

Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee

8th Meeting, 2021 (Session 6), 1 December
2021

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

Note by the Clerk

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.

Full petition <https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE1907>

Introduction

1. This is a new petition that has been under consideration since 26 October 2021.
2. A SPICe briefing has been prepared to inform the Committee's consideration of the petition and can be found at **Annexe A**.
3. While not a formal requirement, petitioners have the option to collect signatures on their petition. On this occasion, the petitioner elected to collect this information. 142 signatures have been received.
4. The Committee seeks views from the Scottish Government on all new petitions before they are formally considered. This response is included at **Annexe B** of this paper.

Background Information

5. The petitioner notes that the availability of funded early learning and childcare (ELC) for 2 year old children is dependent on certain eligibility criteria, such as 'their parents being in receipt of benefits or being vulnerable'.

6. As an early years practitioner, the petitioner feels that 'lockdown babies especially have suffered from lack of play experiences, meeting peers and opportunities that other children have always had' noting that 'enabling this new generation the chance to have funded nursery at 2 years old will greatly increase their potential' as well as helping parents who may be struggling financially as a result of Covid-19.

Background

7. The SPICe briefing accompanying this petition notes that two-year-olds can currently access funded ELC if their parent/s are in receipt of:
- Income Support
 - Job Seeker's Allowance (income based)
 - Any income-related element of Employment and Support Allowance
 - Incapacity or Severe Disablement Allowance
 - State Pension Credit
 - Support under part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999
8. In addition, two year olds are eligible from families in receipt of Child Tax Credit
- but not Working Tax Credit, with earnings of £16,480 or less
 - and Working Tax Credit with earnings of £7,500 a year or less
9. Two year olds from households in receipt of Universal Credit with an income threshold of £625 a month or less are also eligible, as are two year old children who are, or have been, looked after by the local authority, subject of a kinship care order or the subject of a guardianship order.
10. The briefing also notes that the Scottish Government is seeking to provide funded ELC to any care-experienced parent.
11. However, the briefing states that the Scottish Government 'does not report on how many of the eligible two year old children access funded ELC as it cannot determine the overall population of eligible children.'

Scottish Government submission

12. The Scottish Government submission notes that current eligibility criteria for funded early learning and childcare (ELC) for 2 year olds are designed to 'target the children whom evidence suggests will benefit most from high quality ELC provision' estimating that 'around 14,500 children are currently eligible for funded ELC under the current criteria, out of a total population of around 53,000 two year olds.'
13. The Scottish Government also highlights that in addition to the statutory duties they are under to provide funded ELC to eligible children, 'local councils also have discretion to provide access to any child residing in their area that they see fit' suggesting that 'some councils use this discretion to offer places to a wider

range of children, either according to local priorities or according to the needs of the individual child.'

14. In this year's Programme for Government, the Scottish Government has 'committed to expanding an early learning offer to all one and two year olds, starting with those from low-income families within this Parliament' and highlighting the Scottish Government's intention to consult with families, the early learning sector and academic experts to 'design how the new offer can best support children and families.'

Action

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

Clerk to the Committee

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

Petitioner

Claire Beats

Date Lodged

26/10/21

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

SPICe

The Information Centre
An t-Ionad Fiosrachaidh

Briefing for the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee on petition [PE1907](#): Provide funded early learning & childcare for all 2-year olds in Scotland, lodged by Claire Beats

Background

Expansion of funded early learning and childcare

From August 2021, local authorities were required to secure the provision of 1,140 hours of funded early learning and childcare (ELC) for eligible children. This was an increase from the previous statutory amount of 600 hours of funded ELC.

The [main aims of the expansion](#) are to:

- improve children's outcomes and help close the poverty-related attainment gap
- increase family resilience through improved health and wellbeing of children and parents
- support parents into work, study or training.

The cost of the expansion from 600 to 1,140 hours is over £500 million per year.

The [Programme for Government 2021-22](#) said:

“We have now set out our ambition to provide funded early learning to all one- and two-year-olds, starting in the course of this Parliament with children from low-income households. This year we will begin engagement with families, the early learning sector and academic experts to design how the new offer will work in practice.” (p40)

Eligibility

An eligible child is one who is three or four years of age, some pre-school five-year-olds and two-year-olds whose families meet certain criteria.

Eligibility for funded ELC for two-year-olds can be through the receipt of certain benefits. These are:

- Income Support
- Job Seeker's Allowance (income based)
- any income-related element of Employment and Support Allowance
- Incapacity or Severe Disablement Allowance
- State Pension Credit
- support under part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999.

In addition, two-year-olds are eligible from families in receipt of Child Tax Credit

- but not Working Tax Credit, with earnings of £16,480 or less
- and Working Tax Credit with earnings of £7,500 a year or less.

Two-year-olds from households in receipt of Universal Credit with an income threshold of £625 a month or less are also eligible. These income thresholds are normally up-rated annually.

Two-year-old children who are, or have been, looked after by the local authority, are the subject of a kinship care order or the subject of a guardianship order are eligible for funded ELC.

The Scottish Government is also seeking to provide funded ELC to any care-experienced parent.

Once a two-year-old is eligible for funded ELC, he or she will remain eligible regardless of whether the circumstances of the family change.

Take up

Over the past three years of data (2018-2020), the percentage of two-year-olds receiving funded ELC has been around 10% of the

population. The Scottish Government does not report on how many of the eligible two-year-old children access funded ELC as it cannot determine the overall population of eligible children.

Ned Sharratt
Senior Researcher
11/10/2021

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

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.

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Scottish Government submission of 4 November 2021

PE1907/A - Provide funded early learning and childcare to all two-year-olds in Scotland

Background on the current offer

1. Early access to funded early learning and childcare for eligible two-year-olds is a key early intervention policy. Eligibility criteria currently target the children whom evidence suggests will benefit most from high quality ELC provision.
2. We estimate around 14,500 children are currently eligible for funded ELC under the current criteria, out of a total population of around 53,000 two-year olds.
3. As well as their statutory duties to provide access to funded ELC to all eligible children (including eligible two-year olds), local councils also have discretion to provide access to any child residing in their area that they see fit. We are aware that some councils use this discretion to offer places to a wider range of children, either according to local priorities or according to the needs of the individual child.

Delivery of the expansion of 1140 hours

4. As of August 2021, all councils are offering up to 1140 hours of funded ELC to all eligible children, making high quality early learning and childcare available to families and saving parents up to £4,900 per year for each eligible child. Up to 130,000 children are expected to benefit this year as new children are enrolled, including eligible two year olds.
5. This is a significant milestone that has been achieved in the face of the pandemic by the Scottish Government, Local Government and our local delivery partners.
6. We recognise that delivering a targeted offer presents different challenges to a universal offer, particularly for younger children. Over the course of delivering the expansion we have learnt a great deal about how to ensure the programme meets the needs of children and their families. We are using this learning to inform the delivery of the new commitments set out in the Programme for Government.

New Programme for Government commitments

7. As part of the Programme for Government we have committed to expanding an early learning offer to all one and two-year-olds, starting with those from low-income families within this Parliament.
8. Delivering the 1140 commitment was a significant programme of work involving close working with partners, detailed planning and major new investment.
9. This year we will begin engagement with families, the early learning sector and academic experts to design how the new offer can best support children and families.