

ASCL FUNDING SURVEY | OCTOBER 2022

Methodology

The survey was sent by email to 4,231 headteachers, principals and business leaders in English state-funded schools and colleges, and responses were submitted from October 12 to 24. There were 630 completed responses, a response rate of 15%. Respondents were asked to submit one response per school or college. The majority of responses were from mainstream secondary and all-through schools (80%). The remainder were from primary schools (10%), special schools, colleges and other types of schools.

Results

Almost all of the 630 respondents (98%) said their school or college would have to make financial savings either in the current academic year 2022/23 or future years, or both, compared to last year, as a result of cost pressures.

Alarming, 60% said they will have to make financial savings both in the current academic year and in future years.

Will your school or college have to make financial savings in 2022/23 compared to last year as a result of cost pressures? (Select the answer which best reflects your situation).

| Answer Choice | Response Percent | Response Total |
|--|------------------|----------------|
| 1 No, we have enough funding | 2.1% | 13 |
| 2 No, we'll be able to get by on funding levels this year, but will have to make savings in future years | 7.8% | 49 |
| 3 No, we'll use reserves to balance the books this year, but will have to make savings in future years | 23.3% | 147 |
| 4 Yes, we will have to make financial savings in 2022/23 | 6.8% | 43 |
| 5 Yes, we will have to make financial savings in 2022/23 and in future years | 60.0% | 378 |

It is clear that many respondents are having to consider reductions in teachers and teaching assistants in order to make savings and that this will directly impact on educational provision. In the absence of additional funding, 58% said they are considering or likely to reduce teaching staff and increase class sizes, while 43% are considering reducing curriculum options, and 55% are considering reducing the number of teaching assistants.

The educational impact of a reduction in the number of teaching assistants is that there is then less individualised support available for pupils who need extra help, as well as more consequent pressure on classroom teachers.

What financial savings are you considering or likely to make either in 2022/23 or 2023/24 or both assuming you don't receive any additional funding? (Indicate as many as apply)

| Answer Choice | Response Percent | Response Total |
|---|------------------|----------------|
| 1 Reducing teaching staff and increasing class sizes | 58.1% | 366 |
| 2 Reducing teaching staff and curriculum options/ subjects taught | 43.5% | 274 |
| 3 Reducing number of teaching assistants | 54.6% | 344 |
| 4 Reducing number of other support staff | 67.8% | 427 |
| 5 Suspending or scrapping capital projects | 66.3% | 418 |
| 6 Reducing extra-curricular activities | 31.1% | 196 |
| 7 Other (please specify): | 16.8% | 106 |

Of those who answered 'other' to this question, the most commonly mentioned action was reducing energy costs by measures such as turning heating off earlier during the school day and keeping the heating off until later in the year. Some also said that the need for financial savings was likely to impact on mental health and counselling services for students.

We also asked those who said they were considering a reduction in curriculum options to give more detail about which subjects would be affected. The most common responses were music, drama, and design and technology. Some respondents also indicated that they were considering reducing the number of modern foreign language subjects they offered, particularly at post-16.

Press reports have suggested that some schools may reduce to four-day or three-day weeks to reduce costs. We asked respondents whether this was being considered. None are considering a three-day week, but 17 schools (2.7%) are considering a four-day week.

Cost pressures

The cost pressures affecting schools and colleges include nationally agreed teacher and support staff pay awards for which there is no additional government funding to afford the cost of these awards, rising energy costs which are only partially offset by the government's six-month energy price guarantee, and rising catering costs.

The implications on budgets at school and college level vary depending on a number of factors – such as the composition of their workforce depending on the needs of their students and the energy contracts into which they are tied. For example, schools with higher proportions of children with special educational needs are likely to face higher extra costs because they employ more classroom assistants to support these pupils.

Establishing these costs is made more complicated by the fact that the impact of the government's energy price guarantee was not fully clear at the time this survey was conducted. In fact, the uncertainty over costs has been a big problem for schools and colleges as it has made budgeting extremely difficult.

Nevertheless, we asked schools and colleges to estimate the total extra costs they face in 2022/23 compared with last year. Our survey feedback shows that some secondary schools are facing extra costs of up to £500,000 this year. This equates to the cost of employing around 10 teachers.

Educational impact

Finally, we asked respondents to give their assessment of the educational impact of cost pressures and savings on their school or college. Here is a sample of responses:

- "Having been making cuts year on year for at least the last 10 years there is no option but to cut staffing. This means increased class sizes and a reduction in SEND and other support."
- "We will have to make staff redundant and not replace leaving staff. The impact on education of the pupils will be massive. We will also have to cut back on provisions around mental health and welfare."
- "Inevitably, we will see a reduction in the number of teachers we can afford to employ, which will mean an increase in the average class size, which will only increase the burden on those remaining teachers. The impact of this additional pressure will only worsen the already precarious recruitment and retention situation and will mean that staff have less time available to offer extra-curricular activities, which will again impact negatively on the experience students receive."
- "Devastating. I have been here for 15 years and put my heart and soul into improving this school. It has been tough, but it has worked; this is now going to be thrown away. I have no option but to make significant redundancies across all areas of the school, from SLT to support staff. The impact will be a significant increase in class sizes, more work for the senior colleagues who will still be here and over time, the improvements which have been made will be eroded. I am completely disillusioned."
- "Ultimately, we won't replace staff as they leave. The heating isn't going on until it's freezing and then only for fewer hours so we will be less comfortable and so learn less well. Class sizes will increase and support for the least able will diminish."
- "Larger class sizes, more pressure on staff, less resources. This will impact the quality of education. All the plans I had for improving the learning environment, alternative curriculum development for our most vulnerable, will be significantly reduced or not go ahead at all."
- "We have already stripped back so much of what we can offer through the period of austerity. We could offer so much more in terms of resources if we weren't having to reflect on whether we can afford to employ staff in two years' time or heat the classroom."
- "This is profound. I am looking at 15-20 job losses to cover these costs. I will need to make significant cuts in our teaching, wellbeing, mentoring, learning support, behaviour support, admin support or other staffing capacity. This will have a direct impact on our students."
- "Catastrophic. The scale of savings required in-year is unachievable. Our forecast budget, which was previously positive, is now dire. We would have to fundamentally change our offer to manage. The quality of education we will be able to provide will be substantially reduced."
- "As a special school, catering for vulnerable pupils who have been hardest hit by the impact of COVID, we are expecting not to be able to provide as much classroom support (LSAs and SaLT) that is so beneficial for these pupils. The school was already operating in deficit during 2021/22 and so unfunded pay awards will make it impossible to break-even."

Conclusion

Financial circumstances at school-level vary widely depending on factors which include their funding allocation, and the number of pupils in the school. And, as previously noted, the impact of inflationary pressures will also vary based on factors such as the terms of energy price contracts and the impact of unfunded pay awards.

This represents a serious risk to the financial sustainability of the sector as a whole, and therefore the equity of provision for different communities. The effect of the funding crisis will be uneven with some schools and colleges facing the prospect of having to make deeper cuts than others.

Certainly, it is clear that almost all will have to make savings on budgets that have already been cut to the bone over the past decade.

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