

# PE2111/C: Fund early learning and childcare from 9 months

## Scottish Government written submission, 4 December 2024

Thank you for your letter dated 1 November 2024 in relation to PE2111: Funded early learning and childcare from 9 months.

Keeping children in Scotland out of poverty is the First Minister's top priority and will remain the focus of this Government as we deliver and develop our childcare offer over the remainder of this Parliament.

The Scottish Government has made difficult choices in order to prioritise investment of almost £1 billion a year in delivering 1140 hours of high quality, funded early learning and childcare to eligible children. Scotland remains the only part of the UK that already offers 1140 hours per year of funded ELC to all 3 and 4-year-olds and around a quarter of 2-year-olds regardless of whether their parents are working or not because we are committed to promoting equality for all of Scotland's children, putting their interests first. If eligible families paid for this themselves, it would cost them more than £5,500 per eligible child per year.

It's important to note that the Scottish Government is operating in one of the most difficult financial environments since devolution, and we are moving as far and as fast as we can to develop and deliver a further expansion to funded early learning and childcare for younger children within those constraints.

The 2024 [Programme for Government](#) (PFG) set out that this year we will work with local authorities to maximise uptake of our existing offer for eligible two year olds, with a focus on families most at risk of poverty and on areas with some of the lowest take up rates.

Following years of work with the UK Government we now have access to much better information on the size and distribution of the eligible population in Scotland at both a local and national level. This allowed us to publish more accurate uptake rates for the first time in the ELC Census last year (December 2023) and identify areas where improvements to uptake can be made.

We are now working with local authorities and the Improvement Service on a National Improvement Project which will take focussed action in five local authorities as well as seek out and promote good practice to increase uptake for eligible two year olds across all local authority areas.

In addition, we are progressing our early adopter community (EAC) work in six local authorities, backed by £16 million in 2024/25 and 2025/26. This place-based, people-centred work will help the Scottish Government and our local partners to understand what it takes to deliver expanded local childcare systems that support families with children from the early years to the end of primary school, and the

difference this can make in ending child poverty. Whilst some of the EAC projects will directly support children aged 9 months, at this stage we do not have firm data on participating families as this information will be collected through grant reporting and evaluation activity.

Grant offer letters for these projects have now been issued and in this current year the EACs will focus on engagement with families with younger children for the first time to understand more about their needs and what approaches could deliver the greatest impact for families with children of different ages. Small-scale delivery of early learning and childcare is also being established in a number of EAC communities. These tests of change will be a leading source of evidence and insights about the role childcare can play in supporting families most at risk of living in poverty.

In Shetland, for example, they have identified an ELC setting which currently delivers childcare for younger children as well as breakfast provision for school age children. Increased delivery in this area could offer key insights into both high-quality provision for two year olds in target groups, and models of breakfast provision in rural communities.

In Clackmannanshire, in addition to delivering ELC provision in nursery settings for under twos, they are aiming to strengthen their local infrastructure for baby and toddler groups. Clackmannanshire will extend their toddler groups to four communities, targeting families most in need. This aims to support isolated families and those furthest from support services, providing intervention and support for families at the earliest point, whilst delivering a service that is informed by families' needs. A further baby and toddler group with a specific focus on additional support needs will also be introduced.

The EACs will be a key element of our developing evidence base to inform a future childcare expansion for younger children. Other elements will include building on the research we have undertaken in 2023/24 including our [mapping work](#) and [evidence review](#) to help us understand and identify what models of early learning and childcare are best for younger children. We are also piloting new approaches to early learning and childcare for families with children under three via projects funded by the Whole Family Wellbeing Fund.

We know that the needs of younger children can be different from those of older children, and it is important that we take the time to better understand this through the work we have planned over the coming year.

## **Early Learning and Childcare**