

Proposals on the School Support Staff Negotiating Body (SSSNB)

Response of the Association of School and College Leaders

A. Introduction

1. The Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) is a trade union and professional association representing over 25,000 education system leaders, heads, principals, deputies, vice-principals, assistant heads, business leaders and other senior staff of state-funded and independent schools and colleges throughout the UK. ASCL members are responsible for the education of more than four million children and young people across primary, secondary, post-16 and specialist education. This places the association in a strong position to consider this issue from the viewpoint of the leaders of schools and colleges of all types.
2. ASCL welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this consultation. We are responding on behalf of our members working in business leadership roles.
3. Our response is based on the views of our members, obtained through discussions at ASCL Council, our Business Leader Online Forums, a bespoke ASCL Business Leader Survey (29% response rate), and delegates at the ASCL Business Leader Roadshow (26 June).
4. When considering the impact of any proposals on different groups, it is ASCL's policy to consider not only the nine protected characteristics included in the Equality Act 2010, but also other groups which might be disproportionately affected, particularly those who are socio-economically disadvantaged. We have answered any equality impact questions on this basis.

B. Key points

5. Those working in business leadership roles are not support staff. They do not 'support' the work of teachers and leaders; they themselves are senior leaders, along with Assistant Headteachers/Assistant Principals, Deputy Headteachers/Vice Principals or equivalent roles in trusts. This view is supported by the Secretary of State's foreword in the consultation document, which refers to '*teaching assistants, catering staff and caretakers...*' who are all support staff.
6. ASCL's position is that business or executive leaders who undertake whole school, college or trust responsibilities are an integral part of the leadership team. ASCL believes that this should be reflected in their status and remuneration by them being brought into the scope of the School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Document (STPCD) alongside other leadership colleagues.
7. We believe that these senior leaders should be paid with parity to other leadership colleagues holding the same level of responsibility, regardless of the route they have taken into education leadership.

8. Ideally, we would like to see an education workforce document covering all roles, but while there remain two separate documents, we are clear that business leaders must be brought alongside their leadership colleagues by broadening the scope of the School Teachers' Review Body (STRB) and the STPCD to include them. These could then become the School Teacher and Leader Review Body (STLRB) and the School Teacher and Leader Pay and Conditions Document (STLPCD).

9. ASCL suggests the following criteria for inclusion in the STRB:

Trust central teams:

- Those with leadership responsibility with direct impact on schools, and in roles with levels of responsibility broadly comparable with other trust leaders.
- This includes CFO and COO roles along with other trust specific roles such as Heads of People/HR, Finance, Estates, IT/Digital, Governance, etc.

School based business leaders:

- Those with whole-school business leadership responsibility, and in roles with levels of responsibility broadly comparable with *at least* an Assistant Head.
- This includes such as finance, operations, facilities, HR, Health and Safety, etc., who are likely to be members of the Senior Leadership Team.

10. The School Workforce Census has categories¹ for support staff. Within these are '5. school business professionals' and '7. leadership – non-teacher'.

11. Within category 5, roles such as bursar and business manager are included alongside finance officer. These roles should be in category 7. The government's own advice for maintained schools in the Schools Financial Value Standard (SFVS)² states:

How schools can access staff with adequate expertise

Teachers are not likely to be trained in finance. It is therefore important to employ, or have access to, non-teaching staff with appropriate financial skills. In larger schools, it is good practice to employ a school business manager and make them a member of the senior leadership team. They are then best able to support the headteacher and other senior staff in the field of finance and managing resources. Smaller schools may need to share or buy in such expertise.

12. We believe that category 5 is for school business professionals who are not working in leadership roles, and it is appropriate for those to be brought into the scope of the SSSNB. However, business managers and bursars are senior leaders and as such should be in category 7. This is the category that should be brought into the STPCD as people in these roles are not support staff, but as the category states, in leadership roles.

13. The educational landscape now is unrecognisable from when the SSSNB was first introduced in 2009. In 2009 there very few academies; in 2025 over half of the sector consists of academies in single academy trusts (SATs) or multi academy trusts (MATs). The current situation is not comparable, and some of the proposals contained within the SSSNB and this consultation do not reflect the changes that have taken place over the last 16 years.

14. The current proposal for the SSSNB will keep a significant majority of school business leaders within the scope of SSSNB pay-setting arrangements. We make the case, in the subsequent paragraphs of this submission, that this will prove to be both iniquitous and

¹ SSSNB consultation document, pg 9

² Schools financial value standard (SFVS): checklist guidance, DfE

damaging to the sector. Business leaders, irrespective of whether they are in academy trust schools, maintained schools or trust central teams, need pay-setting arrangements which align with other school leaders. The SSSNB will clearly not achieve this.

15. With over 50% of school business leaders considering leaving their role³, failure to treat people in these roles in the same way as other school leaders risks a haemorrhaging of experienced leaders which will have long-term consequences.
16. The role of the business leader is diverse and can vary in different settings depending on organisational structures. A clear demonstration of this was in our survey⁴ linked to above, where there were over 100 different role titles submitted.
17. Business leaders have strategic oversight and accountability for whole-school, college and trust responsibilities, interpreting and implementing complex legislation and ensuring compliance.
18. Our members are concerned about what research and due diligence has been carried out to warrant some of the statements and assumptions made in the consultation questions, as it is not reflective of their experience working in the sector.
19. Rather than achieving the intentions of the consultation, which states: '*We want the SSSNB outcomes to apply in the same way to maintained schools and academies.*', as it stands two people carrying out the same role and responsibilities could fall under two separate pay review bodies, this would actually create an additional divide with an outdated approach that simply won't work.
20. ASCL has long been campaigning on the issue of business leader pay and recognition.
21. There is no national pay framework that specifically recognises business leadership roles, and pay for these roles is locally determined. As a result, there are disparities in the level of pay and recognition in these roles.
22. The situation has been exacerbated by outdated job profiles used by some local authorities which do not always reflect how the responsibilities and accountabilities of these roles and the profession have evolved over time.
23. Local authorities operate their own job evaluation (JE) and grading framework, generally within the National Joint Council (NJC) pay scales, and this varies greatly between authorities. The result is a fragmented situation where some schools are denied access to higher pay scales which are warranted by these roles, and others are not.
24. Some local authorities have not yet carried out the single status exercise.
25. Pay scales are often capped by local authorities, meaning that business leaders in larger schools, who are responsible for significantly bigger budgets and lead more staff, are paid the same as colleagues in much smaller schools with smaller budgets.
26. Below is an example from one local authority pay scale which clearly demonstrates this. There are 60-70 points between each pay band up to and including band I, then band J has 341 points.
27. This means that a JE score of 660 would receive the same pay band as a role with a JE score of 920. The same 200 points lower down would warrant four clear pay bands difference and would span 21 salary scale points.

³ ASCL Business Leader Pay Survey, January 2024

⁴ ibid

Figure 1. Excerpt from LA NJC pay scales

Grade	NJC JE Score	JE Point Range	SCP
F	400 to 459	60	26
			27
			28
			29
			30
			31
G	460 to 519	60	32
			33
			34
			35
			36
			37
H	520 to 589	70	38
			39
			40
			41
			42
			43
I	590 to 659	70	44
			45
			46
			47
J	660 to 1000	341	48
			49
			50
			51

28. These are the sort of barriers our members face in receiving the appropriate remuneration for their roles.
29. If business leaders were brought into the STPCD, their pay would be set in the same way as headteachers, deputy and assistant heads which is directly linked to number of pupils in each key stage and therefore to the size of a school budget.
30. Although business leaders should be an integral part of the senior leadership team, their pay is often not comparable with other leaders working at a similar (and often lower) level.
31. Our survey data shows that although 88% of business leaders (no change from January 2024) were members of the senior leadership team, only 24% of respondents were paid in line with or above their leadership colleagues.
32. Of the 74% paid below their leadership colleagues (up from 70% in January 2024⁵), 26% were paid slightly below, and a staggering 48% being paid well below.
33. This also brings a lack of recognition of the status of the role. Again, being brought into the STPCD would address this as it would be clear that the role is part of the leadership team.
34. Finally, the NJC pay awards for 2022, 2023 and 2024 left business leaders with the lowest pay award in the education workforce; lower than the majority of support staff and lower than leadership colleagues employed under the STPCD.

⁵ ASCL Business Leader Pay Survey, January 2024

35. This was as a direct result of pay claims submitted by the NJC unions for flat rate pay awards, which disadvantaged those higher up the pay scales.
36. The offer for 2025 is for 3.2% and would again be less than leaders under the STPCD, who are likely to receive 4% following recommendations from the STRB.
37. If the NJC and teacher pay award are finalised, this means that over the last four years, the pay awards are as follows:
- NJC SCP2 = 32.24%
 - NJC SCP22 = 21.88%
 - STPCD = 21%
 - Business leaders on NJC43 or above = 13.46%
38. Those paid above SCP43 were disadvantaged even further than highlighted above due to the 2022 pay award having no floor implemented at SCP43 and being a straight flat rate, regardless of level of salary, resulting in an award of less than 2% for some members.
39. In our recent member survey 31% of respondents said they were paid above SCP43. Again, being brought into the STPCD would ensure that business leaders received the same annual pay awards as their leadership colleagues.
40. Our survey asked members to indicate if any/all of these three issues were a problem for them personally.
41. The results below (figure 2) show that pay inequity is the biggest issue, closely followed by disparity in annual pay awards, then lack of status/recognition.

Figure 2: ASCL member survey data

14. Are any of the following an issue for you personally?				
Answer Choices	yes a significant issue	yes an issue	no not an issue	Response Total
Disparity in annual pay awards	42.57% 232	26.42% 144	31.01% 169	545
Pay inequity with leadership colleagues	37.98% 207	36.51% 199	25.50% 139	545
Lack of status/recognition	25.14% 137	25.69% 140	49.17% 268	545
			answered	545
			skipped	0

42. It is for all the reasons listed above that we remain of the firm view that business leaders will not be served well by the SSSNB, for the same reason that they have not been by the NJC.
43. The interests of business leaders are not represented by the unions on the NJC and as they will be the same unions under the SSSNB this will not change.

44. Their pay claims for flat pay awards do not represent the interests of business leaders and have actually disadvantaged them.
45. By bringing business leaders into STPCD, ASCL will be well placed to represent them, alongside other leaders via the STRB.
46. We have made this call to the DfE and to the STRB and have included this in our written evidence submissions⁶.
47. The risk to the sector if this change does not happen is huge. Our previous survey results (January 2024⁷), showed that over half of respondents intended to leave their role within the next three years. Pay was cited as a contributory factor in the majority of cases.
48. The work business leaders carry out and the responsibilities they hold are critical to the education system. Unless something changes as a matter of urgency, trusts and schools face losing the significant expertise and experience that business leaders bring.
49. Business leaders have a wealth of transferrable skills which enable them to move to higher paid roles in other sectors and professions, often with more flexible working opportunities than are on offer in the education sector.
50. It is also concerning to ASCL that, from our survey and online forums, 62% of respondents were not aware of the SSSNB and potential implications.
51. Although the Secretary of State states *'that the transition to the SSSNB does not disadvantage school support staff or move onto less favourable terms because of new agreements'*, we are concerned that there may be less favourable outcomes for some.
52. The reason for this is that is the government's factsheet⁸ on the SSSNB, states *"We intend to consult before the summer holidays on the definition of school support staff to confirm which staff are within the SSSNB's remit, call for evidence on current pay and conditions and to confirm what pay protections may be necessary for individual employees"*.
53. We are aware that an amendment to the Employment Rights Bill was tabled on 7 July⁹, part way through this consultation process. The amendment *"provides that those regulations cannot alter an employees remuneration or terms and conditions to their detriment"*.
54. Clearly, if pay protections may be necessary, this would be less favourable terms.

C. Answers to specific questions

Topic 1: Definition of 'school support staff' to inform who is in scope of the SSSNB

Questions on staff in scope of the SSSNB and our proposal to refine the definition of 'school support staff'

⁶ ASCL evidence to STRB 35th Remit

⁷ ASCL Business Leader Pay Survey, January 2024

⁸ Factsheet: School Support Staff Negotiating Body

⁹ SSSNB Frequently asked questions, DfE July 2025

Question 1: Ignoring the definitions (which are covered in the next question), do you agree with our proposals to:

- (a) Exclude staff whose pay and conditions are determined through the existing pay and negotiating bodies named above?**
- (b) Include academy trust employees in support staff roles who work from locations other than academies?**
- (c) Exclude executive leaders of academy trusts?**

55. (a) Yes, we agree that staff whose pay and conditions are determined through the existing pay and negotiating bodies should be excluded from the SSSNB. This includes business leaders who are paid on the leadership pay range (STPCD) and are employed trusts and in Voluntary Aided (VA) schools. In ASCL's recent pay survey this was 16% of respondents and 19% who attended the Business Leader Online Forums.

56. (b) Unsure. We agree that academy trust employees in support staff roles who work from locations other than academies should be included in the SSSNB if they are working in administrative roles and not leadership. However, it should be noted that there are business leaders operating in leadership roles who are not part of the trust executive team but do plan, direct and control activities and report back to the board on performance. These roles should be excluded from the SSSNB.

57. (c) Yes, we agree that executive leaders of academy trusts should be excluded from the SSSNB. There are business leaders operating in these roles at a comparative level in maintained and Voluntary Aided settings, and they should also be excluded and assimilate to the School Teacher Pay and Conditions Document (STPCD). Likewise, due to varying staffing structures, business leaders who are based in a school within a trust should also be excluded.

58. The assertion is made in the consultation document that "*Academy trusts have senior roles that operate across multiple schools. These roles often do not exist in the maintained sector or, where they do, are typically carried out by senior staff in a local authority's central team*".

59. In the ASCL survey 77% of respondents told us they do not agree this to be the case in their setting.

Question 2: Do you agree with how we have defined the groups above:

- (a) staff covered by the named existing pay and negotiating bodies?**
- (b) central academy trust staff**
- (c) executive leaders of academy trusts**

49. (a) Unsure. If it includes all those currently contractually employed on leadership pay ranges of STPCD and who are not teachers, then we do support this. This includes staff in Voluntary Aided schools, school-based business leadership roles in trusts, and business leadership roles in central teams which are not in a role such as COO or CFO but which are on leadership pay scales. By just excluding this group, it will create a bigger divide across the workforce between staff excluded and included.

50. (b) Unsure. We agree that academy trust employees in support staff roles who work from locations other than academies should be included in the SSSNB if they are working in administrative roles and not leadership. However, it should be noted that there are business leaders operating in leadership roles who are not part of the trust executive team but do plan, direct and control activities and report back to the board on performance. These roles should be excluded from the SSSNB. Support staff are essential in our schools, but administrative roles are not leadership roles.

51. (c) No. There are executive leaders in academy trusts and maintained schools. Leaders in maintained schools have equal leadership responsibilities and complexity of roles. Examples include a Chief Operating Officer of a large maintained secondary PFI school, and a Finance Director across a federation of three maintained schools.
52. (c) This proposal excludes one part of the sector entirely due to the setting they work in and will create a two-tier system. This is a direct contradiction of the intention of the body and the Secretary of State's intention to 'smooth the differences between academies and maintained schools'¹⁰.
53. There is a clear lack of understanding from the government of the role of business leadership in the maintained sector. As detailed above, 77% of our survey respondents disagree that LAs have senior staff undertaking senior roles across schools. There has been a hollowing out of local authorities resulting in many of the services previously provided by the LA now being carried out by individual schools.
54. Many schools have their own teams covering areas such as finance, IT and HR. Others operate a shared service model with other schools or procure outsourced services from private providers.

Question 3: Are there staff who you think would still be covered by the broad ERB definition (after our proposed exclusions above) who you think should not be?

55. Yes, business leaders in maintained schools and business leaders within trusts who are not in a position of COO/CFO but who hold leadership roles which plan, direct and control activities and are accountable to trustee board or Governing Body for performance of these areas.
56. The consultation advises '*the ERB gives the Secretary of State powers to adjust the definition of 'school support staff, through secondary legislation'*'. ASCL believes that business leaders with whole school or trust wide responsibility should be excluded from the SSSNB.

Question 4: Are there any other staff working centrally for academy trusts who you think should be included (but would not be under our current proposal)?

57. No, we believe it is appropriate for those working in support roles of an administrative nature such as finance Assistant, HR officer etc to be included in the SSSNB as these roles provide a support function not a leadership one.

Topic 2: Call for evidence on existing pay and terms and conditions

Evidence on current pay and conditions

For employers

We have answered some of these questions based on the results of our member survey.

Question 1: Do you use the National Joint Council (NJC) for Local Government Services National Agreement on Pay and Conditions of Service ("The Green Book") for school support staff?

58. Unsure. From data from our membership, we are aware of a mixture of pay scales and conditions used across the sector (figure 3). From the responses to our survey and










¹⁰ [Does Labour have an academies problem? Schools Week, September 2024](#)

online forums the data indicates that in addition to the majority of respondents being paid on NJC, there are a large number of members paid on other pay scales such 16% on leadership pay scales or 9% on trust specific pay scales.

Question 2: Do you pay school support staff based on the pay points on the NJC pay spine?

59. Unsure. Data from our business leadership membership survey highlights huge variations of different pay scales used for business leaders (figure 3 below). This could be resolved by including business leaders within the STPCD in line with leadership colleagues.

Figure 3. Data from survey

5. Please indicate your current pay arrangements:				
Answer Choices			Response Percent	Response Total
1	Leadership pay range (STPCD)		15.41%	84
2	Trust specific pay range		8.62%	47
3	NJC pay scales 1-43		29.54%	161
4	NJC pay scales above point 43		30.46%	166
5	NJC Chief Officer		2.02%	11
6	Hay grading		1.65%	9
7	Kent scheme		1.47%	8
8	Surrey pay		1.10%	6
9	Other (please specify):		9.72%	53
			answered	545
			skipped	0

60. The majority of salary ranges reported in the ASCL survey fell between £40k and £80k. Alarminglly, 5% of respondents reported being paid the equivalent to a classroom teacher on M4.

Question 3: How do you decide where to put support staff (i.e. which pay point) on the pay structure that you use? For example, you may use job evaluations or role profiles.

61. There is huge disparity in practice, which means one business leader could be paid significantly less than a comparable role in maintained schools and trusts. In our experience job descriptions are out of date and do not reflect the complexities of the role. Business leaders with whole-school or trust-wide leadership responsibilities are an integral part of the leadership team. 74% of respondents to our survey told us that that they were paid below leadership colleagues. This is unacceptable.

62. ASCL guidance on *Pay, conditions and recognition for business leaders*¹¹ aims to bring more consistency and equality to the process of assessing the level of responsibilities by informing decisions about setting pay for those working in business leadership roles.

Question 4: Are there any parts of contracts with your staff that you would be concerned about changing under the SSSNB?

63. Yes. Some members may lose their leadership pay scales and associated conditions if they are moved into the SSSNB.

64. Likewise, some members may lose trust-specific related terms and conditions that may be enhanced if they are brought under the SSSNB.

For employees

Question 1: Are there any parts of your current contract that you would be concerned about changing under the SSSNB?

65. Yes. See answer to Question 4 above.

Topic 3: Agency workers

Questions on agency workers – evidence gathering

For employment agencies

66. We do not represent agency workers, therefore are unable to comment on this section.

Equalities impact

Question on equalities

Question 1: Could any of the proposals have an impact – positive or negative – on people with any of the following protected characteristics?

- Age
- Disability
- Gender reassignment
- Marriage and civil partnership
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race
- Religion or belief
- Sex
- Sexual orientation

67. Yes. There is already a serious issue of women being underrepresented in leadership roles and being paid less than their male counterparts¹². The school business leader workforce is also predominantly female. However, just as in teaching, higher paid business leaders are predominantly male.

68. This means that it is highly likely that in a senior leadership team made up of a mix of men and women, the female leaders will be paid less than the male leaders, with

¹¹ [Pay, conditions and recognition for business leaders, ASCL](#)

¹² [Closing the Gender Pay Gap in Education: A leadership imperative \(ASCL, NAHT, NGA, WomenEd\)](#)

business leaders likely to be the lowest paid member of leadership, regardless of the level of responsibility and accountability they hold. This must be addressed.

69. We also know that there is underrepresentation of leaders from BAME backgrounds in school leadership¹³ in general, and this is also the case for those working in business leadership roles¹⁴.

70. We do not believe that the SSSNB will resolve these issues, for the many reasons already cited. The solution must be to bring the roles into the leadership section of the STPCD.

Question 2: What action could help reduce any negative impacts you identified in Q1?

71. Exclude all business leaders from scope of the SSSNB and place them in the STPCD.

Question 3: Are there any other equality-related impacts you think we should consider?

72. We are not aware of any at this stage, though we are mindful of potential unintended consequences.

D. Conclusion

73. The Employment Rights Bill gives the Secretary of State the power to exclude staff working in maintained schools or academy trusts from the SSSNB's remit.

74. ASCL believes that business leaders with leadership roles and responsibilities should be excluded from the SSSNB and brought into the scope of the School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Document (STPCD) alongside their leadership colleagues.

75. We hope that this response is of value to your consultation. ASCL is willing to be further consulted and to assist in any way that it can.

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Association of School and College Leaders
11 July 2025

¹³ [Racial equality in the teacher workforce, NFER](#)

¹⁴ [Association of BAME business leaders in education](#)