

CST National Survey 2024

Deep Dive Operations

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March 2025

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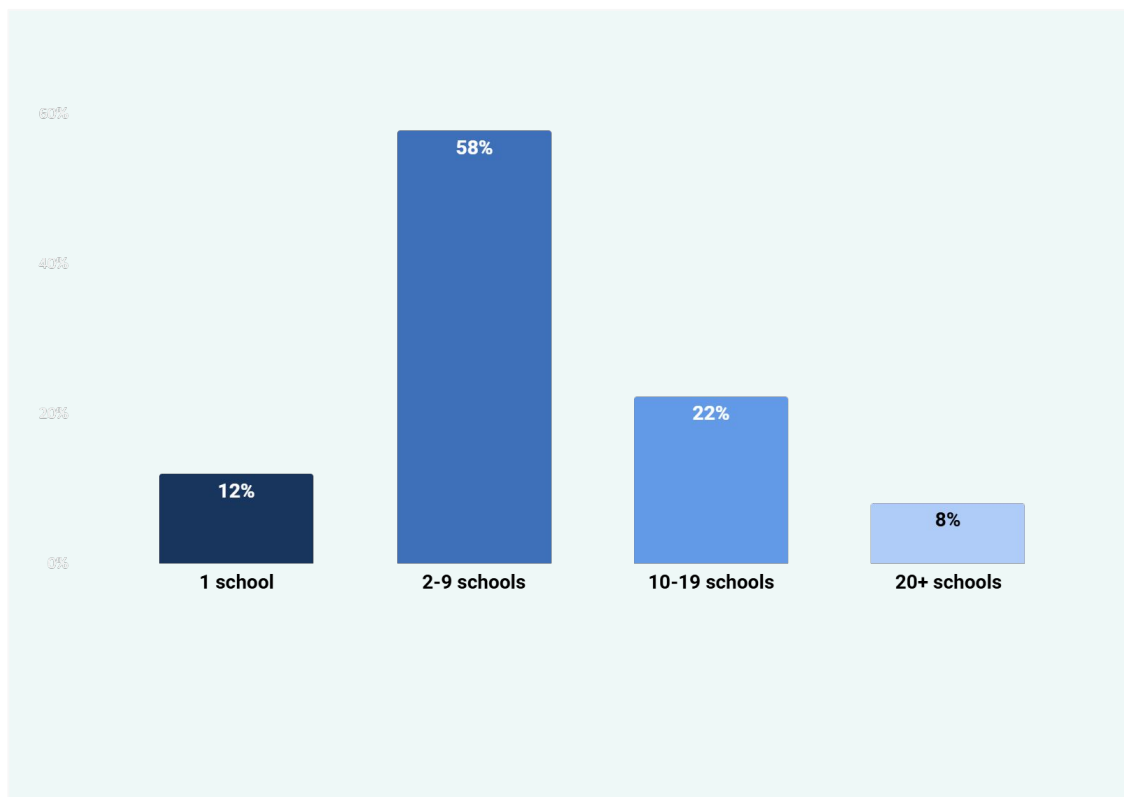
Research Methodology

Feedback from 417 Trusts

In June-July of 2024, the survey was answered by 417 trust accounting officers (the senior leaders directly responsible to Parliament for their trust, usually the CEOs) across England.

The survey covered trusts of all sizes, from trusts with single academies to running dozens of schools, making it a representative sample of school trusts across the sector.

Feedback was focused on trust experience and priorities for the 2024/25 academic year.



Survey designed around the CST's Strong trusts framework

The design of the survey is informed by CST's Building Strong Trusts framework and explores accounting officers' priorities and challenges across the various elements of trust leadership.



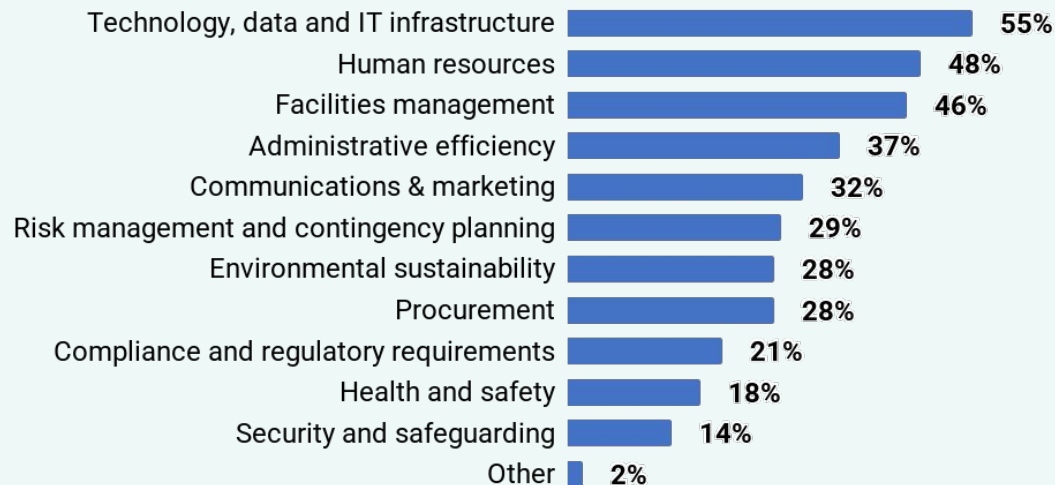
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Priorities and challenges

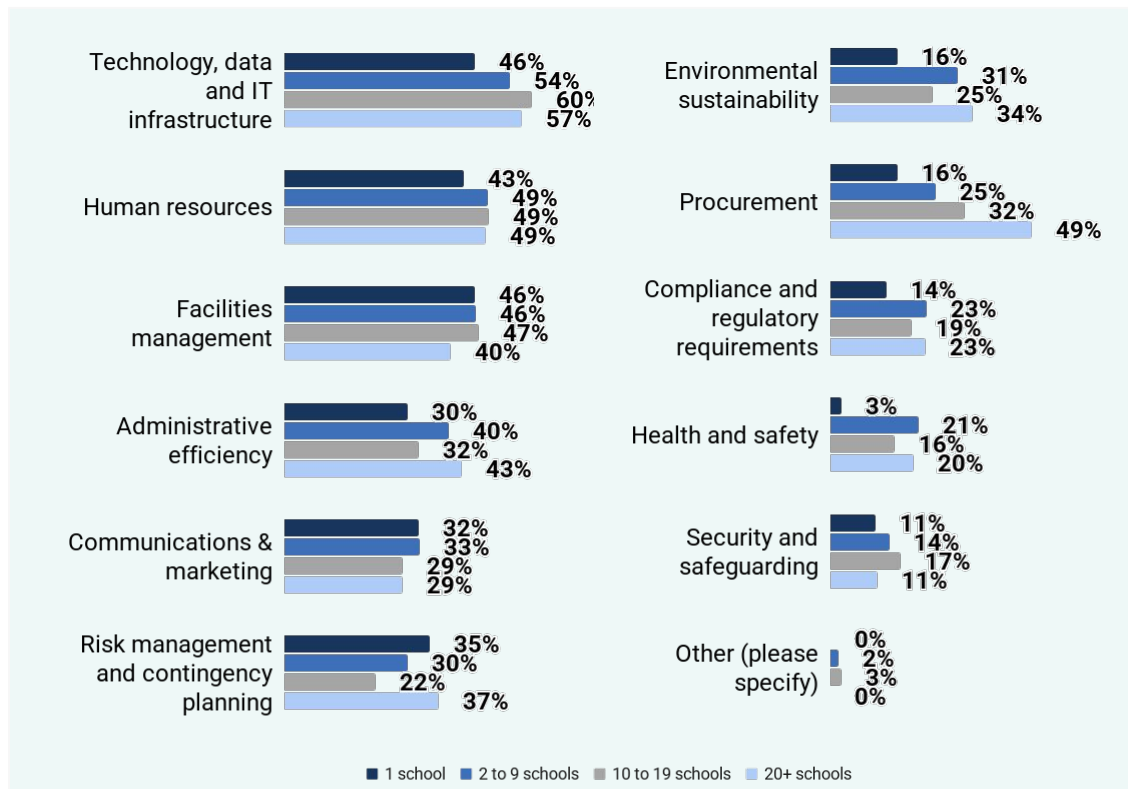
In which areas does your trust intend to focus its efforts regarding operations in the next academic year?



Looking at operational priorities in this year's survey, about half of trusts intend to focus their efforts on technology, data and IT infrastructure (55%), human resources (48%) and facilities management (46%)

In which areas does your trust intend to focus its efforts regarding operations in the next academic year?

By trust size



■ The top priorities are similar for trusts of all sizes

■ There are some differences in priorities when it comes to trust size for example, procurement is a significantly larger priority for larger trusts than it is for smaller trusts

■ Health and safety is also less frequently mentioned as a priority for single school trusts compared to larger trusts

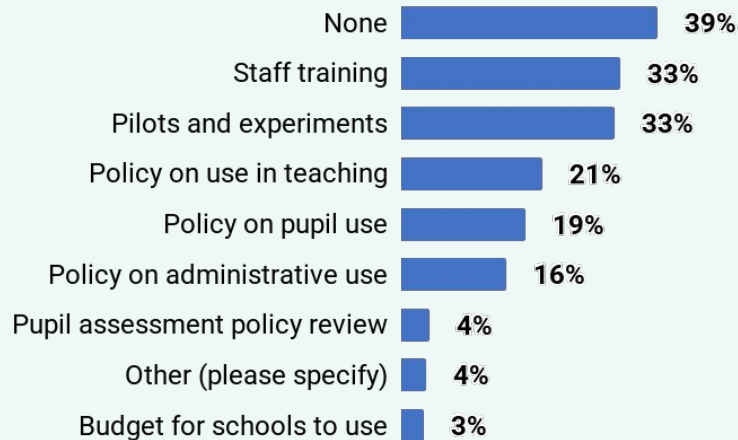
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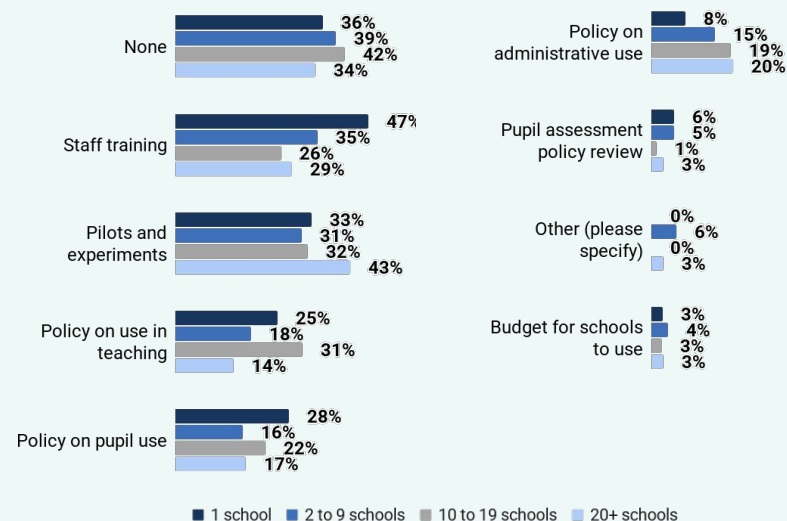
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Technology and Artificial Intelligence

Which of the following activities has your trust implemented in response to developments in Artificial Intelligence technology?



By trust size



With 55% of CEOs highlighting that they intend to focus on technology, data and IT infrastructure, it is interesting to explore how trusts have reacted to the recent developments in AI technology. About four out of 10 trusts (39%) haven't taken any action, while a third (33%) have run staff training and another third (33%) have run pilots and experiments.



Trusts have also invested time in developing policies. Very few trusts have gone as far as to allocate budgets for schools to use or review pupil assessment policies.

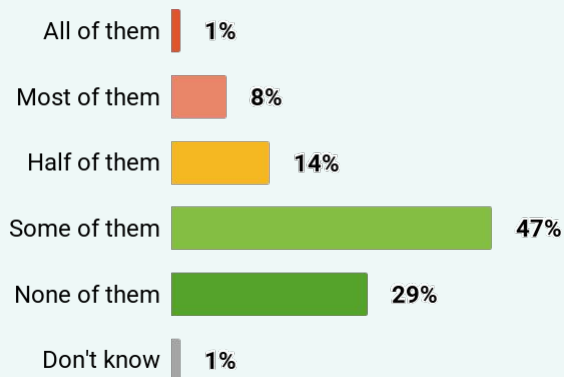
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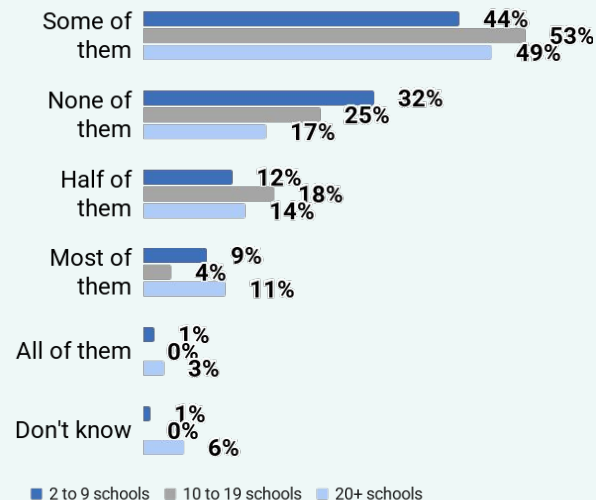
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Buildings

How many of your schools have buildings that could be described as poor? (exhibiting major defects and/or not operating as intended)

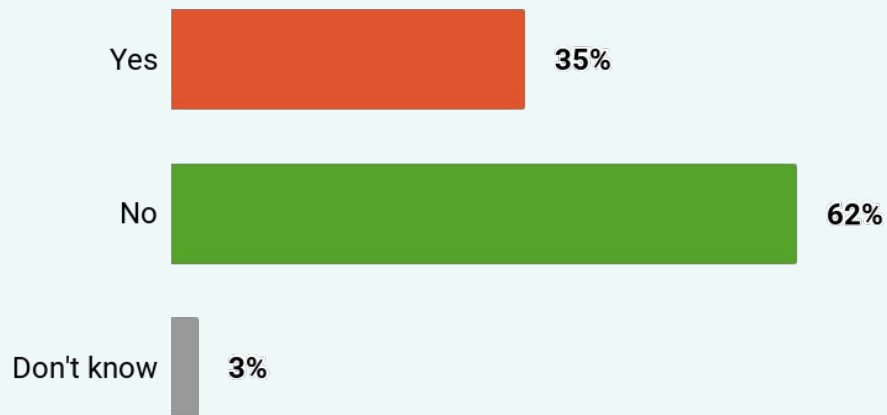


By trust size



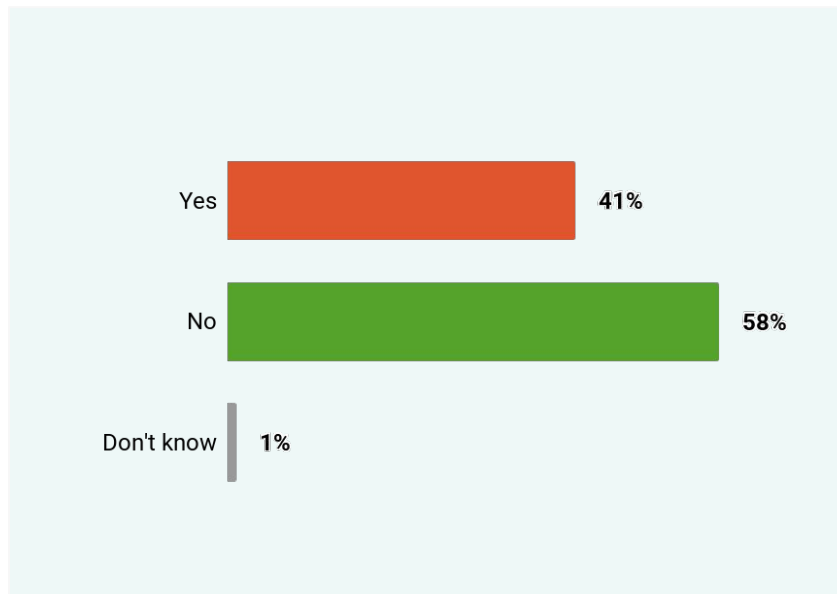
The condition of buildings is a common problem for trusts. Two thirds of trusts reported some buildings in poor conditions, with nearly one in ten reporting that either all or most buildings were in poor condition. Only 29% said they had no buildings in poor condition.

Does your school have any buildings that could be described as poor? (exhibiting major defects and/or not operating as intended)

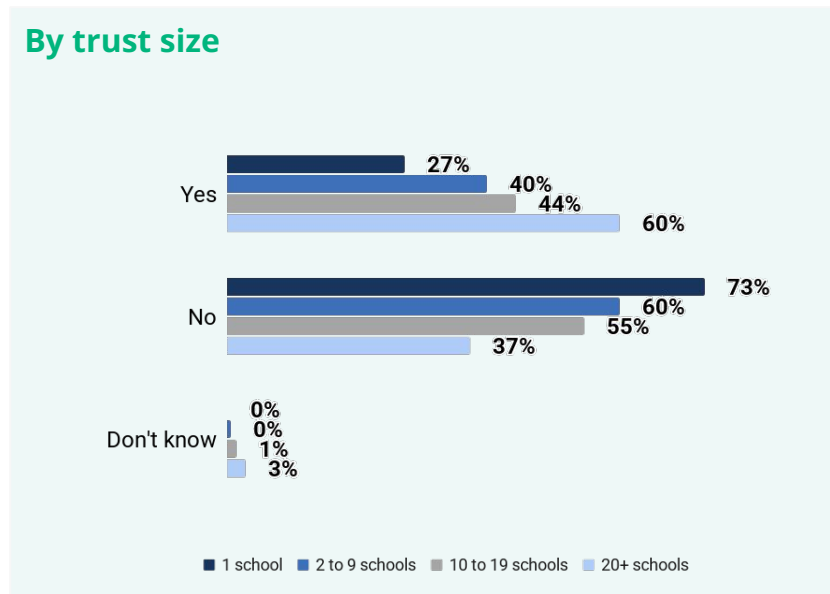


For single school trusts, 35% of CEOs of single school trusts also stated that their school has buildings that could be described as poor.

Could any of your school buildings be described to be in bad condition (life expired or at imminent risk of failure)?



By trust size



41% of CEOs reported that at least one of their school buildings could be described to be in a bad condition (life expired or at imminent risk of failure)

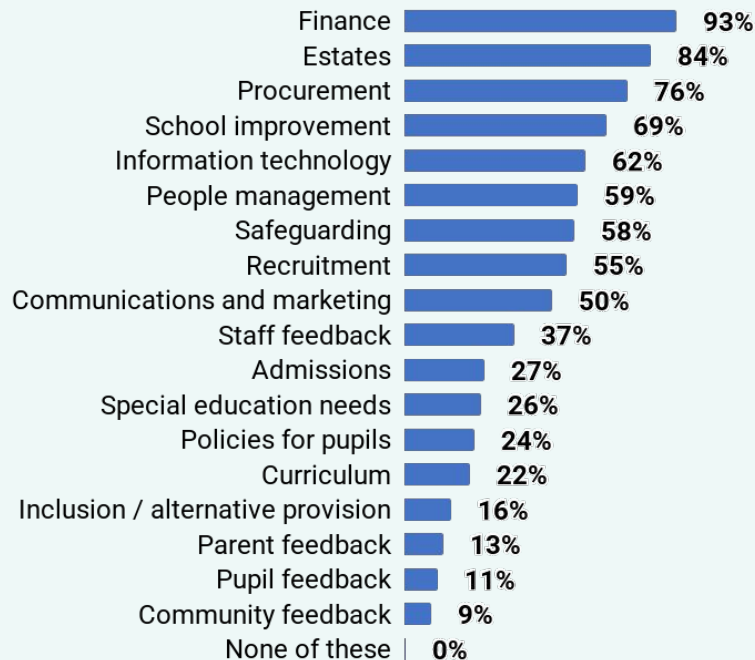
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Operating models

Which of the following areas does your trust primarily direct centrally?

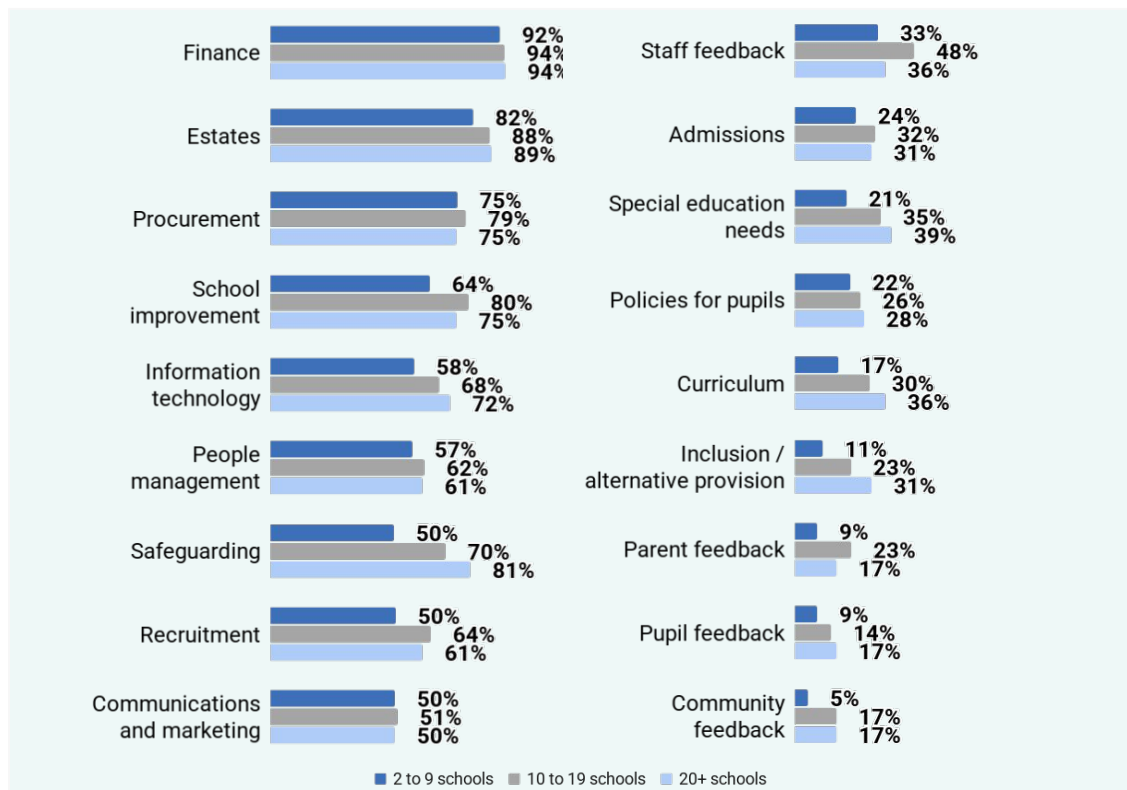


We asked multi-academy trusts about centrally directed areas. Operational elements dominate with finance, estates and procurement all primarily directed centrally by more than three quarters of trusts.

About half of trusts primarily manage staffing and recruitment centrally. A minority of trusts take a central approach to pupil and community matters like curriculum, feedback, SEND and inclusion.

Which of the following areas does your trust primarily direct centrally?

By trust size

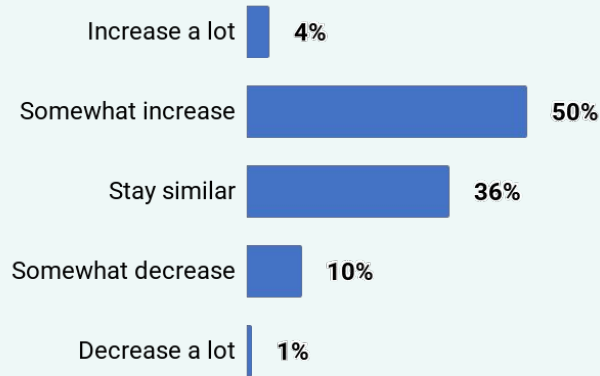


Interestingly, when we look at trusts of different sizes there isn't a major difference in how some operational elements of running a trust are managed specifically, finance, estates and procurement.

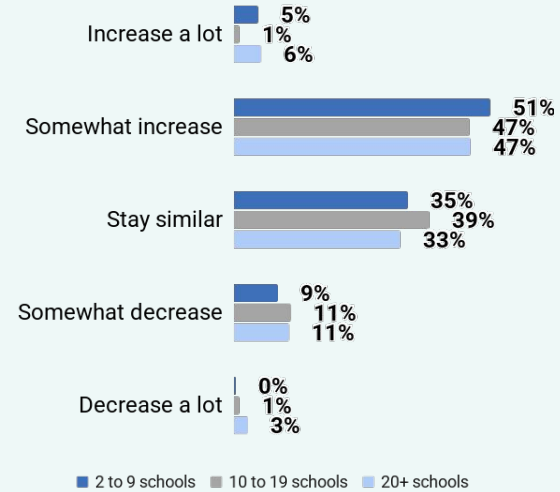


However, larger trusts are considerably more likely to direct pupil matters centrally, including safeguarding, SEND, curriculum and inclusion and alternative provision.

How do you expect the number of staff working across multiple schools to change over the next year?



By trust size



Trusts take a diverse approach to the composition of their central or shared teams. Most trusts expect to have more staff working over multiple schools. Over half of trusts (54%) expecting the number of such staff to increase next year, with only 11% expecting it to decrease.

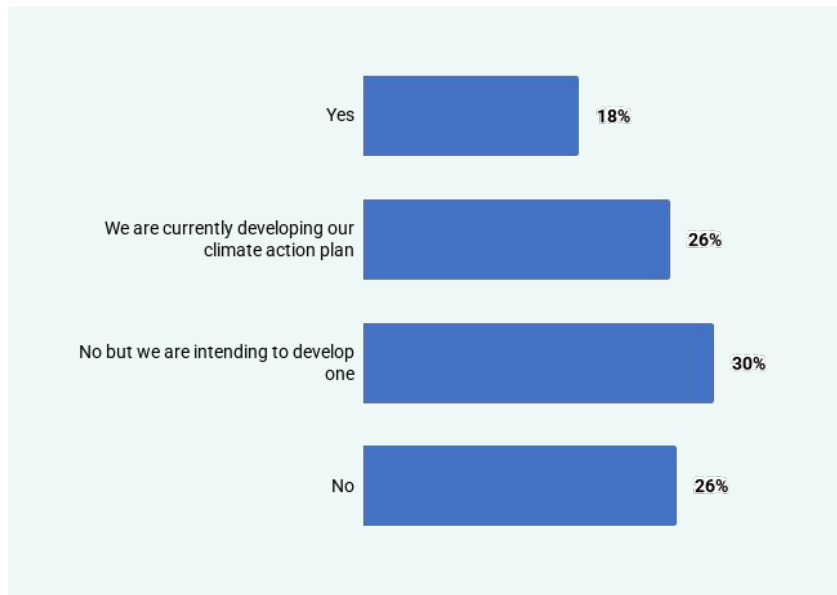
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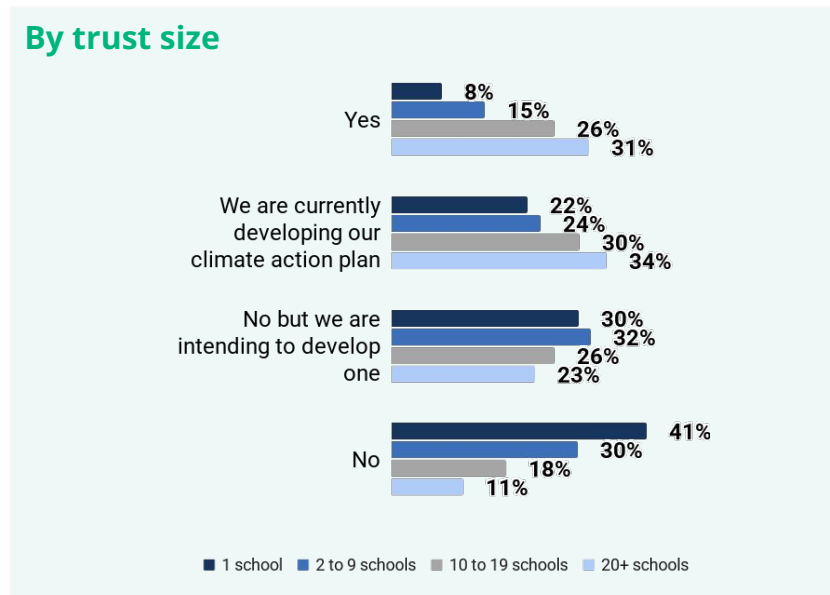
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Climate action plans

Does your trust have a climate action plan?



By trust size



18% of CEOs reported having a climate action plan for their trust. 26% of CEOs reported that they were currently developing a climate action plan and a further 30% are intending to develop one.

Single school trusts were considerably more likely to report not having a climate action plan compared to larger organisations.

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Conclusion

Sam Skerritt, Director of Public Affairs and Policy, CST



Many trusts face bidding for, massively-oversubscribed funding pots for new boilers and roofs, and paying for short-term fixes when they really need long-term investment and improvement. Even where trusts have capital finance directly allocated, prolonged underfunding has led to a backlog of repairs estimated by the National Audit Office at more than £13.8bn.

CST has called for a new approach to funding that looks at schools' real costs, provides multi-year settlements that allows trusts to plan ahead, and ends an addiction to competitive funding pots that waste effort and create perverse incentives.

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