

Education and Gaelic Committee
Tuesday 22 September 2026
4th Meeting, 2026 (Session 7)

Pre-budget scrutiny 2027-28

Introduction

1. The Committee will focus its pre-budget scrutiny 2027-28 on the following two themes:
 - Progress toward children's care system reform
 - class contact time within school education

Committee meeting

2. At this meeting the Committee will take evidence on the second theme from:
 - Sheena Devlin, General Secretary, and Kevin Funnell, Co-Chair, Resources Network, Association of Directors of Education in Scotland (ADES);
 - Stuart Bain, Chief Officer (Employers' Team), COSLA.

Supporting information

3. SPICe have provided a background briefing which is attached at **Annexe A**. Written submissions from ADES and COSLA are attached at **Annexe B**.

Next steps

4. The Committee will continue to take evidence on its pre-budget scrutiny on both themes at its next meeting on 29 September 2026.

Clerk to the Committee
September 2026

Annexe A



Pre-budget scrutiny 2027-28: class contact time within school education

Introduction

The Committee is focusing on delivery of plans to reduce class contact time as well as progress towards children's care system reform. The Committee took evidence on the care system last week. This week the Committee will take evidence on class contact time from teachers' representative organisations. Next week the Committee will hear from representatives of local government on class contact time. This paper is intended to support members for both this week and next week's evidence sessions.

The planned reduction in class contact time of 90 minutes per week represents a reduction of around 6.7% of the current maximum class contact commitment. Delivering this change will require adaptation across the education system, for example through the employment of additional teachers, changes to timetabling, or other innovative approaches. Implementation may present particular challenges in some settings and communities, including where teacher recruitment difficulties already exist.

Reducing class contact time – background

Following the 2021 election, the Scottish Government committed to reduce class contact time from 22.5 hours to 21 hours per week in Session 6. Delivery of this aim proved to be challenging. [In December 2024, the Scottish Government](#) said:

“Local Government and the Scottish Government have [...] agreed to make meaningful progress towards reducing class contact time for teachers, in recognition of the asks made by teachers and teaching unions. Medium- and long-term joint workforce planning will take into account the importance of responding to issues including different local needs.”

[Speaking to the Education, Children and Young People Committee](#) in January 2026, the then Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills said the Government will be funding pilots of reducing contact time in this financial year.

Following a ballot of its members, on [6 March 2026 the EIS announced it would take industrial action](#) in relation to teachers' workload and a lack of progress in the reduction of contact time. [Following further negotiations, on 13 March 2026 the](#)

[Scottish Government](#) announced that:

“A weekly reduction of 90 minutes will be introduced on a phased basis, with primary school teachers and those working in special schools benefiting from August 2027. Secondary school teachers will follow two years later.”

The [EIS suspended plans for industrial action](#). The Government said that it would provide £40 million in 2026-27 to support this deal and that a “multi-year budget line from 2027-28 onwards will cover the full implementation costs.”

[COSLA issued a response to this plan on 13 March](#). COSLA said that its council leaders agreed to support the Government’s approach “despite concerns ... in the interests of reaching a constructive way forward and attempting to avert planned strike action”. COSLA expects the proposal to be fully funded by the Scottish Government and estimated costs of around £250-310 million per year. It also said that implementation will require more consideration. COSLA highlighted “challenges to fully implementing in all parts of the country due to recruitment shortages in both rural, remote and island communities and in specialist subjects.”

The planned roll out of reduced class contact time for primary schools will fall in the 2027-28 financial year.

Rationale for reducing contact time

The rationale for reducing contact time is to allow teachers more time to undertake a range of other tasks, particularly curriculum development.

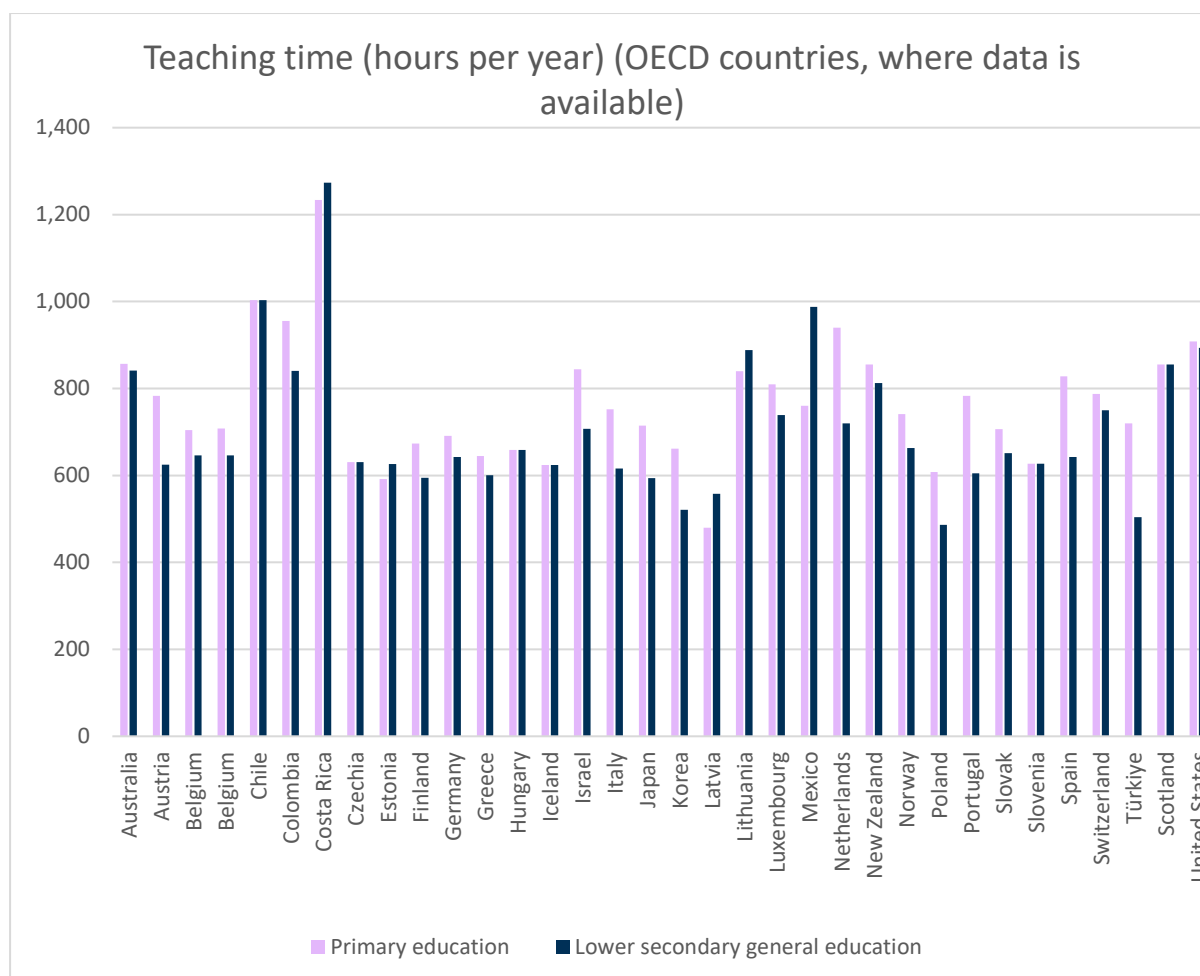
The Scottish Government planned to reduce contact time in Session 6 and [the 2021-22 programme for government](#) said that the additional time would be for teachers to “prepare for lessons, raise standards and undertake professional development.”

The [EIS argues that reducing class contact time will](#):

- Reduce teacher workload
- Create more permanent teaching posts
- Provide more time for ‘preparation & correction’- time for lesson planning, differentiation and ASN, marking and assessment
- Improve teacher health and wellbeing
- Have a positive impact on pupils’ learning.

The chart below¹ shows the OECD’s measure “Statutory teaching time” for OECD countries where data is available for primary and lower secondary stages of education. The data for Scotland is towards the right of the chart and its figure is 855 hours (38 weeks x 22.5 hours) which is higher than most other OECD countries.

¹ [OECD Data explorer: Teachers' statutory teaching and working time](#)



The [OECD's 2021 review of the implementation of CfE](#) said that it was notable that Scotland's teachers have one of the highest rates of class contact across OECD countries. It said that "there is an obvious tension between this comparatively high rate of class contact and the expectations of CfE that teachers lead and plan curriculum locally". OECD also said that reducing contact time would also require other factors to support better outcomes; it said:

"Reducing class contact time in any school system makes sense only when the teaching workforce is already well qualified and has demonstrated capacity for innovation and collaboration, and when school leadership has the capacity to ensure that this scale of investment delivers improvement for learners."

The submission that the Committee has received from ADES noted that "there are currently no clear metrics of impact/success [of reducing class contact time] that will be able to be monitored, evaluated and reported."

Workload

The aim of reducing contact time is to free up time for teachers to allow them to focus on tasks that are critical to teaching and learning. There has been a longstanding aim to reduce teachers' and school leaders' workload and bureaucracy.

In 2013, [a ministerial working group on tackling bureaucracy published a short report](#). The working group found that the main drivers of excessive bureaucracy were:

- Over-detailed planning processes
- Assessment, tracking and reporting systems that are not fit-for-purpose
- Adopting approaches rather than adapting approaches to suit local circumstances
- Unnecessary auditing and accountability
- Lack of confidence
- Unclear expectations

The working group published [a follow-up report in 2015](#) which found that some progress had been made in reducing bureaucracy in Scottish schools, but unnecessary paperwork remained a significant issue.

In 2016, the Government undertook and commissioned work to tackle unnecessary bureaucracy and undue workload in schools. [Education Scotland published a report following an inspection of Local Authorities](#). This suggested that there was a mixed picture in relation to local authorities tackling bureaucracy and reducing unnecessary workload for their staff.

[In August 2025](#), the Scottish Government announced that “independent work will be taken forward to examine how reducing unnecessary bureaucracy in Scottish education can improve teacher workload”. The Government said that HMIE would provide guidance on this. It also said greater use of technology would be explored in order to free up teachers’ time. It is not clear what progress has been made in this area.

National terms and conditions

Teachers’ terms and conditions in Scotland are agreed nationally through the Scottish Negotiating Committee for Teachers (SNCT). The SNCT is a tripartite body comprising of members of teaching organisations; local authorities; and the Scottish Government.

[Part of the national terms and conditions govern the expected work patterns of classroom teachers](#). The SNCT handbook states:

- The working year is 195 days of which 190 days will coincide with the school year for pupils
- The full-time working week is 35 hours
- Within the 35-hour week, a maximum of 22.5 hours will be devoted to class contact (18.5 hours for teachers on the Teacher Induction Scheme)
- No less than one third of the teacher's actual class contact commitment is provided for preparation and correction
- The remaining time is subject to local agreement, [but could include](#): parents meetings; staff meetings; continuous professional development; preparation of reports, records etc.; or curriculum development.

If a teacher had the maximum contact time, the time for preparation and correction would be 7.5 hours and the remaining time (fifth bullet) would be 5 hours, in a 35-hour week.

Changes to class contact time will require agreement at the SNCT.

Pay is also part of the national terms and conditions. [In January 2026, the then Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills](#) discussed factors that had slowed progress in the aim to reduce contact time. She highlighted that “since 2018, the pay of classroom teachers has increased by 40 per cent” and the Scottish Government “could not have forecast that situation when we came into power again in 2021.” Ms Gilruth also said:

“The other factor, which is inherently linked, is that the teaching unions separate pay and conditions from their negotiations.”

Teacher numbers

Alongside the pledge to reduce contact time, the Scottish Government in Session 6 sought to increase the number of teachers employed in public schools. This was linked to the reduction in contact time – as more teachers may be required if teachers are to be in classrooms less. The 2021-22 Programme for Government said it would “support the recruitment of 3,500 additional teachers and 500 classroom assistants.” The approach of targeting a specific number of teachers was a change in policy approach; previously workforce planning was based around pupil teacher ratios, which takes account of changes in the number of pupils.

The latest data on the number of teachers was published in December 2025 based on the annual September teacher census. In 2021 there were 53,581 FTE teachers in public schools (excluding ELC, including centrally employed). In 2025 this figure was 52,779 FTE, a fall of 802 compared to 2021, but this was up slightly compared to 2024. Comparing 2021 to 2025, there were small increases in the number of FTE teachers in the secondary and special education sectors but a decrease in the primary sector.

In the same period, there have been changes in school rolls, including falling rolls in primary (more on this below). The pupil teacher ratio (PTR) for primary schools is higher in 2025 than 2021 – it was 15.1 in 2021 and 15.3 in 2025. In secondary schools PTR increased from 12.4 to 12.6 and special education it has fallen from 3.8 to 3.7 across the same period.

The responsibility for recruiting and employing teachers is a matter for local authorities. The Scottish Government has provided funding specifically to support additional teacher and classroom assistant recruitment. There were tensions and frustration between the Scottish Government and local government during Session 6 around the number of teachers local authorities are employing, with the initial targets (for teachers) clearly being missed.

The [Scottish Government's policy focus shifted during 2024](#) from its earlier commitment to recruit 3,500 additional teachers towards protecting existing teacher

numbers and restoring numbers to their 2023 level.

Modelling and demographic change

WPI Economics Report 2024

The Scottish Government commissioned research from WPI Economics to look at the potential impact of demographic change on pupil numbers in Scotland up to 2035, and the implications for the corresponding teacher resourcing needs. This work was in the context of the policies around teacher numbers and planned reduction in contact time. The [report of this research was published on 7 May 2024](#). The research modelled two scenarios for reducing contact time:

Scenario 1 (a) was “Lowering class contact time to 21 hours per week by 2026”. Under this scenario it said:

“Enabling a 1.5 hour reduction in class contact time by 2026 requires an increase in teachers over that period, despite expected reductions in pupil numbers. Overall teacher demand increases by 2,100 (including centrally employed teachers) between 2022 and 2026 to 55,400 in the baseline scenario, and the national PTR falls by 0.9, from 13.2 to 12.3, over the same period. However, the teacher demand to maintain this class contact time level then gradually decreases to 47,300 by 2035, due to the declining student population.”

Scenario 1 (b) was “Lowering class contact time to 21 hours per week by 2028”. Under this scenario it said:

“In this alternative sub-scenario, the reduction in class contact time is instead assumed to occur two years later, by 2028. The national PTR still needs to fall to 12.3 in order to achieve a reduction of 1.5 hours, but the reduction and the profile for teacher demand is less abrupt. In the baseline projection, teacher demand only marginally increases by a much more modest 0.4% – fewer than 240 teachers – between 2022 and 2028, to around 53,600. Thereafter, it is expected to gradually decline due to the declining student population (albeit less sharply than in Scenario 1a), reaching 47,300 by 2035.”

Scenario 1 (b) required fewer additional teaching staff than scenario 1 (a).

Teacher workforce planning advisory group, modelling and targets

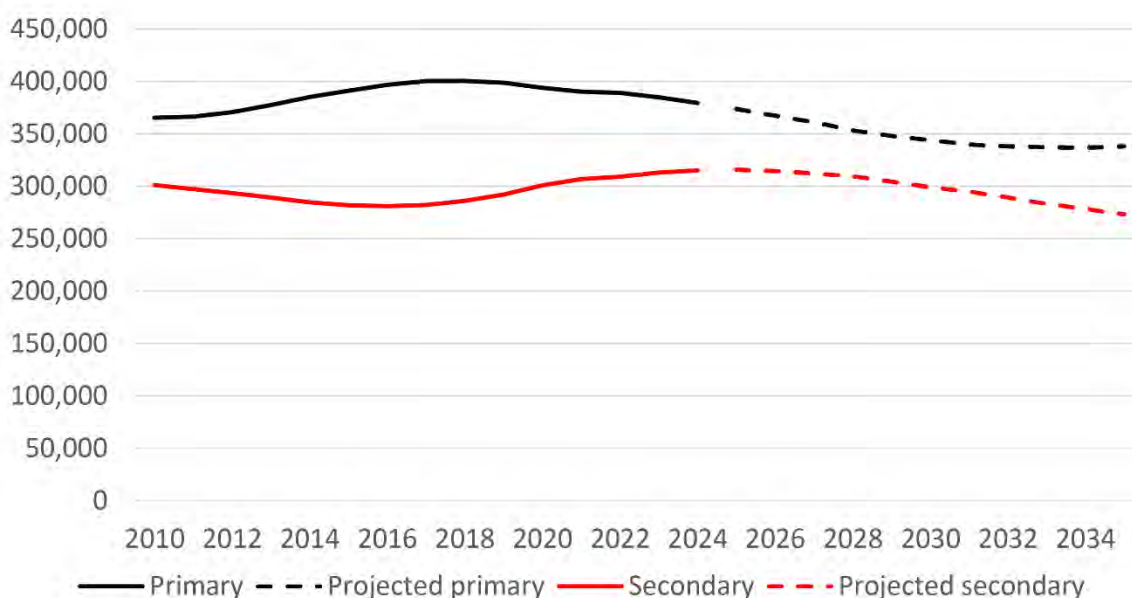
The Teacher workforce planning advisory group (TWPAG) is a group convened by the Scottish Government which considers workforce planning issues, models future teacher workforce requirements, and makes recommendations on intake targets for Initial Teacher Education courses. All of the organisations represented by the witnesses the Committee will hear from on this topic are represented on TWPAG.

The most [recent modelling exercise TWPAG undertook was published in June 2026](#). The objective of this model was to maintain FTE teacher numbers at roughly 2025 levels – 53,500 FTE (across all sectors including ELC). This is similar to the figure

identified, in the short term, by the WPI Economics modelling to support a reduction in contact time from 2028 (scenario 1 (b) above).

This notes that the pupil rolls in both primary and secondary sectors are expected to fall. The chart below is extracted from TWPAG's 2026 report.

Pupil Projections, 2025-2035



(numbers of primary and secondary school pupils till 2024 and projected numbers from 2025)

Maintaining teacher numbers at 53,500 when rolls are falling will decrease the pupil teacher ratios. The following table shows the expected PTRS in each sector expected under this scenario up to 2029.

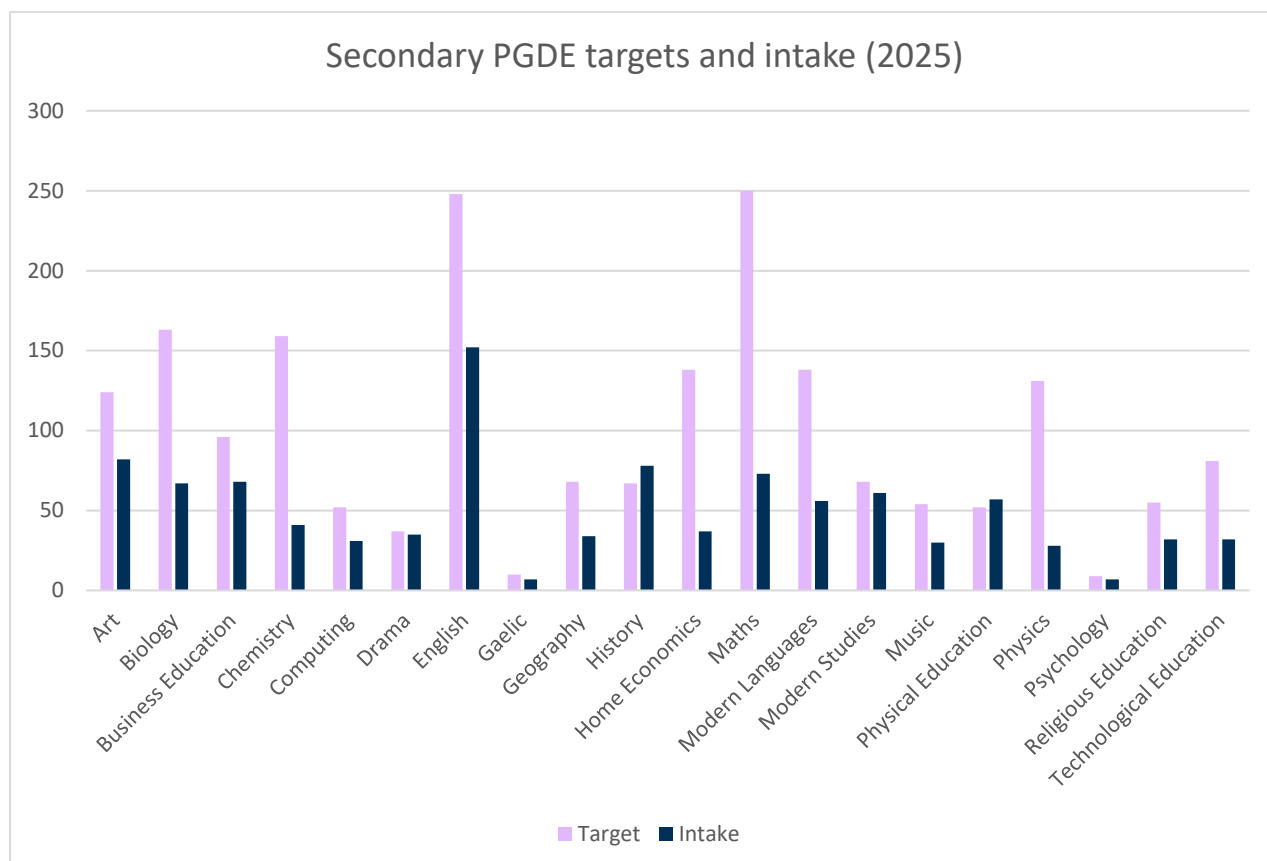
Year	Primary	Secondary	Special	Total (including centrally employed teachers)
2025	15.2	12.6	3.7	13.2
2026	15.0	12.6	3.7	13.1
2027	14.7	12.5	3.7	12.9
2028	14.4	12.4	3.6	12.7
2029	14.2	12.2	3.5	12.5

TWPAG uses these data to make recommendations on annual intake targets for Initial Teacher Education (ITE) courses.

TWPAG also publishes data on how many students were recruited to ITE courses each year. Generally, primary education targets are met. Places for secondary school teachers are routinely missed by around 40-50%. The latest data is for the 2025 targets/intake. Across the different routes for primary education, 1,491 students were recruited against a target of 1,561. In secondary education, the target

across all routes in 2025 was 2,336 and 1,275 (55% of target) were recruited.

For targets to PGDE courses for secondary education, the target was 2,000 and 1,008 students were recruited. Different targets are set for different subjects. The chart below shows the targets and intake by subject.



The intake for History and Physical Education exceeded targets; intake for every other subject fell short. Maths, Physics, Chemistry and Home Economics all achieved less than 30% of the target intake in 2025.

Flexibility around registrations

TWPAG's previous modelling paper, which supported target setting for 2025-26 ITE courses, included an [annex estimating a possible surplus of primary teachers](https://www.gov.scot/publications/teacher-workforce-planning-2024-exercise-statistical-modelling-paper/pages/6/). <https://www.gov.scot/publications/teacher-workforce-planning-2024-exercise-statistical-modelling-paper/pages/6/> This estimated that between 2019-20 and 2022-23 "an excess of approximately 950 primary teachers have been trained." TWPAG included a number of caveats to this estimate and suggested that it "should only be used to provide an indication of oversupply to help steer initial policy development". The TWPAG paper also said:

"It should be noted however that some rural local authorities still struggle to fill posts, indicating that this is not just an issue of availability of teaching posts but also of preferences by teachers for where they would like to work."

The [Cabinet Secretary gave a statement to Parliament on 2 September 2026](#) in

which she announced “a new £1 million teacher recruitment assistance fund to support the recruitment and retention of teachers in our rural and island communities with practical support, including housing support.”

The recent Programme for Government said the Government would create “new employment opportunities for teachers by creating the conditions for a Teacher Jobs Guarantee and new accreditations and better job security for Pupil Support Assistants”. It also said that in the current year, the Government would support more primary teachers to retrain to work in secondary schools and address recruitment challenges in rural and island communities.

The Teacher Induction Scheme (TIS) is a guaranteed year with a local authority school to provide the opportunity for provisionally registered teachers to be considered for full registration. Individuals have the option to list their five preferred local authorities or [to ‘tick the box’ where they could be assigned to any local authority, with priority given to ‘remote and rural local authorities’](#). This is incentivised with an additional payment of £8,000 in the secondary sector and £6,000 in the primary sector before tax/NI. In 2025-26, there were 63 placements in the primary sector and 92 placements in secondary sector under this scheme.

All teachers in Scotland must be registered with the General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS). [The Requirements for Teachers \(Scotland\) Regulations 2005](#) require local authorities to “employ adequate numbers of teachers in the schools under their management, with the appropriate professional skills and knowledge necessary to enable those teachers to undertake the teaching duties allocated to them.” [GTCS has registration categories](#) including, primary education, secondary (subjects) education and additional support needs. Teachers [registered in one category can add subjects or categories to their registration](#). For example, this might enable secondary teachers to expand their range of qualified subjects and primary teachers to work in the secondary sector. There are academic requirements for an additional registration in [a secondary subject](#) or as [an additional support needs teacher](#). In a recent briefing to members of the Committee, GTCS suggested that the additional registration process is an important element of addressing teacher recruitment challenges and provides increased employment opportunities for individual teachers.

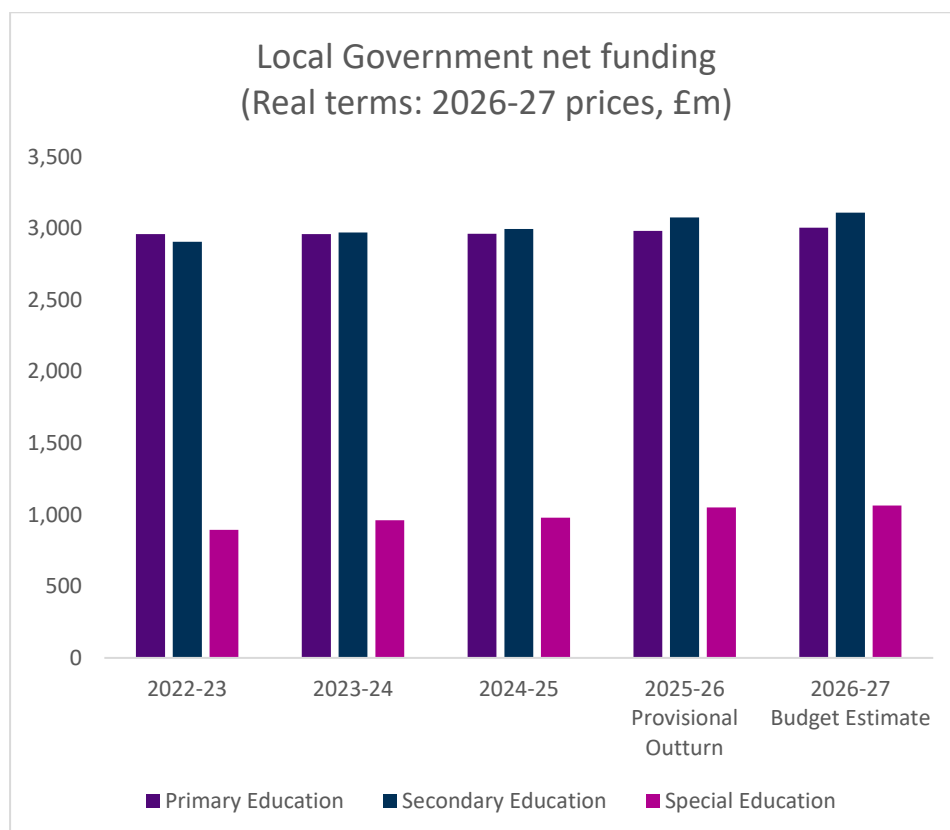
School education funding

The majority of funding for school education is from local authorities’ core budgets. Most of the local authority budgets for school education are not formally ringfenced. Councils have a range of duties across different statutory services as well as a range of non-statutory services across which local government are required to set budgets and ensure that they are achieving best value.

As noted above, COSLA suggested that the policy of reducing class contact time would cost in the region of £250-£310 million per year and expects the policy to be fully funded by the Scottish Government.

The Scottish Government publishes data on local authorities’ spending on services. The latest data is the Provisional Outturn and Budget Estimates publication (POBE).

This includes non-audited outturns for 2025-26 and budget plans for 2026-27 as well as audited outturns for 2022-23 to 2024-25. The chart below shows this data in real terms for net resource² spend on primary, secondary and special education.

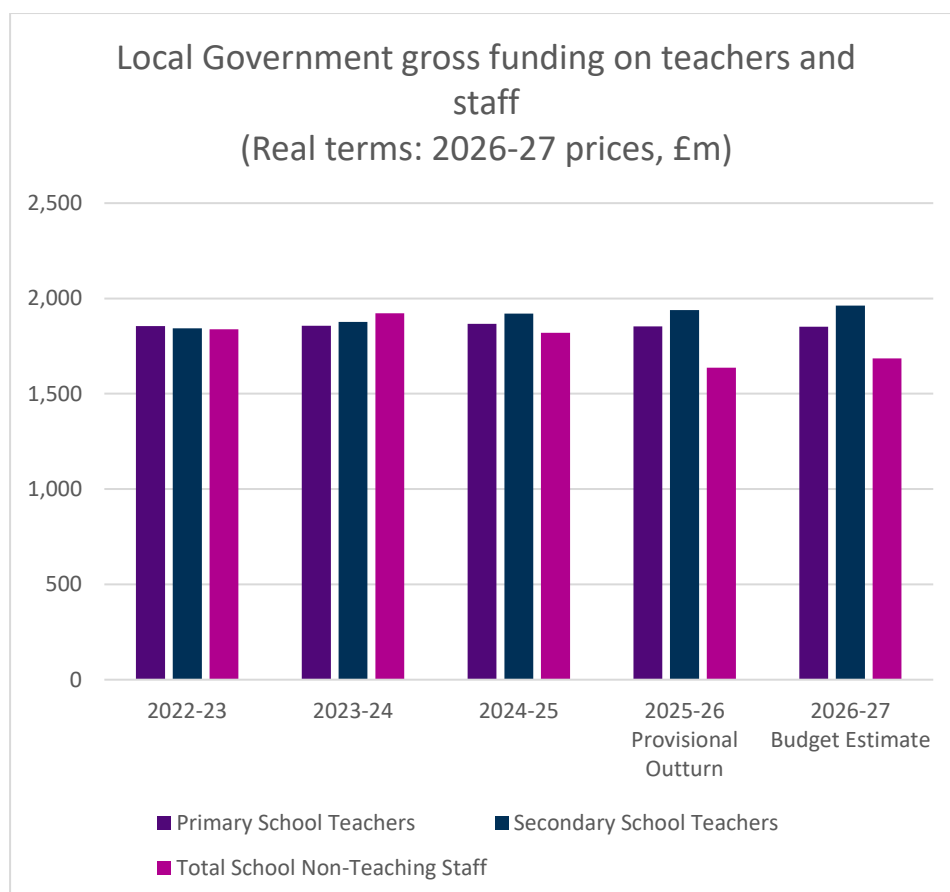


The data shows a trend in increased funding by local authorities to the secondary and special sectors. Real terms funding to the primary sector has been flatter with relatively small increases in 2025-26 and planned for in 2026-27.

A large proportion of resource funding on schools is for the salaries of teachers and staff. The following chart shows the gross³ resource spend on teachers in the primary and secondary sectors in real terms.

² Resource is day-to-day spending. Here 'net' excludes expenditure funded through earned income and ringfenced grants.

³ These figures are gross and include spend funded by earned income or ringfenced grants. These data are therefore calculated differently to the previous chart.



Real-terms spend on primary teachers was fairly flat over the period; spend on secondary teachers increased; and spend on non-teaching staff in all sectors was less in 2025-26 and 2026-27 compared to previous years.

As part of the agreement between local government and the Scottish Government to maintain teacher numbers, the Scottish Government provides additional money to local government. The [National Improvement Plan for 2026](#) says that the Government is providing local government “£186.5 million to deliver our joint commitment to restore teacher numbers to 2023 levels, freeze learning hours, and reduce class contact time”.

Ned Sharratt, (Education & Culture)

SPICe

Date: 16/09/2026

Note: Committee briefing papers are provided by SPICe for the use of Scottish Parliament committees and clerking staff. They provide focused information or respond to specific questions or areas of interest to committees and are not intended to offer comprehensive coverage of a subject area.

The Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh, EH99 1SP www.parliament.scot

Annexe B

Written submission from ADES

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 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.

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.
- **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.

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.

Written submission from COSLA

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.