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Convener
Education, Children and Young People Committee
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5 June 2025

Dear Convener,

In tandem with your request to the Minister for Children, Young People and the Promise, the Minister for Higher and Further Education and I to attend Committee on the 11th June, your clerks have requested written updates on various items in advance of this session.

Please find responses to each of the Committee's requests set out in annex A.

My ministerial colleagues and I will look forward to engaging further with the Committee on these issues and others across the Education and Skills portfolio next week.

Yours sincerely,

JENNY GILRUTH
Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills

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Annex A

Additional Support Needs

1. Since the Committee's inquiry into Additional Support for Learning (ASL) last year we have continued to deliver our ASL Action Plan. The third Progress Report was published in November 2024 and since then we have completed a further 13 actions. We have record investment in ASL. Over £1bn was spent by local authorities in 23/24 and the Scottish Government has committed a further investment of £29 million in the 25/26 budget for local and national programmes to support the recruitment, retention and training of the ASN workforce.
2. It should also be noted that pupils with additional needs continue to achieve. The attainment gap for children with Additional Support Needs is closing (ACEL Stats 11 Dec 2024) and initial destinations for pupils with additional needs have improved over the long term. In the coming year we will continue to deliver the three priorities identified for the next phase of work in relation to the Action Plan and the commitments in the Programme for Government.
3. We acknowledge that the significant rise in the number of children with additional support needs in recent years presents challenges and that the context has changed significantly since the Additional Support for Learning Act was passed over 20 years ago. We have welcomed the work of the Committee, Audit Scotland and the Children and Young People's Commissioner and we have committed to engage in a cross-party roundtable with Local Government to discuss what more can be done to support Additional Support Needs in our schools. We have also agreed to a review of Additional Support for Learning, the scope and detail of which will be informed by this engagement.

Revised Statutory Guidance

4. In the third Progress Report, published in November 2024, the ASL Project Board committed to focusing on the delivery of the remaining actions set out within the ASL Action Plan before the end of this Parliamentary term. To deliver this, there will be a particular focus on communications, the National Measurement Framework for Additional Support for Learning, and consulting on a refreshed code of practice.
5. A Code of Practice working group is in place and they have been engaging with a wide range of policy areas to consider existing and emerging policy developments that are likely to interact with or impact the refreshed guidance. As the developments have been considered and drafts have been produced, an iterative process has been underway with policy colleagues and key stakeholders, to ensure that this work takes account of the refresh of the GIRFEC Policy and Practice Guidance as well as to ensure cognisance and alignment with other key pieces of work.
6. In response to the Committee's Report on Additional Support for Learning, additional consideration has been given to a number of key areas to respond to the findings of that report. The refreshed Code of Practice will provide further clarity that a diagnosis is not required in order to secure additional support for learning. It will also set out clearer information on the reasons for the decision around placing requests that fall under the 2004 Act.

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7. The refreshed Code of Practice will also strengthen the transitions chapter to reflect the concerns regarding transitions between primary and secondary school setting and greater clarity will be provided on the relationship between the Co-ordinated Support Plans (CSPs) and other children and young people plans within a staged intervention model.
8. Importantly, there will be further opportunities for wider stakeholders to provide feedback during our public consultation exercise, which is currently planned for early Autumn 2025.

Research on Masking

9. We agreed to the recommendation made by the Committee to undertake a literature review in this area to better understand this trend and to provide advice to the education system accordingly and we have been scoping out this area of work.
10. In considering how to take this work forward officials have reviewed the resources developed by the National Autism Implementation Team (NAIT) on [autistic masking](#) and [support for parents](#) which provide an excellent background on autistic masking and advice on how a professional may support a person who may be masking. The resource for professionals provides an excellent basis for strengthening existing resources but officials are conscious that it is focused on autistic masking.
11. NAIT also undertook a literature review of masking, with a particular focus on Autism, in 2022. We are keen to build on this existing knowledge, to update it, and to enhance it to include wider considerations references above. We have been working with NAIT to scope out this work, and whilst timelines are still being finalised, we anticipate that this will take place over the Summer of 2025

Improving Access to Services and Cross-Government Working

12. We continue to work with NHS Boards to closely monitor the CAMHS Service Specification's implementation, to improve services and support for children and young people with mental health problems, and their families. For the first time ever, national performance against the 18-week CAMHS standard has been met, with 90.6% of children and young people starting treatment within 18 weeks of referral (quarter ending December 2024). However, it is also important to recognise that as a specialist service, CAMHS will only provide the right support for a small proportion of children and young people. Many children and young people will find more suitable support in their local community, and this should be quickly and easily accessible.
13. Additionally, as set out in the [National CAMHS Service Specification](#), we expect health boards to provide sensitive and appropriate signposting to a more suitable service such as those provided by our community-based supports. We have provided local authorities with over £65 million since 2020 to fund community-based mental health and wellbeing supports and services for children, young people and their families. This £15 million per year funding will continue through the local government finance settlement from 2025-26.
14. The Scottish Government is also taking action to improve services and support for children and young people with neurodevelopmental concerns. As set out in the National Neurodevelopmental Specification for Children and Young People, Health boards and children's services partners must work together to ensure that children and families receive

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support and access to services that meet their needs at the earliest opportunity, and this should not be dependent on a formal diagnosis of a neurodevelopmental condition.

15. In 2024/25 we provided almost £250,000 to fund a range of individual projects to improve neurodevelopmental assessment and support for children and young people and, in partnership with COSLA, the Scottish Government has recently undertaken a review of the implementation of the Neurodevelopmental Specification. This review will support development of positive next steps that will support health boards and local authorities to implement the Specification and make improvements to the support and services experiences by families.
16. We are investing in a programme of work to support early intervention in speech, language and communication development for pre-school children and their families. The National Early Language and Communication team, made up of seven senior speech and language therapists seconded to Education Scotland, is in place until August/September 2025. This team are working in partnership with local teams and at a national level on prevention and early support, and across the whole system to support improved outcomes for children in relation to their early language and communication needs. The Programme for Government includes a commitment to publishing an Early Years Speech and Language action plan by autumn 2025, setting out practical steps to support children's early speech and language development.

Placing Requests

17. We committed to engaging with partners to explore current placing request practice in relation to specialist provisions as well as the grounds of refusal of requests by local authorities and the Additional Support Needs Tribunal. This work is ongoing and as mentioned above, an element of the Code of Practice consultation will be to explore how we can provide further clarity on the reasons for the decision around placing requests that fall under the 2004 Act. The Scottish Government has already agreed to a review of ASL and this matter will be given further consideration in that context.

Schools' Physical Environment

18. Since the recommendations of the Committee were accepted by the Scottish Government, engagement has been undertaken with a range of stakeholders in relation to physical environments. Some of these participants were contributors to the inquiry, while others have been identified by widening the remit to include academics involved in research, designers of learning environments and experts who have been involved in producing recent accessibility design guidance.
19. It has become evident that while ASL is a broad scope, many of the issues raised in the inquiry relate to sensory experience which can be more acute for people with neurodiverse characteristics. As research and dialogue in this arena has developed in recent years, it is anticipated that guidance supplementary to existing Scottish Government documents published in 2014 would be beneficial.
20. An event to engage with stakeholders is planned for June which will:

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- widen appreciation of the issues experienced by people with sensory issues
- introduce the principles of “Designing for the Mind”
- share examples of how physical environments can support or detract from user experience.

21. The guidance which is currently in development is planned to be applicable to both existing and future projects across the whole learning estate. This guidance is intended to be published before the end of 2025 and, in the interim, local authorities and their designers can reference a publicly accessible standard titled: “Design for the Mind – Neurodiversity and the Built Environment”.

Accreditation of Pupil Support Staff

22. To ensure pupil support staff can provide the best possible support for our learners, the Scottish Government undertook a comprehensive review of PSS support and accreditation which has resulting in a report exploring options for the establishment of an Accredited Qualification and Registration Programme specifically tailored for PSS professionals.

23. We anticipate that this report will be published in the coming weeks. The delays experienced in its finalisation have been primarily due to competing priorities within the portfolio and the necessary timescales required for meaningful engagement with a diverse range of stakeholders to ensure well-considered set of options.

24. The report will highlight the significant value of the readily available PSS Professional Learning Framework. It will also propose the expansion of learning opportunities for PSS through diverse formats. A key recommendation within the report is the development of a free, national induction programme to ensure a consistent foundation of knowledge and skills for all individuals entering these vital roles

ASL Spend

25. Angela Morgan’s review did not extend to resourcing. However, we did recognise the importance of this, which is why we ensured that the ASL Action Plan included an action for Audit Scotland to consider how additional support for learning is resourced. The Auditor General and Accounts Commission published their briefing on ASL on 27 February this year (2025).

26. We welcome the briefing on ASL which helpfully identifies areas for improvement but also acknowledges the complexity of ASL. The briefing highlighted that the funding arrangements for ASN are complex and there are various funding streams which are about additionality and are not intended to recognise the totality of the cost in relation to ASL. Ministers will shortly be meeting with the Auditor General to discuss the issues raised in his review further. As already outlined the review of ASL provides an opportunity for this issue to be given further consideration in that context.

27. Any such review will require the participation of not just education experts, but also health, social work and others as well as the participation of parents and young people themselves. It also needs to link with wider work we are undertaking on areas such as education reform and improvement, including on the curriculum, qualifications, the physical environment in schools.

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Progress on the National Transitions Strategy

28. The original 2021 Programme for Government commitment was to introduce a National Transitions to Adulthood Strategy within this parliamentary term, which we are still on track to achieving.
29. The intention was to publish the strategy before the end of 2024, however, as the Committee will be aware, the Minister for Children, Young People and the Promise wrote to them on 28 October 2024 to provide notice of a short planned extension to this timeline. This decision was considered necessary in order to give the fullest consideration to the extensive and invaluable contributions made by those who attended the solution focussed engagement sessions held over the summer of 2024. In addition to this, the Minister gave a Parliamentary Statement on 20 November 2024 on improving transitions for young disabled people, including the decision to extend the planned publication timeline from the end of 2024 to spring 2025.
30. The intention remains to publish the strategy before the summer recess. This will include publishing in a range of accessible formats. This update was recently given to the Committee, along with a commitment to send an advance copy of the strategy to the Committee a day before its publication.
31. The Scottish Government is grateful for the Committee's ongoing interest in, and commitment to the strategy. Actions needed to improve the experience of transitions for disabled young people are already underway. For example, we are already:
- Reinforcing our commitment that all planning and support for disabled children and young people should be underpinned by Getting it right for every child - our national approach to supporting the wellbeing, and improving outcomes of our children and young people
 - Developing GIRFE, which builds on existing adult best practice and the learning from GIRFEC, supporting individuals as they transition from children to adult services and taking a person-centred multi-agency approach.
 - Providing funding through the Children, Young People, Families and Adult Learning Third Sector Fund to support the Association of Real Change (ARC) Scotland to continue to run the Scottish Transitions Forum, and to support the wider implementation of Principles into Practice across more local authorities in Scotland.
 - Investing in the Independent Living Fund Scotland's Transition Fund to support young disabled people between the ages of 16 and 25 to transition to adulthood. The ILF Transition Fund has made more than 11,300 awards to young people totalling nearly £22m, since opening at the end of 2017, making a positive difference to the lives of thousands of young disabled people.

ASN and National e-Learning Offer

32. Our young people's education is of utmost importance, and we want to see all children and young people receive the support they need to reach their full potential. It is important to highlight that education authorities have specific duties to provide education to children and young people who are unable to attend school due to prolonged ill health (usually via hospital education or learning at home) or who are excluded from school (s14 of the 1980 Act). They also have duties under the Additional Support for Learning Act 2004 to identify, provide for and review the additional needs of their pupils.

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33. This includes determining the most appropriate provision for children and young people with additional support needs, taking account of their legislative responsibilities and the individual circumstances and wishes of children, young people and their families. Education authorities are supported in implementing their duties under the 2004 Act through the statutory code of practice on additional support for learning.
34. At a national level, the Scottish Government funds the National e-Learning Offer (NeLO) to provide a range of resources to support learning across the curriculum. This includes the e-Sgoil service which provides study support for young people working towards their qualifications, and the piloting of the i-Sgoil service that supports young people who have disengaged from their school learning. While it was initially a pandemic response, uptake has continued to grow post-pandemic as educators and learners adopt the offer as a part of their curriculum design. These resources complement the delivery of teaching and learning in schools and local authorities.
35. While the e-Sgoil and i-Sgoil services clearly support education authorities in the fulfilment of their functions, they cannot fully replace the statutory localised arrangements. The Scottish Government is committed to working together with local authorities and other partners to implement a range of support for local authorities and schools to support them to respond to issues related to school attendance and absence.

Exclusion and part-time timetables for pupils with ASN

36. Data on exclusion is published every two years. Data for exclusions during 2024/25 is scheduled for publication in December 2025 and will include up-to-date figures on rates of exclusion for pupils with additional support needs.
37. We have recently begun a review of our national attendance guidance, Included, Engaged and Involved Part 1. Consideration of guidance on part-time timetables has been identified as a priority for this review and a working group has been established to support this work. The working group comprises membership from a range of stakeholders, including Education Scotland, local government, teaching unions, alternative education providers and parent and carer representation.
38. School attendance is the responsibility of local authorities, who carry the statutory responsibility for the delivery of education in Scotland. An online package of support for local authorities and schools was launched by Education Scotland in August, including guidance, professional learning, networking and exemplification.
39. In addition, an Improving Attendance Quality Improvement Programme has been established to provide bespoke support for areas where improving levels of attendance remains a challenge. A package of support has been designed, focussing on the use of Quality Improvement (QI) methodology. The first cohort of schools, from six local authorities, completed the programme in March 2025. Most schools involved in the programme have made good progress with small tests of change. Learning from the first cohort of the programme will be collated and shared by Education Scotland in early 2025-26. A second cohort of the programme began delivery in March 2025 to 14 local authorities, 3 of which have been involved in the first cohort.



Dispute Resolutions

40. Communication was one of the three priority areas for delivery by the ASL Project Board before the end of this parliamentary term. There are multiple actions ongoing to address a range of different communication concerns, with some specifically in relation to improving communication and signposting of the value of mediation to address concerns or resolve disputes before accessing tribunals.
41. Over the remainder of 2025, and as detailed in the PfG, the Additional Support for Learning Project Board will work with Enquire, the national advice and information service on additional support for learning, to further progress the work on the implementation of the communications strategy. In addition, the Scottish Government continues to fund Enquire and in 2025 work targeted on improving communications with parents/carers includes targeted work with local authorities to improve local information and advice on additional support for learning; review of the Parent's Guide; and collaboration with ASL mediation providers to review existing information and improve awareness.
42. In addition to improving our communications approach, the consultation on the refreshed Code of Practice also offers an opportunity to consider and receive feedback on how we can ensure that the information on the dispute resolution process is as accessible as possible,

Audit Scotland report on ASL

43. In response to Audit Scotland's recommendations on data we have committed in PfG to holding a data summit with all local authorities in Scotland on Additional Support for Learning focused on recommending actions for improving consistency of identification, support and reporting of children's needs at a local level. This will be the first step in a wider piece of work to improve data at both local and national level to inform policy development going forward.
44. As indicated earlier, we welcome Audit Scotland's briefing and have agreed to both a cross-party roundtable with COSLA as a prelude to scoping a review of ASL.

The Curriculum Improvement Cycle

45. Since my last update to the Committee on [04 October 2024](#), Education Scotland has continued to engage with large numbers of educators, stakeholder organisations and national agencies to progress the Curriculum Improvement Cycle. In April this year, the curriculum cycles commenced for Social Studies, Religious and Moral Education/Religious Education, Languages, Technologies, Expressive Arts, and the remaining three contexts for learning, joining those already underway on Numeracy and Mathematics, Literacy and English, Literacy and Gàidhlig, Sciences and Health and Wellbeing.
46. Three national papers have been published by Education Scotland. Paper one [Background and A Case For Change : Findings from the Pilot Curriculum Reviews 2023/24](#) (November 2024) focused on the key findings from early pilot curriculum reviews and set out the initial evidence on the case for evolving the "technical framework" of Scotland's curriculum.
47. Paper two '[Towards an Evolved Technical Framework.](#)' (December 2024) looked in more detail at the options available to evolve the technical framework.

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48. Paper three [‘Working Together to Make Change Happen’](#). (April 2025) outlined the method and approach that is being taken to implement the curriculum improvement cycle and looked ahead to implementation of curriculum changes.
49. By the end of June 2025 the Scottish Government, Education Scotland and the SQA will set out a single combined timeline for curriculum improvement and reforms to qualifications and assessment outlining what will happen next and when.

Monitoring and evaluation strategy for education reform

50. The Government has commissioned work to inform the development of a comprehensive framework for monitoring and evaluating the progress, impact, and effectiveness of the Education Reform Programme. The Strategy will include detailed consideration of Curriculum Improvement and Qualifications Reform to ensure specific aims and outcomes related to the quality of teaching, learning and progression are being met.
51. A policy and economics consultancy, WPI Economics, won the contract following a competitive tendering process. The project launched on 30 April, with initial scoping work now underway. The project is due to complete in Spring 2026.
52. The Monitoring and Evaluation Strategy will be underpinned by Theories of Change, which the contractor will work with a range of key stakeholders to develop over the coming months, including Education Scotland, the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA), HMIE, ADES and COSLA.

HMIE’s national thematic inspection of local authorities’ approaches to school improvement.

53. The HMIE report was published in March and sets out a number of recommendations with a focus on improving leadership, collaborative improvement, and better use of data to inform self-evaluation, improvement planning and resource allocation. Taken together, these will help reduce variability within and across local authorities, and deliver consistent improvement in outcomes for learners. The full report is available at the following link: [hmie-local-authority-approaches-to-supporting-school-improvement_final-003.pdf](#). The Committee may wish to engage directly with the Interim Chief Inspector, Janie McManus on the detail of this report which provides an important evaluation of the role of Local Authorities in supporting our schools.

Further work on supporting interdisciplinary learning and exploring the possibility of developing a leaver’s certificate.

54. As Committee Members will know, the Scottish Government’s evolutionary approach to qualifications reform recognises the challenges facing our schools and the resources available in the system. We are committed to improving assessment in the Senior Phase and seek to enhance outcomes for young people by delivering a fair and credible qualifications and assessment system. We recognise the desire, including from young people themselves, for Interdisciplinary Learning (IDL) opportunities to be more consistently available across all secondary schools and the skills and benefits this form of learning can bring.

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55. IDL can offer learners the opportunity to apply disciplinary knowledge and develop key skills in relation to complex, real world challenges and are relevant to future employment opportunities and real world issues such as climate change.
56. Since the Scottish Government's response to the recommendations of the Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment (IRQA), work has begun to deliver the actions set out as part of a long-term improvement plan in the National Improvement Framework. This work is being led by Education Scotland through a refreshed IDL co-design group which now has 130 members.
57. The work builds on the definition of IDL developed in 2020 and affirmed in 2023 by the co-design group which is:

"Interdisciplinary Learning is a planned experience that brings disciplines together in one coherent programme or project. The different disciplines plan and execute as one. These disciplines might fall within one curricular area (e.g. languages, the sciences) or between several curricular areas. IDL enables children and young people to:

- learn new knowledge or skills, and develop new understanding of concepts;*
- draw on prior knowledge, understanding and skills;*
- transfer and apply that collective knowledge to new problems or other areas of learning."*

58. The current phase of work, aligned with national priorities and the IRQA recommendations, will set out a five-year vision to embed high-quality IDL across all phases of education. This includes work underway by SCQF to credit-rate existing IDL programmes such as those offered by Daydream Believers and the Futures Institute at Dollar Academy,
59. Our position remains that the development of a leaving certificate is a longer-term, shared goal for Scottish education. Such an approach might offer the potential to acknowledge a wider range of young people's achievements in a more inclusive way. Significant work remains to define the certificate's content and practical implementation, including engagement with the teaching profession to determine the best approach at a time when there is the capacity for the system to consider it effectively. Further details of the specifics of our approach to the leaving certificate will be provided before the end of 2025.
60. The Scottish Government is grateful to SDS, Education Scotland and the many practitioners who collaborated with them, for the work they have led to introduce the first iteration of the national digital profile as part of the My World of Work Website. This is an important step forward in ensuring young people can celebrate the breadth of their achievements.

Working with local government to increase teacher numbers

61. The Committee is aware of the agreement the Scottish Government reached with COSLA in December, which commits the Scottish Government and local government to working together to restore teacher numbers to 2023 levels in 2025, as well as freezing learning hours and making meaningful progress on reducing class contact time for teachers. We are providing £186.5 million to local authorities in 2025-26 to support this work and to maximise the number of teaching posts available. This is an increase of £41 million on 2024/25.

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62. This agreement is predicated on trust and the Scottish Government is committed to working together with COSLA at pace on these issues. Officials have been engaging with councils since December, to discuss plans for restoring teacher numbers to 2023 levels. These discussions also provided a valuable opportunity to better understand local contexts and discuss any exceptional mitigating circumstances, outwith councils' direct control, which may impact on achieving the commitment to restore teacher numbers.
63. It remains our expectation that councils will be working towards delivering the terms of the agreement and that they will allocate the resources required to increase teacher numbers. In the very few cases that individual councils do not deliver satisfactory progress, we reserve the right to adjust, withhold or recover relevant monies allocated to individual councils for these purposes

Contact time

64. Reducing class contact time for teachers will help address critical concerns around teacher workload, thereby creating the space to drive improvement and reform in our schools and improve outcomes for our children and young people.
65. The Scottish Government and COSLA are committed to working in partnership with the teacher unions to set out a timeline for implementation of this important commitment, so that meaningful progress can be made as soon as is practical.
66. Ultimately, changes to class contact time will require tripartite agreement through the Scottish Negotiating Committee for Teachers.

Education Scotland's work to support CPD for classroom teachers and school leaders

67. The importance of professional learning and development is widely recognised as being a key driver in improving outcomes for children and young people. Providing opportunities for classroom teachers and school leaders to engage in highly effective and transformative professional learning can reignite purpose, passion and encourages curiosity, creativity and lifelong learning by deepening educators' understanding of their learners needs and potential. Scotland has its own national model of professional learning which seeks to build a system-shared understanding of the importance or research and practice in the design and delivery of professional learning.
68. One of the key functions of Education Scotland is to continue to provide accessible opportunities for practitioners at all levels in the education system to engage in high quality professional learning across a range of areas.
69. Education Scotland's professional learning service provides support across three main areas: curriculum; leadership; and inclusion, wellbeing and equalities. High-quality and accessible professional learning (CPD) is available for all, from classroom teachers to those in promoted posts and in senior leadership in schools both through cohort-based programmes and online self-directed professional learning resources. Education Scotland also works to build capacity in schools, settings and local authorities to design, deliver and evaluate their own professional learning (CPD), both through the *Leading Professional Learning* programme and resources on the website.

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70. Education Scotland will be sharing a brochure of planned activity for the upcoming academic year with local authorities in June to support their planning of professional learning at a local level. Education Scotland remains committed to designing, developing and delivering high quality professional learning with the continued aim of improving outcomes for children and young people.

Centre for Teaching Excellence

71. The Centre for Teaching Excellence will support and empower the teaching profession to deliver excellent learning and teaching by addressing a recognised gap in linking research and evidence to pedagogical practice.

72. The Centre will work with teachers to meet their needs and help them deliver truly excellent learning and teaching, which we know will help to improve the learning outcomes of our children and young people. To support this, engagement with teachers through focus groups took place in late April and early May, to gather their views directly on what the priority areas of research for the Centre should be. A number of organisational stakeholders have also been engaged throughout this work, to ensure there is no duplication of effort and that connections across the wider system are made.

73. The results of the focus groups helped to inform a national survey that is now open to all teachers across Scotland providing a further opportunity to engage and consult with them.

74. To embed ongoing engagement the Centre for Teaching Excellence Advisory Board has now been established, including teaching professional associations, ADES and COSLA, with the purpose of providing advice, guidance and feedback on the offering to teachers.

75. Important progress has also been made on making secondment opportunities available to teachers, with a number of these now open for applications. Roles will offer flexibility through the use of different models and teachers seconded to the Centre will contribute to research and develop related professional learning opportunities online and in-person.

76. Work on the Centre will continue over the summer, ensuring it is ready to support teachers at the start of the new academic year in August.

Supporting positive behaviours

77. The first progress report on the Relationships and Behaviour in Schools Action Plan 2024-27 was published at the end of March, providing a statement on this progress to Parliament in May. The progress report illustrates that between November 2023 and March 2025, we made good progress against all 20 actions set out within the plan.

78. The first phase of the action plan prioritised responding to emerging areas of concern. That is why we published new guidance on preventing and responding to gender-based violence, and on the use of mobile phones, as well as updating Respect for All, our national anti-bullying guidance, including strong messages about our expectation that all incidences of bullying should be recorded.

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79. A package of support has been put in place by our interim Chief Inspector, to ensure HMI inspections help support improvement. There is enhanced evidence gathering on relationships and behaviour as part of the school inspection process, with feedback highlighting key strengths and areas for improvement, supporting the school to reflect on and enhance its approaches to promoting positive relationships and behaviour.
80. Education Scotland has been supporting local authorities and schools with bespoke professional learning tailored to the needs of their staff on topics such as restorative approaches, expectations and consequences, and co-regulation and de-escalation.
81. Practical resources to support staff on specific topics have also developed. This includes updating 'Keeping Your Cool in School', a programme that supports primary-aged children to recognise and manage strong emotions. In addition, as part of the Violence Prevention Framework, partners in the third sector launched the 'Quit Fighting for Likes' campaign, which includes resources for teachers to engage young people in conversations aimed at preventing the filming and sharing of violent incidents on social media.
82. We have now entered phase 2 of the plan, with significant activity scheduled for the next year. This includes new guidance on responding to behaviour, including consequences, which will be published before the summer recess. This guidance has been developed by a sub-group of the Scottish Advisory Group on Relationships and Behaviour and members of the Head Teacher Taskforce.
83. The Scottish Government recognises the significant concerns about incidents of violence in our schools. While these incidents remain rare, ensuring the safety of children and young people, and staff, in our schools is paramount. This summer we will also be providing schools with new guidance on risk assessments for violent, aggressive and dangerous behaviour. This guidance will provide clarity to public schools and education authorities on using a risk assessment process that is compliant with Health and Safety at Work legislation and consistent with the UNCRC.
84. We will also shortly be publishing new guidance on responding to racism and racist incidents in school. This initial guidance forms part of a wider whole-school approach to addressing and responding to racism and racist incidents which will be published in early 2026.
85. Other key priorities for phase 2 of the action plan are a review of processes for recording incidents including violent incidents, to identify potential means of streamlining processes and improving consistency; and commencing work on reviewing our national attendance and exclusion guidance.

The Gender Equality Taskforce in Education and Learning (GETEL)

86. GETEL was established in response to one of the recommendations made by the First Minister's National Advisory Council on Women and Girls. Its scope is education aged 3-18 (early years, primary and secondary school, and some community learning settings, but not further and higher education). Its ambitions are underpinned by the need to create systemic change so that all girls and young women have a gender equal experience of education.

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87. It has two distinct, but interlinked areas of work; firstly, the group is working through a set of recommendations which were developed as part of its theory of change model. Most recently this has seen the group considering how to develop an intersectionally-sensitive, gender competent curriculum against the wider context of Education Reform. They will share their findings from that shortly.
88. Going forward, the Taskforce will be looking at issues such as the development of leadership programmes and professional learning which will support teachers and staff, as well as the longer-term ambition of gender competent school estate planning. Secondly, the Taskforce provides strategic oversight to existing and emerging frameworks, in order to embed gender equality in education policy. In the longer term, this will result in policy coherence across the education landscape. To date this has seen this Taskforce apply a gendered lens to: the Behaviour in Schools Joint Action Plan, the Gender Based Violence in Schools Framework and the School Age Childcare Programme.

Anti-Racism in Education Programme

89. The Scottish Government is committed to creating an education system in Scotland that is anti-racist, where the needs of all learners are reflected. This work is being driven by the Anti-Racism in Education Programme (AREP) through its four interconnected workstreams:

- Curriculum reform
- Racism and racist incidents
- Diversity in the Teaching profession and education workforce
- Education leadership and professional learning

90. The AREP is made up of a range of education and anti-racism stakeholders as well as local authorities, other Scottish Government departments and executive agencies. The board is chaired by Prof. Khadija Mohammed. It aims to:

- Identify measures which will address race inequality which remains evident in schools
- Work with marginalised groups and individuals to ensure that young people from all minority ethnic backgrounds who experience race inequality, have their voices heard and can contribute to the decision making and implementation of the AREP's objectives
- Advise on potential changes in practice and also on concrete short, medium and long term actions to support the desired outcome, which is that as a result of an anti-racist approach and a culture of racial literacy amongst all school staff and pupils, no minority ethnic child, young person, teacher or member of staff will experience race inequality in a school setting

91. To date, the AREP has achieved the following outputs:

- Education Scotland's Building Racial Literacy Programme
- Education Scotland's Peer Mentors Programme
- Action Guide for Local Authorities to support the recruitment, retention and promotion of minority ethnic staff
- Since 2021, publication of annual data report on the diversity of the teaching profession

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- Ongoing implementation of the Initial Teacher Education anti-racist framework
- The anti-racist curriculum principles
- The Anti-Racist commitment for schools and education settings.

Improving Attendance

92. Following the Scottish Government's request for Education Scotland to undertake work to understand current barriers to attendance, which remains below pre-COVID levels, significant activity has been implemented to support improved attendance.
93. Education Scotland has established an Improving Attendance Quality Improvement Programme to provide bespoke support for areas where improving levels of attendance remains a challenge. The first cohort of schools, from six local authorities, completed the programme in March 2025, and Education Scotland are now working with a second cohort of 14 authorities. Most schools involved in the programme have made good progress with small tests of change. Learning from this will be collated and shared by Education Scotland later this year.
94. A Scotland-wide conference was held in February 2025 for all leads in local authorities with a focus on 'strategic approaches to improving attendance'. This, together with a National Attendance Network that has been set up, is ensuring opportunities for collaboration, networking and sharing between local authority leads. Four sessions aimed at school leaders, designed by school leaders, took place in February and March 2025.
95. New Education Scotland webpages were published in August 2024 with materials on policy, use of attendance data, partnership working and effective practice. A second package of online support, focused on case studies and exemplification, was published in March 2025.
96. We have also strengthened our understanding of attendance through increased analysis of attendance data. In December 2024 we changed the publication of the [national attendance statistics](#) from biennial to annual, and also included a new measure on persistent absence first published in [March 2024](#). In addition, from 2024/25, the methodology for publication of the fortnightly management information on school absences was improved by moving away from a once a fortnight point in time "snapshot" to reporting on absences over the entire fortnightly period, producing "academic year to date" measures and a new measure of persistent absence in line with the annual measure.
97. The national attendance campaign will focus on the importance of schools and families working together to support our young people to return to, engage and benefit from their learning. As part of the development of the campaign, qualitative research was undertaken in 2024 with parents, pupils and stakeholders to build a clear picture of lived experience and needs. Insight from this research, as well as further engagement, will be used to inform the development of the campaign.

Relationships Sexual Health and Parenthood Education

98. The Scottish Government has published a report on outcome of the public consultation on the revised relationships, sexual health and parenthood (RSHP) education teaching guidance. We received over 4,000 responses to the public consultation on the revised RSHP teaching guidance.

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99. The Scottish Government also enlisted Young Scot and the Scottish Youth Parliament to engage with young people directly and through an online survey to gather their views on the revised RSHP teaching guidance.
100. The Scottish Government has had regard to all consultation responses and identified key themes where respondents have asked for further clarity within the guidance. Work has begun on finalising the teaching guidance ahead of publication by the end of the 2024/25 calendar year.
101. Education on relationships, sexual health and parenthood (RSHP) is an important part of young people's development and is vital in helping keep them safe. This education is key in equipping young people with the knowledge and understanding of issues like consent, appropriate relationships and boundaries, which can play a crucial role in helping to reduce instances of gender based violence. The Scottish Government is required by law to issue statutory guidance to education authorities on how relationships and sex education should be conducted in schools.

Digital strategy for school education

102. The Scottish Government is considering how best to bring better coherence and alignment to the range of digital projects and activity that is currently being undertaken across the education system. Government, Agencies and stakeholders across education are engaged in development of innovative and creative digital approaches but there are further opportunities for collaboration, consolidation and efficiencies across the sector which we want to exploit. We expect to set out our strategic approach to these issues later in 2025.
103. In addition, Education Scotland and Scottish Government are currently engaging stakeholders in the future of the Glow services. The current contractual arrangements come to an end in 2027 and significant stakeholder engagement is being undertaken to determine the future shape of national services to ensure they continue to meet the evolving needs of schools.

Monitoring the outcomes of the expansion of funded to ELC to 1,140 hours.

104. In October 2022 Scottish Government published a 2018-2025 Evaluation Strategy which set out how we will evaluate the impact of the ELC expansion on outcomes for children, parents and families.
105. The Evaluation Strategy underlined that the primary focus for the evaluation is on measuring outcomes for children, parents and families. In August 2024, the Scottish Government published an Interim Evaluation report. The report showed that uptake of expanded hours is very high, and there are promising signs that the expansion is delivering improvements in quality, flexibility, accessibility and affordability. However, families' experiences of funded ELC vary across Scotland and there is more to do to understand how well the expansion is meeting different families' needs.
106. Right now, it is too early to draw conclusions on the impact of the 1140 expansion as analysis of the Scottish Study of Early Learning and Childcare data, the key evidence source for the evaluation, is still underway. Baseline data for the SSELC was collected during 2018 and 2019 from a sample of children and their parents accessing up to 600

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hours of funded ELC. The same data was collected during 2023 and 2024 from a sample of children and parents accessing up to 1,140 hours.

107. Measuring before and after the expansion allows for an initial assessment of the extent to which the expansion's outcomes have been achieved. We expect to publish the 2018-2025 Evaluation Full Report in December 2025. The report will summarise and synthesise key findings from analysis of all the research and data that form part of the evaluation programme, across the three strands.

Support for the PVI sector and work with local government on sector sustainability.

108. Private, third sector and childminding providers are a valued part of the successful delivery of our 1,140 hours early learning and childcare offer, with parents choosing to use funded providers for around a third of all funded ELC. We know from our engagement with the sector that many providers are facing cost and workforce pressures.
109. The UK Government's changes to employer's National Insurance Contributions will unfortunately only add to these pressures, and we share the sector's deep concern at this decision. The Chancellor should have provided full funding to shield all Scotland's public services from these additional costs.
110. Where the Scottish Government has devolved responsibility, we are prioritising investment to support our private, third and childminding sectors. Scotland remains the only part of the UK to support the real Living Wage for workers delivering funded ELC through direct investment – with a further £9.7 million uplift going to local authorities in 2025-26 to enable ELC funding rates to increase in line with the real Living Wage uplift.
111. Unlike the UK Government, we legislated to introduce a Nursery Rates Relief scheme through which we provide 100 per cent relief on Non-Domestic Rates to eligible day nurseries – saving the sector over £11 million this year.
112. As a result of our investment decisions, average rates paid to providers for 3-5 year olds receiving funded ELC have increased by around 78% between 2017 and 2024, from £3.68 per hour in 2017-18 to £6.55 per hour in 2024-25.
113. Our 2024-25 Sustainable Rates Data Report showed that the gap between the highest and lowest rates narrowed in 2024-25. We expect to see further progress in 2025-26, with new joint guidance published in February this year which encourages further standardisation across local authorities.
114. A national cost data survey developed in collaboration with funded ELC providers and local authorities is currently open and funded providers can take part in the survey until 2 July 2025 - we would strongly encourage all those who can to do so, as we want to understand costs and how they vary across provider type and geography, so that Scottish Government and local authorities can do all we can to support a diverse and thriving sector.

Update on proposed expansion of Childcare

115. Keeping children in Scotland out of poverty is our top priority and will remain the focus of this Government as we deliver and develop our childcare offer. Scotland faces one of

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the most difficult public spending environments that this devolved parliament has ever seen, and we have had to make tough decisions to prioritise investment of around £1bn a year in delivering a universal offer of 1140 hours of high quality, funded early learning and childcare.

116. We are working with local authorities on a National Improvement Project, to maximise uptake of our existing offer for eligible 2 year olds to ensure that as many children as possible benefit from the offer. There are two main components of this work: Individual, intensive support to five local authorities (Aberdeenshire, Falkirk, Glasgow, North Ayrshire and North Lanarkshire); and a programme of online content available to all local authorities. We are developing more workshops and content with the Improvement Service in response to feedback from local authorities.
117. In 2025/26 we will increase our 'Extra Time Programme' investment to £5.5 million, expanding delivery from 31 clubs to 53 clubs providing funded breakfast and after school and holiday clubs across Scotland. This national programme will deliver services across the whole of Scotland, supporting up to 5,000 children and their families who are most at risk of living in poverty.
118. The latest PfG reaffirmed the announcement made at Budget to deliver a £3 million 'Bright Start Breakfasts' fund. This fund will expand access to breakfast clubs across Scotland, creating more free places for families who need it most. The Fund launched in May this year, with delivery commencing from the start of the 25/26 academic year. The Fund will be open to a wide range of providers including schools, and private and third sector providers. In addition, we are committing within the Programme for Government to provide an additional £1m to help support holiday playschemes and activities provision for disabled children. This funding will be distributed across all 32 Local Authorities and can be used locally to support provision of specialist holiday services.
119. Work will continue to deliver our wider commitments on childcare through a number of projects that were not set out in detail in the Programme for Government. These include the design of a digital service to make it easier for parents and carers to find and manage their childcare, and continued investment in our Access to Childcare projects.
120. The PfG also outlines that there will be continued investment of up to £16 million over 24-25 and 25-26 in designing and delivering early learning and school age childcare services for priority families working in our 'Early Adopter Communities' within six local authority areas - Dundee, Clackmannanshire, Glasgow, Inverclyde, Fife and Shetland.
121. This work is expanding access to affordable childcare for low-income families with children, from early years through to the end of primary school and evaluating the difference this can make. We are working with the EACs to make them a leading source of learning, evidence, data, and evaluation relating to the impact, approach, and outcomes associated with place-based, people-centred systems of childcare.
122. Any future expansion requires the collaboration and cooperation of the entire childcare sector, across both public and private spheres, to navigate the significant challenges such as sustainably developing the workforce, ensuring that we maintain the high quality and flexibility that parents can currently access and making sure that any changes we make are in the best interests of Scotland's children and their families. Decisions around this will

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be informed by the evidence we are developing right now in the Early Adopter Communities across the country.

Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Act 2024

123. The Committee will be aware that the first annual report on implementation of the Act, required under Section 34 is due to be laid in Parliament on Wednesday 4 June.
124. On the provisions still to be brought into force, careful planning and engagement with a range of children's care and justice stakeholders and duty-bearers is well-established and continues. This dates back to consultation on the legislation and is supported by the multi-agency Implementation and Resourcing Group, which the Committee will be aware was established during Parliamentary scrutiny of the associated Bill.
125. The government's workplan is for further provisions in the Act to be brought into force in this Parliamentary term, pending further in-depth engagement and preparation over the course of this year and into 2026.

Secure Accommodation Capacity

126. We acknowledge the current capacity constraints in secure care. Alongside partners, we are taking a range of actions to address those challenges. Ministers have been updating the Parliament regularly since the start of the year. In the Minister for Children, Young People and the Promise's most recent statement on 15 May those actions were highlighted. At the end of April, letters issued to the Education and Justice Committee Conveners gave further detail on our contingency actions, and the context within which they were being deployed.
127. The recent parliamentary statement set out the work we are doing to bolster our secure care estate, to develop preventative alternatives to deprivation of liberty, as well as the further steps we are taking to improve the wider care system. The Scottish Government was pleased to confirm to Parliament that the new national contingency resource opened in Rossie last month. Those beds are now available and being used to care for children.
128. That represents a significant Government commitment. While we do expect to take further capacity restoration action in the months to come, secure accommodation should only ever be used when absolutely necessary. This is why we are also working closely with third sector partners to identify and develop services that offer credible, safe alternatives to the deprivation of liberty. These services will help improve outcomes, reduce reliance on secure care, and help deliver the ambitions of The Promise.
129. We will provide the Government response to the 'reimagining secure care' report, including a further update on capacity and contingency actions, before summer recess.

Colleges

130. On the financial sustainability of the college sector, and the SFC's work with colleges in this regard, the SFC monitors financial health across the sector and works closely with colleges on sustainability as part of their statutory responsibility for coherent provision of high quality further and higher education.

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131. The picture is not static, and some issues resolve quickly. The number of colleges engaging with the SFC at any one time is a snapshot in time and not necessarily indicative of longer-term sector health.
132. In relation to the Committee's inquiry into College Regionalisation, the Minister for Higher and Further Education; and Minister for Veterans provided a written response to the Committee on 12 June 2023, with witnesses at the post-inquiry evidence session in February confirming that progress has been made since then. It is important to note that these witnesses recognise the considerable change to the types of qualifications being studied at college since regionalisation, and the requirement for greater flexibility within the college funding model, for example.
133. Building on the direction the Minister provided to the SFC in this year's letter of guidance, the SFC has worked with the college sector to bring about important changes to the college funding model for 2025-26. This has included responding to explicit asks from the sector that funds are distributed in a way that better reflects differences in the cost of delivering different course in different places. The SFC have put in place transition arrangements that mean that no college will see a funding reduction in AY 2025-26 when compared with 2024-25.
134. The college Tripartite Alignment Group (comprising of Scottish Government, the SFC and Colleges Scotland) continues to work on identifying and implementing workable flexibilities to ease colleges' financial pressures while ensuring accountability for public funds. Work is ongoing across a number of work priorities currently, such as diversification of funding into the sector, establishment of a new way to flexibly fund investment through a College Transformation Framework, and exploration of the breadth of delivery via colleges.
135. Through the work of the Tripartite Alignment Group, formalised changes to guidance on college asset disposals have been issued so that colleges retain a more significant proportion of the value of any sale to invest locally. In case helpful, here is the link to the Group's webpage where you can view the Terms of Reference, members, and minutes from the Group's meetings: [Colleges: Tripartite Alignment Group - gov.scot](https://www.gov.scot/colleges-tripartite-alignment-group)
136. The Committee is aware that the Regional Strategic Bodies and Regional Colleges (Glasgow and Lanarkshire) Order 2025 was laid on 1 May. We are confident that this draft Order delivers the right governance reforms to achieve the original college regionalisation aims of effective regional planning and collaboration, as well as improving college accountability. The Committee had an opportunity to scrutinise the Order in detail when they approved it on 28 May.

Universities

137. It is the SFC's responsibility to monitor the financial stability of the university sector as part of their statutory duty to ensure coherent provision. The Scottish Government is working closely with the SFC to support the sector to address sustainability challenges.
138. Financial information pertaining to institutions is published by HESA. For reasons of commercial confidentiality, we would not look to share financial details beyond this. We would also not wish to discourage institutions from sharing information with the SFC and with Scottish Government for the risk that it may be made public.

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139. The Committee will be aware of the situation at the University of Dundee and the challenges that the University is facing as it aims to take forward a recovery plan that will allow the institution to continue to thrive long into the future.
140. It is important to recognise that the University is an autonomous institution that holds the decision-making powers over its strategic planning. Therefore, it is for the University to develop its vision for the future and to work with University Court to make final decisions related to their financial recovery plan. Questions regarding the detail of the latest recovery plan are therefore for the University to answer given these are not decisions for the Scottish Government.
141. This Government has been clear that the University of Dundee has our full support as it makes its way through this challenging period, and we will undertake the necessary due diligence and carefully consider any further ask for financial support. As the Committee will be aware, the Scottish Government has already taken action by providing £25m of liquidity support for the sector to the SFC, with the SFC allocating £22m of this to Dundee University on 20 March.
142. The Committee can be sure that this Government will continue to engage with the SFC and wider sector to secure a positive future for the University of Dundee.

Reform

143. The clear strategic direction for the post-school sector referenced in the Committee's letter will come from our multi-year transformation Post-School Education and Skills Reform Programme which is progressing well, with considerable work underway across all five interconnected strands of the Programme.
144. These strands include leading a new, national approach to skills planning and working with partners to strengthen regional approaches; and reforming the education and skills funding system so it is easier to navigate and more responsive to learners and skills priorities, initially by introducing a Bill to simplify the post-school funding body landscape.
145. We are taking forward legislation to deliver simplification of the funding body landscape as part of the 2024-25 legislative programme. On 22 January, Scottish Ministers announced the next step in delivering our plans for post-school education reform, and we are pressing ahead with the proposal to consolidate all post-school provision funding within the SFC and all student support funding within SAAS.
146. On 5 February, the Tertiary Education and Training (Funding and Governance) (Scotland) Bill was introduced to the Scottish Parliament. The introduction of the Bill is the next step in the simplification of the post-school funding body landscape. We have also commenced work on skills planning across government and with key partners, and stakeholder engagement has been undertaken to inform the scope of the audit of post-school qualifications and help identify key data holders. Work is also underway to build the evidence base to improve the apprenticeship models for Foundation, Modern and Graduate Apprenticeships.
147. Change of this magnitude will not happen overnight, and we recognise the importance of working with the bodies involved and stakeholders to get it right. That is why in order to

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hasten the pace of change, we will be working with stakeholders to implement other improvements to shorter timescales.

148. In the Programme for Government, the First Minister committed to introduce a new Scottish Government-led approach to national skills planning, and strengthen regional skills planning, to ensure that post school provision becomes more responsive to Scotland's strategic skills needs and priorities.
149. We have established a Scottish Government Skills Planning Policy Unit, undertaken extensive engagement and evidence-gathering on existing arrangements, and drafted a strategic case for skills planning reforms. Close collaboration is taking place with SDS and SFC on this reform project. Draft regional guidelines were discussed with Regional Economic Partners over October-December 2024. Overall, we have identified a proposed direction of travel for a future skills planning model and are currently engaging key stakeholders on this.
150. We are working closely with SDS to provide clarity on remaining functions, especially skills planning. Officials are actively discussing the direction of travel with both SDS and SFC leadership, which could help achieve our reform objectives in this area sooner, through greater collaboration and new or improved processes as needed.
151. We are keen to find the most impactful, most practical, and least disruptive path for skills planning reform, and the collaboration between the Scottish Government, SDS and SFC in this regard has been promising so far.
152. While we work to reform and future-proof the system long-term, we also fully recognise the need for ongoing action to support more immediate skills needs which is why we continue to provide additional targeted support across a range of sectors including investing in offshore wind, social care, engineering, and advanced manufacturing. Our key partners such as SDS and SFC, continue to play their active role in supporting and enabling the skills system to deliver against SG priorities.

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