

Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee

4th Meeting, 2021 (Session 6), 22 September
2021

PE1880: Introduce awareness and practical
experience of litter picking and waste
separation into the school curriculum

Note by the Clerk

Petitioner	Calum Edmunds, Susanna Zanatta and Tannith Diggory of Cleanup Glasgow
Petition summary	Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to make an appropriate level of daily cleaning part of the curriculum in schools, including litter picking and waste separation.
Webpage	petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE1880

Introduction

1. This is a new petition that was lodged on 14 July 2021.
1. A SPICe briefing has been prepared to inform the Committee's consideration of the petition and can be found at **Annexe A**.
2. While not a formal requirement, petitioners have the option to collect signatures and comments on their petition. On this occasion, the petitioners have elected to collect this information. 438 signatures have been received.
3. The Committee seeks views from the Scottish Government on all new petitions before they are formally considered. A response has been received from the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills on this petition and is included at **Annexe B** of this paper.

Scottish Government submission

4. In her submission the Cabinet Secretary explains that Learning for Sustainability (LfS) is a theme across Curriculum for Excellence, which provides learners with the opportunity to develop skills, knowledge and values on environmental sustainability.
5. The Cabinet Secretary states that the Scottish Government is committed to increasing the prevalence of LfS within the curriculum.
6. The Learning for Sustainability National Implementation Group was established to deliver the recommendations of the Learning for Sustainability (LfS) report. The concluding report on its work, Vision 2030+, was published in March 2016 and made 14 recommendations to the Scottish Government.
7. In her written submission, the Cabinet Secretary highlights the June 2019 publication of the Scottish Government's Learning for Sustainability Action Plan. This Action Plan will take forward all 14 recommendations of the Vision 2030+ report.
8. The Cabinet Secretary also highlights that many schools engage with LfS, and specifically the theme of litter and waste collection, through the Eco Schools programme. The programme is facilitated by Keep Scotland Beautiful, with funding provided by the Scottish Government.
9. The Cabinet Secretary notes that litter is the only core topic in the Eco-Schools programme and must be one of the three topics covered in order to achieve Green Flag Award status.
10. Although the Scottish Government supports the ultimate aim behind the petition, it believes that individual schools should determine the precise content of their curriculum and how it is applied to the timetable at school-level. As such, the Scottish Government "would prefer to avoid excessive prescription."
11. The submission goes on to state that the key to Learning for Sustainability is the fact that sustainability is thought of not just as a learning topic but as a whole school issue. The Cabinet Secretary highlights that schools are encouraged to consider a number of factors, including the role of school canteens and the school's relationship with suppliers.
12. The Cabinet Secretary points to the important role that local authorities and COSLA can play in the process when acting as an "important facilitator (or barrier) when school pupils and school leaders are aiming to improve their school's approach to recycling waste".

13. The Cabinet Secretary highlights that it is currently developing its new National Litter and Fly-tipping Strategy. The Scottish Government is due to hold a 12-week public consultation at the end of this year before the strategy is published in early 2022.
14. The Cabinet Secretary concludes by stating her intention to share details of this petition, as well as her response, with Education Scotland and Keep Scotland Beautiful, to ensure the issues highlighted are taken into account when exploring whether the current programme on litter and waste management can be strengthened.

Action

15. The Committee is invited to consider what action it wishes to take on this petition.

Clerk to the Committee

PE1880: INTRODUCE AWARENESS AND PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE OF LITTER PICKING AND WASTE SEPARATION INTO THE SCHOOL CURRICULUM

Petitioner

Calum Edmunds, Susanna Zanatta and Tannith Diggory of Cleanup Glasgow

Date Lodged

14 July 2021

Petition summary

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to make an appropriate level of daily cleaning part of the curriculum in schools, including litter picking and waste separation.

Previous action

We emailed MSPs, contacted schools and councillors, and are involved in regular litter picking. Our local MSP, John Mason, suggested a petition might help raise the profile of the issue to lift it up the agenda in parliament.

Background information

Keep Scotland Beautiful recently stated that 'Scotland is facing a potential litter emergency'.

In recent years, anti-littering strategies, campaigns and clean-up activities have just scratched the surface. It is time for a systemic change to properly address the issue and drive a cultural shift in society about littering and respect for the environment.

The Scottish Government recognises the importance of [‘Learning for Sustainability’](#), and we believe there is an appetite for a curriculum-linked approach.

Such an [approach is followed in Japan](#) where cleaning time is part of students’ daily schedule, throughout primary and secondary. It only needs to be 15-20 minutes a day.

If students are responsible for their mess, they are less likely to make it in the first place and will show respect for their surroundings.

Besides making street cleaning almost unnecessary, this cultural shift is essential in the context of waste reduction and recycling to ease the litter emergency. Read more at <https://cleanupglasgow.co.uk/sp>

**Briefing for the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee on petition [PE1880](#):
Introduce awareness and practical experience of litter picking and waste separation into the school curriculum, lodged by Calum Edmunds, Susanna Zanatta and Tannith Diggory of Cleanup Glasgow**

Curriculum

Scotland's curriculum, the Curriculum for Excellence, is non-statutory. It is intended to be an outcomes-based curriculum and there are few prescribed activities.

The learning experience in schools is intended to be led by local authorities, schools, teachers and pupils themselves. Nonetheless, the Scottish Government has a strategic role and has supported specific in-school initiatives through partnership working. Often this is to support pupils' entitlements to particular aspects of learning (e.g. learning languages).

Learning for Sustainability (LfS) is part of the Curriculum for Excellence. [Education Scotland states](#) that LfS is "an approach to life and learning which enables learners, educators, schools and their wider communities to build a socially-just, sustainable and equitable society". The current approach to LfS is based on a report published in 2012. The [Learning for Sustainability \(LfS\) report](#) recommended that every learner should receive their entitlement to LfS and every practitioner should demonstrate LfS in their practice. In addition, it called for every school and centre to develop a coherent, whole school approach that impacts on their establishment's culture, curriculum and campus and connects them fully to their wider communities. An implementation group was set up to take forward the recommendations of the report; [that implementation group reported in 2016](#).

Eco-Schools

[Keep Scotland Beautiful delivers the international Eco-Schools programme](#) in Scotland. Eco-Schools Scotland is described as a whole school, pupil-led approach to Learning for Sustainability.

Eco-Schools is a seven step framework which is intended to introduce, manage and complete environmental actions in the school and local community. This framework is designed to put young people at the heart of these environmental actions. As part of the planning, the school's Eco-Committee should develop an action plan covering three (or five for a renewal process) of 10 listed topics. Two of these topics are Waste and Litter.

Litter strategy

In June 2014, the Scottish Government published the country's first National Litter Strategy [Towards a Litter Free Scotland: A Strategic Approach to Higher Quality Local Environments](#). That strategy stated that the Scottish Government would:

“work with council education services and organisations such as Education Scotland and Young Scot to develop initiatives and resources that encourage young people to do the right thing with waste. We encourage delivery partners to contribute to the development of materials and to include these within their existing education projects.”

Zero Waste Scotland [produced a guide for working with schools on issues to do with litter](#). In May 2017, Young Scot launched 'Supporting a shift in attitudes and behaviours to littering in Scotland', a report by Generation Change, a group of young people who were looking at how to combat littering. Their ideas included introducing an app to show young people where the closest bins are and making bins across Scotland more colourful and visible to encourage people to use them. Other ideas included public art projects to highlight the community impact of littering, and creating a national education campaign.¹

In 2019, the Scottish Youth Parliament published [Pack it Up, Pack it In](#) which identified young people's views and recommendations

¹ SPICe was unable to locate the original report. Secondary reporting on this document can be found here: <https://www.outdoorrecreation.org.uk/stories/communicating-young-people-changing-behaviours-well-shape-develop-policy-national-level/>

on reducing litter and single-use packaging, and improving recycling in Scotland. The report's recommendations included:

“Local Authorities and the Scottish Government should make funding and support available for young people and other community groups to carry out local projects to reduce the impact of littering and increase community pride in their local area. ...

“All young people in Scotland should receive improved practical environmental awareness education, and be empowered to take action to live more sustainably. To help achieve this, the Scottish Government and Education Scotland should take a human rights based approach when implementing the ‘Learning for Sustainability (LfS) Action Plan’, by meaningfully including children and young people in the design and delivery of LfS programmes. ...

“Local Authorities and the Scottish Government should do more to raise awareness amongst young people to help them understand what can be recycled, and when recycling is collected, in their communities.”

The 2014 Scottish Litter strategy [was reviewed in 2019](#) (albeit the review was published in 2021). This review called for a substantial “review and refresh of Scotland’s future strategy to tackle littering”.

Key Organisations and relevant links

Scottish Government

Education Scotland

Zero Waste Scotland

[Keep Scotland Beautiful](#)

Young Scot

Scottish Youth Parliament

[Association of Directors of Education Scotland](#)

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22/07/2021

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

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Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills submission of 24 August 2021

PE1880/A: Introduce awareness and practical experience of litter picking and waste separation into the school curriculum

I am writing in response to a request made for the Scottish Government's views on the action called for in the above petition.

Background and wider context

In recent decades, the issue of sustainability (environmental, social and economic) has become a national and global priority. This priority is recognised by the United Nations which, in 2015, introduced [17 Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs) and it was further emphasised with the Scottish Government's declaration of a climate emergency.

As referenced in the petition, Learning for Sustainability (LfS) is a theme across Curriculum for Excellence that brings together global citizenship, sustainable development education and outdoor learning. Through education in these areas we are committed to providing learners with the opportunity to develop the skills, knowledge and values to live socially, economically and environmentally sustainable lives.

The government is committed to increasing the prevalence of LfS within our curriculum. In June 2019 we published the [Learning for Sustainability Action Plan](#) which will take forward all 14 recommendations of the concluding report of the Learning for Sustainability National Implementation Group – [Vision 2030+](#)

Our plan focuses action around: strengthening the place of LfS within curriculum and assessment delivery; supporting educators in delivering effective and relevant LfS; and supporting education establishments to adapt the learning environment to better facilitate sustainability education.

Litter and waste management in schools

In relation to the petition's request to "make an appropriate level of daily cleaning part of the curriculum in schools, including litter picking and waste separation", the Scottish Government believes that individual schools should determine the precise content of their curriculum and their timetable at school-level. Whilst the government agrees with the ultimate aim behind the petition – i.e. the aim to increase public awareness of the importance of addressing litter, and to begin this awareness-raising in schools – we would prefer to avoid excessive prescription in relation to school-level curricula.

As stated, LfS features already as an entitlement within the curriculum, with a number of existing experiences and outcomes which encourage learning about litter and waste, for example:

- "I can discuss the sustainability of key natural resources and analyse the possible implications for human activity."
- "I can analyse products taking into consideration sustainability, scientific and technological developments."
- "I can make suggestions as to how individuals and organisations may use technologies to support sustainability and reduce the impact on our environment."
- "When preparing and cooking a variety of foods, I am becoming aware of the journeys which foods make from source to consumer, their seasonality, their local availability and their sustainability."
- "I can discuss the sustainability of key natural resources and analyse the possible implications for human activity."

Key to Learning for Sustainability is the fact that sustainability is conceived of not just as a learning topic but as a whole school issue. For example, when schools tackle LfS as a cross curricular theme, they are encouraged to consider the role of school canteens and the school's

relationship with suppliers and with local businesses, the food packaging they use and their responsibility for cleaning up litter.

Another important element is the role of the local authority, who can act as an important facilitator (or barrier) when school pupils and school leaders are aiming to improve their school's approach to recycling waste. The government would therefore point to the important role played by local authorities and COSLA.

A final aspect in considering this petition is the role played by the [Eco-Schools Scotland programme](#). Many schools engage with LfS, and specifically the theme of litter and waste collection, through Eco Schools. The Scottish Government provides annual funding of £300,000 to Keep Scotland Beautiful in order to deliver the programme across Scotland. The government therefore views the Eco Schools programme as an important vehicle with which to encourage and support schools to integrate learning about litter and litter picking activity as part of children's learning. Litter is the only core topic in the Eco-Schools programme, and must be one of the three topics covered in order to achieve Green Flag Award status. For example as part of the programme, pupils can engage in litter survey activity, litter analysis activity, they can learn about single use plastic and waste collection.

Given the importance of the Eco-Schools programme in the context of this petition, the Scottish Government will alert Keep Scotland Beautiful to the petition and ask if they can explore ways in which their programme may be further strengthened in relation to the litter picking topic.

Broader action to address litter and waste management

School education is only one aspect in the government's approach to address issues in relation to litter and waste management. As the Committee will be aware, we aim to make Scotland a zero waste society by improving resources efficiency, taking action to reduce and recycle food waste, introducing a deposit return scheme and other key measures.

Our National Litter Strategy "[Towards a Litter-Free Scotland](#)," which was published in

2014, has now come to the end of its five year lifespan. Work has now begun to refresh the National Litter Strategy as a National Litter and Fly-tipping Strategy. A 12-week public consultation will take place at the end of this year, and the refreshed strategy will be published in early 2022. This approach recognises that these are different issues and will allow a tailored approach to be taken to each of them. Recognising the important role of education in litter prevention, communications and behaviour change has been identified as one of the four key themes which will be the focus of this refreshed strategy.

Conclusion

I am grateful to the petitioners for their efforts to bring this matter to the attention of both the Parliament and the government. As stated, while the government is not minded to mandate a particular weekly time for litter picking in schools, I am keen to ensure that the aims behind the petition are highlighted to the relevant education organisations. To this end, I have asked my officials to share details of the petition as well as this government response with Education Scotland. In addition, I have asked officials to engage with Keep Scotland Beautiful in order to alert them to this petition and to explore whether they can further strengthen their programme to support learning about litter and waste management.

Shirley-Anne Somerville