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Thank you for your letter of 18 March in which you highlight a range of concerns the SNCT Teachers' Panel has relating to ongoing work on planning for the implementation of reduced class contact time for teachers.

I am clear, and I know the Cabinet Secretary has also communicated this with you, that we consider reducing class contact time for teachers as key to addressing critical concerns around teacher workload, while also creating the conditions to improve educational standards and outcomes. That is why it was a manifesto commitment in 2021.

I agree with you that it is essential that the Teachers Panel is given its rightful place in discussions regarding the implementation of this commitment. I also agree that the proper mechanisms available within the SNCT structure should be used to achieve this – for example around decision-making on the use of time. However, I also believe that there is a legitimate space for bilateral engagement between the Scottish Government and COSLA on this issue.

Bilateral discussions are a normal and appropriate part of the SNCT process, and I do not consider that this undermines the collective bargaining agreements that we have in place. We intend to develop a clear understanding of how a reduction in class contact time can be effectively achieved across the whole country, taking account of individual local circumstances in preparations of discussions at the SNCT. This will ensure that when subsequent implementation discussions are held, through the appropriate SNCT structures, those discussions are evidence based, and we can be jointly assured that any measures proposed are deliverable.

Scottish Ministers, special advisers and the Permanent Secretary are covered by the terms of the Lobbying (Scotland) Act 2016. See [www.lobbying.scot](http://www.lobbying.scot)

Tha Ministearan na h-Alba, an luchd-comhairleachaidh sònraichte agus an Rùnaire Maireannach fo chumhachan Achd Coiteachaidh (Alba) 2016. Faicibh [www.lobbying.scot](http://www.lobbying.scot)

I would add that my officials have clearly heard the concerns you have raised directly with them recently and have amended the terms of reference for this initial phase of work so that it properly reflects the important role of the SNCT. This will be shared with you and your colleagues shortly, through the appropriate SNCT channels.

I hope it is clear that we are fully committed to delivering a reduction in class contact time for our teachers, and improving educational standards and outcomes for our children and young people.

I would welcome a collaborative approach to delivering these aims that we can all support.

**JOHN SWINNEY**