

F/T: 0300 244 4000
E: scottish.ministers@gov.scot

Bob Doris MSP
Deputy Convener
Social Justice and Social Security Committee
The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
EH99 1SP

By email: sjss.committee@parliament.scot

29 November 2024

Dear Deputy Convener,

ADDRESSING CHILD POVERTY THROUGH PARENTAL EMPLOYMENT REPORT – FOLLOW UP

Thank you for your correspondence of 7 November 2024, requesting updates in relation to selected recommendations made within the Committee's inquiry report published last year.

I welcome the Committee's continued focus on the important issue of addressing child poverty through parental employment, and your intent to continue to hold the Scottish Government to account on progress until the end of the current session. This will further strengthen the Scottish Government's own governance and accountability processes, including the oversight provided by the recently established Cabinet Sub-Committee on Child Poverty chaired by the First Minister.

As you know, ending child poverty is the Scottish Government's top priority and we will continue to do everything within the scope of our powers and limited budget to drive progress toward the stretching targets we have set. The Scottish Budget for 2025-26, to be published on Wednesday 4th December, will outline the investments we will make in the coming year to continue delivery of our ambitious programme of action.

The annex attached to this letter provides updates to the relevant recommendations.

Please do not hesitate to get in touch if you require any further information.

SHIRLEY-ANNE SOMERVILLE

Scottish Ministers, special advisers and the Permanent Secretary are covered by the terms of the Lobbying (Scotland) Act 2016. See www.lobbying.scot

St Andrew's House, Regent Road, Edinburgh EH1 3DG
www.gov.scot

Annex – Updates to Committee recommendations.

CHILDCARE

Committee ask: The Committee would welcome an update on the Scottish Government’s work to “develop an expanded national offer for more families with two-year-olds, focusing on those who will benefit most”, including the outcomes of its engagement with partners in the childcare sector, pilots and support to local authorities. The Committee would also be interested in an update on the Scottish Government’s progress in increasing the number of childminders in rural areas, including the impact of the recruitment pilots led by the Scottish Childminding Association.

Information on progress to improve childcare support for children with ASN would also be helpful, including:

- Progress since ASN has been introduced as a standalone unit within the Scottish Qualifications Authority’s Next Generation Higher National Childhood Practice award pilot
- Progress on the identification of gaps as part of the review of the National Occupation Standards.
- An update on the development of case studies in collaboration with the Improvement Service to highlight how the expansion of funded ELC is supporting children with ASN to access high quality funded ELC.

Scottish Government response:

Developing an expanded national offer

Ending child 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. We remain committed to reaching more younger children with funded early learning and childcare (ELC), targeting those that need it most, and the Programme for Government 2024-25 set out that this year we will work with local authorities to maximise take-up of our existing offer for eligible 2 year olds, with a focus on families most at risk of poverty and 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 take-up 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 authorities.

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, person centred work will help Scottish Government and our local partners to understand what it takes to deliver 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.

Scottish Ministers, special advisers and the Permanent Secretary are covered by the terms of the Lobbying (Scotland) Act 2016. See www.lobbying.scot



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. The engagement and targeted delivery that takes place for younger children will be a key element of our developing evidence base to inform a future expansion. Other elements include:

- Building on the research undertaken in 2023-24 to help us understand what different approaches to ELC are best for younger children; to learn from existing models and to review current evidence.
- Piloting new approaches to ELC for families with children under three via projects funded by the Whole Family Wellbeing Fund.
- Incorporating lessons from the 1140 expansion of funded ELC, including continued work to maximise uptake for the targeted offer to eligible two-year-olds.

We know that needs of younger children are 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.

Childminders in Rural Areas

Childminders are an essential part of the childcare sector, offering a high-quality, nurturing experience to children of all ages. We have seen declines in the childminding workforce over recent years – a trend that is mirrored elsewhere in the UK – and we have worked with the Scottish Childminding Association (SCMA) and other partners to support the recruitment and training of new professional childminders across Scotland through innovative childminder recruitment pilots.

These pilots gathered valuable lessons about effective recruitment to these roles – in particular, the need to allow more time for people to decide on a career change; how best to make information available; and the importance of local knowledge and networks in targeting recruitment activity. In July 2024, SCMA reported that these pilots had established 100 new childminding businesses, including 71 in rural areas.

Building upon this pilot work, as announced in the Programme for Government 2023-24, we committed to growing the childminding profession and have now funded the SCMA to deliver a new national 3-year programme of childminder recruitment and retention. Backed by more than £1 million of Scottish Government funding, the Programme for Scotland's Childminding Future launched on 5 June 2024.

The SCMA have scaled up their successful childminder recruitment approach across the country. The programme offers a £750 start-up grant to new childminding businesses, alongside a package of support and training available to successful applicants, providing everything needed to establish a new childminding business from home. The programme also includes a range of measures to address the retention of the childminding workforce, helping deliver more practical support and ensure existing professionals are supported with their workloads and professional development. This includes trialling, in a select number of rural, island and urban local authorities, a mentoring scheme and models of funded time to allow childminders to undertake activity such as planning and continuous professional learning.

Scottish Ministers, special advisers and the Permanent Secretary are covered by the terms of the Lobbying (Scotland) Act 2016. See www.lobbying.scot

St Andrew's House, Regent Road, Edinburgh EH1 3DG
www.gov.scot

INVESTORS IN PEOPLE™
We invest in people Silver



The recruitment programme is available in 17 local authorities in the first year, and the retention pilots are available across 9 areas – including several rural authorities – with the programme expected to be expanded to several new areas in year 2 (participation is subject to local authority service delivery planning). As of 31 October 2024, SCMA have received 833 initial enquiries for the recruitment programme, 115 of which have already enrolled onto the programme and are progressing through their training and induction.

Childcare Support for Children with Additional Support Needs (ASN)

We are committed to reducing inequalities from the earliest years. ELC practitioners are in a unique and important position to influence children’s development and have the capacity to create environments that encourage equity and inclusion.

The Scottish Qualifications Authority’s (SQA) Next Generation Higher National Childhood Practice award pilot framework, including an ASN module as mandatory unit, is being delivered for the first time in 2024-25. Early indications are that the changes have enhanced the qualification and are better preparing participants for the workplace.

Full roll out of the Next Generation Higher National Childhood Practice award will be subject to the outcome of the SQA quality assurance process for all new and revised qualifications, due to complete this month.

The review of National Occupational Standards (NOS) for the childcare workforce is underway and scheduled to be completed in December 2025, with stakeholders from across the childcare sector participating to ensure that the refreshed NOS address the full range of skills, knowledge and experience required to support children and young people.

Following completion, the suite of qualifications that allow people to register and work with children and young people (which are derived directly from the NOS) will be reviewed to ensure they provide the childcare profession with the relevant skills, knowledge and experience to meet the NOS.

In relation to collaborative work with the Improvement Service to highlight how the expansion of funded ELC is supporting children with ASN to access high quality funded ELC, three [case studies](#) are now available on the Improvement Service website. The Scottish Government has also worked with the Improvement Service to deliver a national online learning event for the ELC sector to explore how settings can ensure that a child’s ASN is not a barrier to them accessing their funded ELC hours. Drawing on the case studies, the event aimed to strengthen attendees understanding of effective ASN provision in the early years, and to provide simple and practical methods of how to implement ASN inclusive practice in their settings. A [learning event resource pack](#), including a recording of the webinar, is also available on the improvement Service website.

Scottish Ministers, special advisers and the Permanent Secretary are covered by the terms of the Lobbying (Scotland) Act 2016. See www.lobbying.scot

St Andrew’s House, Regent Road, Edinburgh EH1 3DG
www.gov.scot

INVESTORS IN PEOPLE™
We invest in people Silver



EMPLOYABILITY

Committee ask: The Scottish Government committed “to publishing a breakdown of employability funding per Local Authority for the coming financial year once budget processes have concluded, with specific detail of investment targeted towards parental employability included.” The Committee asks the Scottish Government to provide the detail of the investment targeted towards parental employability to inform the reports’ recommendations as well as its budget scrutiny.

Scottish Government response:

Scottish Government funding allocations for No One Left Behind by Local Authority are available on the [Employability in Scotland website](#). Information in future financial years will now be published as a matter of course.

In 2024-25, the Scottish Government has made a total of £75.2 million available to Local Authorities for the delivery of No One Left Behind. This is comprised of £35.6 million for No One Left Behind provision, £40.1 million for Parental Employability Support and £2.5 million for Employability Child Poverty Coordinator posts.

TRANSPORT

Committee ask: As well as issues around childcare, the report highlighted transport issues specific to rural areas and the Committee would welcome an update on investment in Demand Responsive Transport to improve public transport and connectivity in rural areas. In June 2024, the last Best Start Bright Future progress report referred to the evaluation of a range of projects concluding in 2024-25. The Committee would welcome an update on the evaluation and findings from the projects.

Scottish Government response:

Demand Responsive Transport (DRT) was investigated as part of the Scottish Government’s Mobility as a Service (MaaS) Investment Fund which aimed to provide people with better travel information, ticket booking and payment services so they can decide how to undertake their journey.

Included in the “Go-Hi” MaaS project in the Highlands and Islands region, Highland and Islands Transport Partnership (HITRANS) created the “Moove Flexi” DRT service. By providing an online booking app, it allows users to book on-demand public transport where they can then pay directly on the app using a smartphone, track their bus in real-time and use the in-app map to book a bus directly to their chosen pick-up point. The service currently runs in the Ferintosh and Durness areas, where it has been well received with plans to expand the service to Orkney through their seven community transport services.

The DRT service M.Connect in the Moray Council area also continues to build its user base with a series of drop-in engagement sessions planned from now till March 2025 to further promote the service. Shetland’s Transport Partnership (ZetTrans) carried out a DRT Feasibility study in the Shetland islands where one of the main findings was that for some of the more sparsely populated areas it would be challenging for developing a financially viable DRT project. The South East of Scotland Transport Partnership’s (SEStran) MaaS project

Scottish Ministers, special advisers and the Permanent Secretary are covered by the terms of the Lobbying (Scotland) Act 2016. See www.lobbying.scot



“Go SEStran” also trialled a DRT pilot on the 109 Prentice of Haddington bus service in East Lothian with mixed results – integration of the technology in a rural area proved harder than anticipated and the short project timescales did not allow for generation of sufficient passenger numbers to merit continuation of the scheme.

Acknowledging the importance of DRT in helping to provide improved public transport connectivity, from 2025-26 it has now been included in the portfolio of sustainable travel projects eligible for funding through Transport Scotland’s People and Place programme. These place-based sustainable and active travel behaviour change projects will support people to make more of their daily journeys by walking, wheeling, and cycling, and bridge the gaps between those journeys and the public transport network with options that are more sustainable than the private car.

EDUCATION – FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR PART-TIME STUDENTS

Committee ask: In its response to the Committee on financial support for part-time students, the Scottish Government agreed action was needed and that “it would undertake a review of student support for part-time learners to improve the parity of support on offer, especially for those who are returning to learning and may have other caring or work-related responsibilities.” We are aware the Education, Children and Young People Committee has also highlighted the lack of equality between part-time and full-time students in relation to financial support as part of its pre-budget scrutiny. We are therefore looking forward to getting further details on the work being undertaken to address issues faced by part-time learners and provide financial support.

Scottish Government response:

We have made a commitment to undertake a review of student support for part-time and distance learning students. We are in the process of considering the best way to engage with the sector to ensure that the relevant views of key stakeholders and students are captured. All issues impacting on part-time students will be given careful consideration as part of this Review. As an initial step, we have opened up living cost support to disabled students who are studying full-time distance learning courses and who are unable to study campus based courses because of their disability.

EDUCATION – INDIVIDUAL TRAINING ACCOUNTS (ITAS)

Committee ask: In relation to the future of ITAs, the Scottish Government indicated in its response to the Committee that no decision had been made on their continuation or level of funding because of budget challenges. The Committee would benefit from an update on the matter.

Scottish Government response:

As outlined in the Minister for Higher and Further Education’s [letter](#) to the Education, Children and Young People Committee, of 16 April 2024, due to the continuation of unprecedented challenges on the budget of the Scottish Government and its agencies, no funds were available in the SDS budget allocation for the delivery of the ITA scheme in 2024-25.

Scottish Ministers, special advisers and the Permanent Secretary are covered by the terms of the Lobbying (Scotland) Act 2016. See www.lobbying.scot

St Andrew’s House, Regent Road, Edinburgh EH1 3DG
www.gov.scot

INVESTORS IN PEOPLE™
We invest in people Silver



While we are still to understand the full impact of the UK Government's Budget Statement last month, it is clear that there will continue to be significant financial pressures in the coming year. Although discussions on the Scottish Budget for 2025-26 continue, it is unlikely we will see an improvement in the SDS budget to the extent it would be able to support delivery of ITAs in the coming year without a reduction in apprenticeship funding or other SDS services.

Support for people who are out of work or working parents will continue to be available through other Scottish Government initiatives, such as the No One Left Behind, delivered at a local authority level through the local employability partnerships. Individuals looking for training opportunities and funding can also continue to contact SDS for advice on available options and access SDS career advice and support services, as well as their online learning portal that offers access to a wide range online learning including free courses.

Scottish Ministers, special advisers and the Permanent Secretary are covered by the terms of the Lobbying (Scotland) Act 2016. See www.lobbying.scot

St Andrew's House, Regent Road, Edinburgh EH1 3DG
www.gov.scot

INVESTORS IN PEOPLE™
We invest in people Silver

