

Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee

14th Meeting, 2022 (Session 6), Wednesday
26 October 2022

PE1907: Provide funded early learning &
childcare for all 2-year olds in Scotland

Note by the Clerk

Lodged on 26 October 2021

Petitioner Claire Beats

**Petition
summary** Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to provide funded early learning and childcare for all 2 year olds, removing eligibility criteria for access to services.

Webpage <https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE1907>

Introduction

1. The Committee last considered this petition at its meeting on [23 March 2022](#). At that meeting, the Committee agreed to write to the Scottish Government.
2. The petition summary is included in **Annexe A** and the Official Report of the Committee's last consideration of this petition is at **Annexe B**.
3. The Committee has received a response from the Scottish Government, which is set out in **Annexe C**.
4. Written submissions received prior to the Committee's last consideration can be found on the [petition's webpage](#).
5. Further background information about this petition can be found in the [SPICe briefing](#) for this petition.

6. The Scottish Government's initial position on this petition can be found on the [petition's webpage](#).

Action

The Committee is invited to consider what action it wishes to take.

Clerk to the Committee

Annexe A

PE1907: Provide funded early learning & childcare for all 2-year olds in Scotland

Petitioner

Claire Beats

Date lodged

26 October 2021

Petition summary

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to provide funded early learning and childcare for all 2 year olds, removing eligibility criteria for access to services.

Previous action

I have previously been in contact with Fergus Ewing MSP who advised me the idea was sound and to begin a petition for the matter.

Background information

Currently, the availability of early learning and childcare funding for 2-year-old children depends on certain eligibility criteria, such as their parents being in receipt of benefits or being vulnerable.

Lockdown babies especially have suffered from lack of play experiences, meeting peers, and opportunities that other children have always had. Enabling this new generation the chance to have funded nursery at 2 years old will greatly increase their potential. It will also help a lot of parents that are struggling financially as a result of Covid-19 job loss, for example.

As an early years practitioner I know what these babies have missed out on. Children have experienced facial expressions covered up in shops when normally they'd be smiled at, cancelled then limited baby groups, and soft play closed for 18 months. These kids need the chance to catch up on play and learning spaces they have missed out on.

https://www.midlothian.gov.uk/info/851/early_learning_nurseries_and_childcare/135/your_early_learning_and_childcare_options/3

Annexe B

Extract from Official Report of last consideration of PE1907 on 23 March 2022

The Convener: PE1907, which was lodged by Claire Beats, calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to provide funded early learning and childcare for all two-year-olds in Scotland and remove the eligibility criteria for access to services. Submissions have been received from the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, the National Day Nurseries Association and the petitioner, as we requested.

COSLA's submission references the delay in the implementation of additional funded early learning hours resulting from the pandemic and work to increase capacity in early learning centre settings. It welcomes the increased uptake of places for two-year-olds, but recognises that further work is needed to fully engage the families of eligible children. COSLA stresses the importance of taking

“a planned and considered approach to create additional capacity”.

The NDNA's submission explains that it is

“the national charity representing private, voluntary and independent ... children's nurseries across the UK”.

It states that

“Expanding funded ELC to all 2 year olds would be of benefit to children and families”,

and it references recent survey findings that show “significant impacts” on babies born during the lockdowns. The NDNA references the role of early learning in providing

“wide-ranging opportunities for the child to develop their skills and knowledge through activities and interactions”.

However, the NDNA also highlights concerns about the implications for the private, voluntary and independent sector of increasing the funded offer to all two-year-olds. It refers to recent recruitment difficulties and the impact of underfunding on the sustainability of nurseries and the viability of children's places, and it states that

“any universal funded provision for 2-year-olds must be sufficiently funded at rates that ... reflect the cost of delivery”.

That is something that local nurseries have raised with me.

In her submission, the petitioner states that, as a nursery practitioner and the mother of a baby born in 2020, she sees the challenges arising from the fact that babies who were born during lockdown had little to no socialisation outside of the home because baby groups were closed. The petitioner believes that babies born during lockdown should have the same access to funded learning and childcare, regardless of their parents' financial situation, adding that research suggests that lockdown-born babies are not at the same developmental levels as non-lockdown-born babies. I find that interesting.

Having considered the representations that we have received, I think that there are a number of actions that we might wish to consider. Would anyone like to offer any suggestions?

David Torrance: I think that we should keep the petition open and write to the Scottish Government to ask when it intends to implement its commitment to expand its early learning offer to all one and two-year-olds. We should also ask for the Government's views on the submissions received on the petition, particularly those expressing concern about the impact that the pandemic has had on the development of babies born during lockdown, and for its plans to address those concerns.

The Convener: Are we all happy with that? On the basis of what we have heard, we will take forward what David Torrance has suggested. The petition remains open and we will see what response we receive.

Annexe C

Scottish Government submission of 14 June 2022

PE1907/E: Provide funded early learning & childcare for all 2-year olds in Scotland

New commitment

1. In the Programme for Government, we set out our commitment to expand early learning and childcare to 1 and 2 year olds, starting in this Parliament with children from low income households. From early consideration of the evidence and engagement with the sector, it is clear that a simple roll-down of the expansion for 3 and 4 year olds is not appropriate. As such, this year (2022-23) we will begin engagement with families, the early learning and childcare sector and academic experts to design how the new offer can best support children and families.

Impact of COVID-19 on child development

2. During 2020 and 2021, protective measures related to COVID-19 curtailed many interactions young children would regularly have in early learning and childcare (ELC) settings and social contexts that provide learning experiences.
3. Studies have suggested negative short to medium term impacts on children's sleep, mood, behaviour and development – especially social and emotional, and speech and language development – among a large minority of young children.^[4]
4. We know that COVID-19 has impacted young children over the past two years in a number of different ways. For example, [a report from Scottish Directors of Public Health](#) earlier this year highlighted that the proportion of children recorded as having one or more developmental concerns (at 13–15 months and 27–30 months) has increased in 2021, having been more stable in 2020.

^[4] [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): Advisory Sub-Group on Education and Children's Issues - children, schools, early learning and childcare settings - evidence summary - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\); COVID-19 Early Years Resilience and Impact Survey](#)

5. We are continuing to engage with partners to identify and better understand these impacts on young children, so that we can respond to their needs.
6. Providing high-quality ELC services, including access to outdoor learning, will play an important role in mitigating some of the negative impacts.
7. To support the children who stand to benefit most from high quality ELC provision, the Scottish Government continues to provide funding for additional graduate level posts in our most disadvantaged communities across all 32 local authorities.
8. These Equity and Excellence leads support quality improvement by modelling pedagogical practice and upskilling other practitioners, as well as working directly with children to improve their learning experiences.
9. A range of quality improvement support is in place at the national level, complementing the support that is being delivered by local authorities, including the Care Inspectorate's Quality Improvement Programme, which is funded by the Scottish Government.
10. In addition, the Scottish Government is funding a range of professional learning resources for ELC practitioners, which are directly relevant to supporting COVID-19 recovery, including modules supporting: parents to further engage in their children's development; the development and progression of children's early language and literacy, and; building confidence in identifying and responding to additional support needs.