

Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee  
Wednesday 25 September 2024  
14th Meeting, 2024 (Session 6)

## PE2101: Provide Defibrillators for all Primary and Secondary Schools in Scotland

### Introduction

**Petitioner** Peter Earl on behalf of Troqueer Primary School

**Petition summary** Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to provide Primary and Secondary Schools with Automated External Defibrillators (AED).

**Webpage** <https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE2101>

1. This is a new petition that was lodged on 21 May 2024.
2. A full summary of this petition and its aims can be found at **Annexe A**.
3. A SPICe briefing has been prepared to inform the Committee's consideration of the petition and can be found at **Annexe B**.
4. Every petition collects signatures while it remains under consideration. At the time of writing, 555 signatures have been received on this petition.
5. The Committee seeks views from the Scottish Government on all new petitions before they are formally considered.
6. The Committee has received submissions from the Minister for Public Health and Women's Health, and Finlay Carson MSP, which are set out in **Annexe C** of this paper.
7. The Committee is also considering petition [PE1989: Increase defibrillators in public spaces and workplaces](#).

### Action

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

**Clerks to the Committee**  
**September 2024**

## **Annexe A: Summary of petition**

### **PE2101: Provide Defibrillators for all Primary and Secondary Schools in Scotland**

#### **Petitioner**

Peter Earl on behalf of Troqueer Primary School

#### **Date Lodged**

21 May 2024

#### **Petition summary**

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to provide Primary and Secondary Schools with Automated External Defibrillators (AED).

#### **Background information**

After a trip to our local Operation Safety event, we looked into the availability of defibrillators in our local area. We were shocked to find out how under resourced our local area was. We do have a local defibrillator but we discovered it was too far away to have a positive impact on anybody who might suffer a cardiac arrest at our school. During events, busy periods we could have up to 400 - 500 people on site. It is not safe enough to not have an AED at hand.

We decided to raise money to buy an AED ourselves. We have learned a lot about enterprise, AEDs, the circulatory system, and how important these devices are.

Our schools are worryingly under resourced compared to other parts of the UK. Providing defibrillators in schools will also help local communities and should be considered as a matter of urgency. The lives of pupils and staff members are being put at risk.

Please help us to get them provided in ALL schools.

## Annexe B: SPICe briefing on PE2101



### Brief overview of issues raised by the petition

[PE2101](#) calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to provide all primary and secondary schools in Scotland with [Automated External Defibrillators \(AEDs\)](#). The petitioner stated that they looked into the availability of AEDs in their local area as part of a recent school activity, and found that their nearest AED was too far away to be used in an emergency. Troqueer Primary School can have up to 400-500 people on the premises during busy times, and the petitioner stated that it felt unsafe for them not to have access to an AED. Additionally, the petition noted that installing AEDs in schools could help the wider local community.

The petitioner's school raised money to purchase its own AED, and has used this fundraising activity as an opportunity to educate pupils about the circulatory system, and the importance of AEDs.

### Impact of AEDs upon out-of-hospital cardiac arrests

According to the Scottish Ambulance Service's [out-of-hospital cardiac arrests \(OHCAs\) report 2019-22](#), an average of 3,140 OHCAs occur in Scotland every year. The survival rate of OHCAs in the UK is around 8%; however, [a systematic review of studies exploring the use of defibrillators](#) found that when AEDs were attached by bystanders during OHCAs, the median survival rate increased to 32%.

### Public availability of AEDs

The number of AEDs in Scotland [doubled between 2019 and 2022](#), with almost 5,000 AEDs currently available in communities. AEDs were deployed by members of the public before the arrival of an ambulance in 8% of out-of-hospital cardiac arrests during this period. This represents an increase from 2.5% from 2011-15. The Scottish Government's [Out-of-Hospital Cardiac Arrest Strategy 2021-26](#) aims to ensure that AEDs are deployed in at least 20% of OHCAs by 2026.

People living in Scotland's most deprived areas are [twice as likely to experience an OHCA](#). However, public spaces in deprived areas are [significantly less likely to have AEDs installed](#). Defibrillator guardians are strongly encouraged to register AEDs with [The Circuit UK-wide defibrillator network](#). However, there is currently no requirement to do so.

## AEDs in schools

In January 2024, data obtained through Freedom of Information requests submitted by the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party showed that approximately four in ten Scottish schools [do not currently have a defibrillator](#). It is thought that this figure could be an underestimate, as six of Scotland's 32 local authorities did not respond to Freedom of Information requests.

In response to [a recent Parliamentary question](#) on this topic, Jenni Minto MSP stated that the installation of AEDs in schools is a decision for local authorities. Some local authorities have installed AEDs in schools. For example, [Edinburgh City Council](#) has overseen the installation of AEDs in each of the city's secondary schools, with plans to complete installation of AEDs in all primary schools. North Ayrshire's [secondary schools all have AEDs](#) due to local fundraising and campaigning efforts. [Clackmannanshire Council](#) has also installed AEDs in each of the region's secondary schools. The installation of AEDs in primary schools appears to be less widespread in Scotland, though data is not consistently reported.

In England, all state-funded schools are required to have at least one AED on site. The UK Government [provided AEDs to state schools](#) that did not already have one on site, to ensure that all schools met this requirement by the end of the 2022/23 academic year. [Non-statutory guidance](#) was produced by the UK Government to support schools in procuring AEDs, and to guide schools in decision-making regarding community access to their AEDs. The UK Government [confirmed in July 2023](#) that all state schools in England now have at least one AED on school grounds.

## Scottish Government actions

In [the Scottish Government's response](#) to PE2101, Jenni Minto MSP stated that "decisions on the installation and maintenance of defibrillators in schools is a matter for Local Authorities to consider at the local level. Funding for Local Authorities is provided through the annual block grant settlement from the Scottish Government and they should use funding resources allocated to them in the manner which they believe will best meet local needs and circumstances within their respective areas."

Ms Minto further responded that the Scottish Government's Out-of-Hospital Cardiac Arrest Strategy 2021-26 aims to increase the percentage of OHCA's which have a defibrillator applied before the arrival of the ambulance service to 20%. To achieve this, the [Save a Life for Scotland](#) Partnership, in which the Scottish Government is a partner, is working to support defibrillator guardians to make strategic decisions about the placement of their defibrillators, to encourage their registration with Scottish Ambulance Service and to increase public confidence and knowledge around defibrillation.

She added that the [Resuscitation Research Group](#) at the University of Edinburgh is developing [a tool to show where AEDs are most likely to be required](#), in order to guide optimal placement. This project is funded by the Scottish Government.

## Scottish Parliament actions

The Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee is currently also considering [PE1989: Increase defibrillators in public spaces and workplaces](#). The National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT) [submitted written evidence to the Committee](#) in support of this petition, outlining NASUWT Scotland's position that every PE teacher should be fully trained in the use of defibrillators, and that every school should have one installed.

**Sarah Swift**  
**Researcher**

17 June 2024

The purpose of this briefing is to provide a brief overview of issues raised by the petition. SPICe research specialists are not able to discuss the content of petition briefings with petitioners or other members of the public. However, if you have any comments on any petition briefing you can email us at [spice@parliament.scot](mailto:spice@parliament.scot)

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in petition briefings is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware however that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.

Published by the Scottish Parliament Information Centre (SPICe), an office of the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body, The Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh, EH99 1SP

## Annexe C: Written submission

### Minister for Public Health and Women's Health submission of 4 June 2024

#### PE2101/A: Provide Defibrillators for all Primary and Secondary Schools in Scotland

In response to PE2101, the Scottish Government would first like to thank Peter Earl and others at Troqueer Primary School for their fundraising to purchase and place a defibrillator. In doing so, they have played a vital part in improving survival from Out of Hospital Cardiac Arrest (OHCA) in Scotland.

The committee may be aware that the Scottish Government is a key partner in the Save a Life for Scotland partnership, which is responsible for the delivery of the [Out of Hospital Cardiac Arrest strategy 2021 to 2026](#). This includes the aim of increasing the percentage of OHCA which have a defibrillator applied before the arrival of the ambulance service to 20%.

To achieve this aim, the Save a Life for Scotland partnership is working to build the evidence base to support defibrillator guardians to make strategic decisions about the placement of their defibrillators, to encourage their registration with Scottish Ambulance Service and to increase public confidence and knowledge around defibrillation.

Mr Earl notes in his petition that *'we do have a local defibrillator but we discovered it was too far away to have a positive impact on anybody who might suffer a cardiac arrest at our school'*. We agree that the strategic placement of defibrillators is important to maximise their impact. A body of international evidence shows that the current approach in many countries to defibrillator placement results in over-provision in areas of lower risk.

To address this, the Research Resuscitation Group at Edinburgh University, supported by funding from the Scottish Government, is developing a tool (SCOT-PAD) to support organisations and communities with more evidence on the optimal location to place their defibrillator to increase its potential impact.

With regard to the Petition's main request – that the Scottish Government provide Primary and Secondary Schools with Automated External Defibrillators, I should explain that the Scottish Government does not routinely provide funding for defibrillators, though a number of other organisations do provide advice and support for the purchasing and maintenance of defibrillators.

This includes:

- The British Heart Foundation - [Defibrillator funding for your local community - BHF](#)

- St Johns Scotland - [Public Access Community Defibrillators | St John Scotland](#).

Decisions on the installation and maintenance of defibrillators in schools is a matter for Local Authorities to consider at the local level. Funding for Local Authorities is provided through the annual block grant settlement from the Scottish Government and they should use funding resources allocated to them in the manner which they believe will best meet local needs and circumstances within their respective areas.

**Jenni Minto MSP**

## **Finlay Carson MSP written submission, 10 September 2024**

### **PE2101/B: Provide Defibrillators for all Primary and Secondary Schools in Scotland**

I am delighted to learn that the petition, PE2101, Provide Defibrillators for all Primary and Secondary Schools in Scotland, has now been published.

As you are possibly aware, I am a strong supporter of this petition, having previously visited the pupils at Troqueer Primary in my constituency of Galloway and West Dumfries.

During my visit I listened to the pupils and, indeed, advised them that I believed submitting a petition to be considered by the Scottish Parliament's Citizen Participation & Public Petitions Committee would be the best way forward.

I was joined by Roger Hill who has been raising awareness and fundraising for the charity CRY (Cardiac Risk in the Young).

Roger, who lost his son David, who worked at the Scottish Parliament, raised more than £25,000 during a marathon cycle journey from Edinburgh to Dublin calling at 11 secondary schools in Dumfries and Galloway to highlight Sudden Cardiac Death. His amazing efforts will result in local secondary schools being gifted defibrillators.

Previously, on 20 March 2024, I lodged a written question asking the Scottish Government whether it plans to provide funding for defibrillators to be made available in all schools across Scotland.

In her response, Minister Jenni Minto confirmed funding for local authorities is provided through the annual block grant settlement from the Scottish Government. Local authorities should use funding resources allocated to them in the manner which they believe will best meet local needs and circumstances within their respective areas.

Decisions on the installation and maintenance of defibrillators in schools is a matter for local authorities to consider at the local level. A number of organisations provide advice and support for the purchasing and maintenance of defibrillators including the British Heart Foundation and St Johns Scotland.

The children at Troqueer Primary have worked tirelessly in their quest that every school in Scotland has access to an Automated External Defibrillators – something that is provided in all schools in England and Wales via funding from the UK Government.

They looked into the availability of defibrillators in the immediate local area and were shocked to find out how under resourced the local area was.

While there is a local defibrillator, the youngsters discovered it was too far away to have a positive impact on anybody who might suffer a cardiac arrest at the school.

As they correctly pointed out, during busy periods they can have up to 500 people on site.

Can I highlight and commend their actions in raising money to buy an AED, having learned about enterprise, the circulatory system, and, crucially, how important these devices are.

As they point out, rightly so, how worryingly under resourced Scottish schools are compared to their counterparts south of the border. Providing them should be considered as a matter of urgency.

Unfortunately, due to other commitments as convener of the Rural Affairs and Islands Committee, I will be unable to attend the Citizen Participation And Public Petitions Committee to voice my support for this particular petition.