

Written submission from School Leaders Scotland Pre-budget scrutiny: Reducing Class Contact Time (RCCT)

School Leaders Scotland (SLS) welcomes the opportunity to give evidence to the Education and Gaelic Committee as part of its pre-budget scrutiny on the planned Reduction in Class Contact Time (RCCT).

SLS is a professional association and trade union which represents those in school leadership positions in secondary schools – headteachers, depute headteachers, principal teachers and school business managers. We are part of the teachers' side on SNCT.

The Scottish Government's policy, following an SNP manifesto commitment in 2021, is to reduce the class contact time of a full-time teacher by 90 minutes per week, from 22.5 hours to 21 hours. The rationale for this RCCT was to allow for additional professional time – activities like preparation and marking – as well as collegiate activities such as school improvement work. An agreement was reached through SNCT that all 90 minutes should be used for professional time at the discretion of the teacher. SLS would be supportive of looking again at some collegiate use of time at an appropriate point in the future, to maximise the opportunity for strategic and collaborative planning to improve outcomes for children and young people.

However, SLS is committed to the principle of supporting RCCT to support our teachers to experience a more manageable workload. Reduced workload should mean less work-related stress and more time to plan high-quality learning and teaching experiences, in turn leading to improved outcomes for children and young people. It may be hard to quantify this, but continuing as we are currently does not seem to be a viable option. Scotland needs a dedicated, motivated and physically and mentally well teaching workforce. Whilst RCCT is not a panacea for all issues, it will help. There are, however, a number of factors that may limit the extent to which these workload benefits are experienced consistently across the country.

Feedback from SLS members

There is a great deal of concern among SLS members about the deliverability of RCCT for secondary schools, even with an implementation date of August 2029. Whilst the necessary changes to the structure of the school day and to school timetables will undoubtedly present challenges, these are not insurmountable. The much larger issue is the availability of appropriately qualified teaching staff.

We currently have a live SLS member survey on teacher shortages, their implications, and readiness for RCCT, with 171 responses (at the time of writing) representing 31 local authorities. The results thus far focus specifically on the interaction between existing teacher shortages and the implementation of reduced class contact time in secondary schools.

- The survey depicts a staffing system already operating with substantial pressure: 108 of 171 respondents (63%) report unfilled teaching vacancies, while 117 (68%) report fewer or far fewer supply teachers than in previous years.
- Members' central concern is a practical one: reducing individual teachers' class contact time creates additional teaching periods that must be staffed somewhere else. In schools already unable to fill posts, members repeatedly question where the additional teaching capacity will come from.
- The problem is not simply the total number of teachers. Secondary staffing is organised by subject specialism, so RCCT can create many multiple small staffing requirements that are individually difficult to recruit to. This is particularly acute in small schools and one-teacher departments.
- Members anticipate a range of possible consequences if additional capacity is not available: narrower curriculum choice, reduced provision in smaller/shortage subjects, more combined or split classes, greater use of non-specialists, increased dependence on supply staff, and additional teaching/cover by senior leaders.
- The survey also highlights implementation pressures beyond recruitment: timetable and school-day redesign, funding, accommodation, transport constraints, and the capacity of local authorities and schools to plan sufficiently early and effectively.
- Taken together, these findings suggest that the intended workload benefit of RCCT will not be experienced consistency across schools and local authorities across Scotland unless additional staffing capacity is available in the subjects and locations where it is needed. Several respondents identify a potential feedback loop whereby staff shortages result in increased cover and leadership demands, further exacerbating workload and retention pressures.

Implications for the Implementation of RCCT

Theme 1: Staffing constraints

The dominant message from respondents is that RCCT cannot be implemented simply through changes to teachers' timetables. Reducing class contact time does not reduce the amount of teaching required: the released periods must be taught by someone else. Members repeatedly describe schools already carrying vacancies and struggling to **secure** supply cover. This creates a fundamental implementation

challenge: RCCT generates additional staffing requirements at a time when many schools report that they do not have sufficient capacity to meet existing needs.

SLS Survey 2026: 108/171 respondents report current vacancies; 117/171 report fewer/far fewer supply teachers. In the RCCT responses, 'staffing/recruitment capacity' is the most frequently identified theme in the indicative coding (136 of 171 responses).

Theme 2: Complexities of subject specialisms

The survey suggests that secondary schools cannot treat additional staffing as interchangeable capacity. Many members describe one-teacher departments or shortage subjects where the released time equates to only a small fraction of a full-time post. A school may therefore need several small pieces of subject-specific staffing rather than a single, recruitable full-time post.

The practical implication is that aggregate staffing numbers can overstate the actual capacity available to schools. A teacher who is available cannot necessarily cover Physics, Technical Education, Music or another specialist subject simply because there is a timetable gap.

Theme 3: Risks to curricular breadth and pupil choice

Members frequently connect staffing constraints directly to curriculum decisions. The survey records reduced provision, a narrower subject range, fewer classes, fewer opportunities to study Advanced Higher, and a more limited curricular offer. In the RCCT comments, schools describe a risk that the curriculum is increasingly shaped by the availability of staff, rather than by the educational offer schools would wish to provide to meet the diverse needs of the young people they serve.

This is particularly significant for smaller subjects, practical subjects and the senior phase, where a small reduction in specialist availability can affect whether a class or course is viable.

Theme 4: Managing Staffing Shortfalls

Where recruitment does not keep pace, respondents anticipate a range of alternative approaches, including non-specialists taking classes, combined or split classes, creative timetabling, senior leaders providing teaching or cover, and increased reliance on supply teachers. While these approaches may enable timetables to operate, members associate them with concerns about curriculum quality, continuity and workload.

The survey therefore presents RCCT implementation as a capacity issue, not simply a contractual-hours issue. If sufficient staffing capacity is not available, the released time may simply be displaced elsewhere in the system.

Theme 5: Implications for small schools and rural schools

Members in smaller and rural schools repeatedly highlight the particular challenges created by their size and location. A one-teacher department may already be fully timetabled; reducing that teacher's class contact time therefore creates a small, subject-specific staffing requirement that may be difficult or impossible to recruit to locally. Rural respondents also cite transport, housing and location as barriers to recruitment, alongside competition for staff from other areas.

*This creates a distributional issue: the same headline reduction in contact time may **demand** materially different staffing solutions depending on school size, subject mix and geography.*

Theme 6: Timetable and restructuring of the school day

A number of members say that the proposed reduction does not fit neatly within existing period structures. They identify period length, the shape of the school day, registration, transport arrangements, accommodation and course structures as interrelated constraints. Some describe the need for significant timetable redesign rather than a simple staffing adjustment.

The implication is that implementation planning needs to test whole-school timetable models, rather than simply calculating the additional FTE required.

Theme 7 — Funding and resource displacement

Members repeatedly raise the cost of additional teachers and the difficulty of funding them within existing local-authority and school budgets. Some also express concern that, within a fixed education budget, funding for RCCT could displace other staffing or support, including ASN provision. These concerns remain despite the Government's commitment to fully fund RCCT.

The issue raised by respondents is therefore not only how many additional teachers are required, but how that additional capacity will be funded without reducing capacity elsewhere in the education system.

Theme 8: Planning and communication

A sizeable group of members describe limited visibility of local authority planning and uncertainty about staffing allocations. The survey suggests that planning activity is under way in some areas, but there is significant disparity across Scotland in levels of readiness and communication between local authorities and schools

Survey Response Conclusions

Taken together, the responses highlight the interaction between RCCT and existing teacher shortages: RCCT is intended to reduce individual teachers' class-contact time, while teacher shortages limit the capacity available to staff the resulting timetables. Where sufficient additional capacity is not available, schools may respond by narrowing curriculum provision, reallocating classes, increasing non-specialist teaching, drawing on leadership capacity, or changing the structure of the school day. Several members also associate these responses with increased workload and pressures on morale and retention. These are the consequences school leaders anticipate if sufficient subject-specialist capacity is not available. The risks to sustainability in the profession, highlighted in the recent publication of the [Sustainable School Leadership National Technical Report for Scotland](#) (Greany et al., 2026) cannot be underestimated.

Requirements for Effective Implementation Planning

- Subject-by-subject staffing modelling, rather than relying **solely on** aggregate FTE modelling.
- School-level assessment of one-teacher departments, shortage subjects and small-FTE staffing requirements.
- Explicit modelling of curriculum consequences: BGE breadth, senior-phase choice, Advanced Highers, practical subjects and wider curricular provision.
- Stress-testing of staffing scenarios that include vacancies, long-term absence and reduced supply availability included.
- Consideration of specific implications for small, rural and island schools, where recruitment and transport constraints may limit flexibility.
- Whole-school timetable and school-day modelling, including period length, transport, accommodation, registration and shared staffing across schools.
- A clear funding model that identifies the additional staffing required and implications for existing ASN, support and school staffing budgets.
- A clear and transparent implementation timetable, with effective communication arrangements, so that school leaders and timetablers can plan staffing and recruitment sufficiently far in advance.

In conclusion, SLS supports the principle of RCCT and its intended positive impact on teacher workload. However, as outlined above, significant concerns remain, particularly around the availability of appropriately qualified teachers and the potential impact on the curriculum available to Scotland's children and young people. There is also a clear need for sufficient time for detailed planning and modelling at school and local authority level. The proposed implementation of RCCT coincides with the Curriculum Improvement Cycle; a period of significant wider education reform, which places substantial demands on education leadership and requires careful consideration of the cumulative burden on schools and their leaders. SLS therefore emphasises that successful implementation of RCCT will depend not only on urgent action to improve teacher recruitment and secure sufficient appropriately qualified, subject-specialist staff across Scotland, but also on realistic timescales, effective planning and recognition of the wider reform context in which schools are being asked to deliver it.

David Barnett
General Secretary
School Leaders Scotland

Appendix One: Anonymised comments from members

Small school / one-teacher departments: Who will cover the classes... in a small school with single teacher subject... the person can't possibly cover all subjects.

Specialist shortages / non-specialist risk: We cannot get full time staff never mind part time. It will result in more non specialists taking classes or more creative timetabling...

Curriculum shaped by staffing: There is a huge danger that our curriculum will be shaped by staffing availability and not by what we want our young people to learn and experience.

Fragmented specialist demand: The FTE time required in each separate specialist subject is so small that a school like mine would need about 2 teachers... each one qualified in about 8 subjects!

Timetable structure: The proposed 90-minute reduction does not align with the current timetable model... significant structural change... alongside recruitment.

Small-school curriculum trade-off: We have 1 teacher in Music... We may have to look at a reduced provision of music in S1/S2.

Existing absence / cover pressure: We are struggling with staff absences already... Finding even more contact time... is going to be nigh on impossible unless we get new staff.

Potential alternative staffing models: Could we look creatively at partners as well - Active Schools, Youth workers... FE...?

Curriculum follows available staff: Schools have to run with curriculum based on the teachers that they can get rather than what the pupils need.

Scale of additional staffing: There are nowhere near enough teachers in the system... A rough calculation would suggest around 100 additional teachers needed in a large city's state schools just for secondary...

Single-teacher subjects / redistribution: Only one teacher in a subject... Additional staff may need to be recruited, but we struggle to recruit anyway.

Tiny staffing increments: Finding staff where there is a small amount of additionality required... I worry we will have more non specialist provision to cover for RCCT.

Rural recruitment / SLT burden: Rural schools simply will not be able to recruit the teachers needed... This will lead to either SLT having to fill gaps... or... reduction in choice.

Physics example: We have some one teacher departments e.g. Physics... the only option will be to reduce sets in Physics or reduce options.

Distributed small requirements: In total we would need around 10 FTE... but this is made up of every department in the school.

Breadth / senior phase: Maintaining breadth across experiences in BGE and subject choice in senior phase will be the biggest challenges...

Specialist staffing vs generic provision The reality is that you cannot recruit someone to cover several different subjects without significant changes to curriculum structure...