide equitable education for all children; and
- (ii) a more centralised model would have benefits for planning processes, maintaining teacher numbers and securing ASN resources due to economies of scale.

Conference therefore calls on the Scotland Executive Council to lobby Scottish Government to reform school education, starting with a full audit and review of the appropriateness of maintaining 32 employers within Scottish education.

Scotland Conference 2025: Staffing: a crisis covered up?

Conference welcomes commitments made by almost all local authorities to maintain 2023 teacher numbers.

Conference is concerned however that inconsistent data approaches between local authorities may mean that this headline is masking the reality on the ground and inhibiting a coordinated national approach to workforce planning. Conference believes that:

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- a. *vacancies in key shortage subjects, such as Maths and Computing, are being covered by numbers elsewhere;*
- b. *vacancies are constantly filled with probationary staff, leading to instability and inconsistency in classrooms & departments;*
- c. *acting positions are becoming more common, and more embedded as a systemic approach;*
- d. *teachers seconded, or working across the Local Authority, are being counted as 'front line'*

Conference believes that urgent action is needed to gain a true picture of the workforce in Scotland and further that without such clarity solutions will be unable to be found.

Conference calls on the Scotland Executive Council to:

- (i) *lobby Scottish Government and SBTE to move with operational urgency to a system with robust data that allows for longer-term planning;*
- (ii) *engage with members, schools, local authorities and Scottish Government to identify clear categories, which for example allow for supply, non class contact teachers, shared headships to be identified, in order to better support national data collection;*
- (iii) *highlight nationally the challenges with only utilising a pupil/teacher ratio approach to workforce planning, including the different ratios which apply to specialist ASN settings;*
- (iv) *seek clarity from Scottish Government and local authorities around the variety of different approaches which are being used across each local authority;*
- (v) *raise with the Scottish Government and COSLA the current challenges in recruiting and retaining teachers, particularly in some subject specialisms, and seek significant and genuine improvements to teachers terms and conditions via SNCT as a vehicle for bringing more people in to teaching;*
- (vi) *press the GTCS, Scottish Government and local authorities for a national stated approach to temporary, short-term cover of teachers beyond their registration category and employed role, supporting the GTCS statement that 'even where something is temporary, assessment should be made about whether the teacher has the appropriate knowledge and skills to teach what*

they are being asked to. This is why it is expected that as far as possible even temporary cover is managed within subject cognate groups'.

Process Ongoing

An RCCT Implementation Group has been established via the SNCT. This working group will look 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. It will also look at local and national workforce implications. It is expected this forum will receive regular updates on modelling work being undertaken both locally and nationally by Scottish Government and COSLA. It is appropriate that all negotiations on implementation will take place within the SNCT.