

# **PE2112/I: Conduct an independent review of childcare costs and availability in Scotland**

## **Connect written submission, 12 December 2024**

In 2021 Connect conducted a survey of parents to gather their experiences of receiving their entitlement to 1140 hours of early learning and childcare, and I have included our summary and calls to action below which we believe are relevant to this petition, particularly regarding further research into how this is being realised for families.

The full survey report can be found here:

- [Connect parent/carer Early Learning and Children \(1140 hours\) Survey Report](#)

Just under one fifth of respondents say their needs are not being met by the early learning and childcare provision being offered to them. In some areas, the range and type of provision is not very varied or flexible in terms of meeting parents' and children's needs. From comments made by respondents, parental choice seems to be limited or non-existent. Connect would like to see more in-depth research to investigate to what extent the Scottish Government ambition of parental choice in early learning and childcare has been realised. Some models offered result in many funded hours being unused because they make no practical sense for families. We would welcome Audit Scotland or Scottish Government looking into this. It is imperative that provision is child-centred – families must not be forced to take excessively long hours if they don't feel it is right for their child.

Where centres pressure parents not to take up their full entitlement (e.g. by collecting children early or dropping them off late), this is clearly not acceptable and the reasons behind this (staffing, costs?) must be addressed. From the point where this policy was consulted on, Connect was concerned that families would be compelled to take up all 1140 hours when their preference was for fewer hours. This has been happening. Some local authority settings do allow informal flexibility where families take up less than their funded hours. However, the centres retain the full funding from Scottish Government. Open discussion about this needs to take place as there is a conflict between inbuilt centre costs and allowing families flexibility. Of particular concern is the fact that 23% of respondents said they were not kept informed about their child's learning or did not know if they were being kept informed. This has to change.