

Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee
Wednesday 21 May 2025
9th Meeting, 2025 (Session 6)

PE2111: Fund early learning and childcare from 9 months

Introduction

Petitioner Julie Fraser

Petition summary Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to provide families with financial support for early learning and childcare when their children reach 9 months old.

Webpage <https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE2111>

1. [The Committee last considered this petition at its meeting on 30 October 2024](#). At that meeting, the Committee agreed to write to the Scottish Government.
2. The petition summary is included in **Annexe A** and the Official Report of the Committee's last consideration of this petition is at **Annexe B**.
3. The Committee has received new a written submission from the Scottish Government which is set out in **Annexe C**.
4. [Written submissions received prior to the Committee's last consideration can be found on the petition's webpage](#).
5. [Further background information about this petition can be found in the SPICe briefing](#) for this petition.
6. [The Scottish Government gave its initial response to the petition on 29 July 2024](#).
7. Every petition collects signatures while it remains under consideration. At the time of writing, 9,295 signatures have been received on this petition.

Action

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

Clerks to the Committee
May 2025

Annexe A: Summary of petition

PE2111: Fund early learning and childcare from 9 months

Petitioner

Julie Fraser

Date Lodged

2 July 2024

Petition summary

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to provide families with financial support for early learning and childcare when their children reach 9 months old.

Background information

Maternity pay ends after 9 months, which is when many women return to work. Many families need to pay for early learning/childcare for over 2 years and this is simply not an option for many others.

This cost often leaves many women having to give up work, and that leads to many families struggling to survive with mounting debt, stress and crossing over the poverty line.

We are asking the Scottish Government to implement funding for working families when their children reach 9 months of age, enabling more people to get back into work and have a better quality of life.

The SNP website has an extremely vague description of their plans for extending funding, but there are no dates or details on what their plans are.

In England, funding has become available for working families with children aged from 9 months old. We are asking them to take swift, decisive action and to implement the same policy.

<https://www.snp.org/policies/pb-what-is-the-snp-doing-to-improve-childcare-and-early-years-education/>

Annexe B: Extract from Official Report of last consideration of PE2111 on 30 October 2024

The Convener (Jackson Carlaw): PE2111, which was lodged by Julie Fraser, calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to provide families with financial support for early learning and childcare when their child reaches nine months of age. The SPICe briefing notes:

“Funded ELC is available to all three- and four-year-olds and some two- and five-year-olds. Eligibility for children under three is not currently universal, but is based on parents/carers being in receipt of certain benefits or the child or parent/carer having experience of care.”

It also notes that, in the programme for government in 2023-24, the Government said that the expansion of childcare support would cover children from nine months old when it stated that it would

“Work with Local Government and other partners to develop the local infrastructure and services needed to provide childcare from nine months to the end of primary school in specific communities in six local authority areas.”

The Scottish Government’s response to the petition states that it is

“working on the initial stages of an expanded national offer for more families with two-year-olds, focusing first on those who will benefit most.”

It explains that expansion work is currently focused on “insights and engagement”, including

“piloting new approaches through the Whole Family Wellbeing Fund and learning from the six early adopter communities.”

Do colleagues have any suggestions for action?

David Torrance: I wonder whether the committee would consider writing to the Scottish Government to ask how the engagement, pilots and investment in the early adopter communities will benefit children at nine months old in those communities, and how that work will inform its development of a targeted offer for one and two-year-olds.

The Convener: We are interested in keeping the petition open. Are colleagues content to proceed on the basis of Mr Torrance’s proposals ?

Members *indicated agreement.*

Annexe C: Written submission

Scottish Government written submission, 4 December 2024

PE2111/C: Fund early learning and childcare from 9 months

Thank you for your letter dated 1 November 2024 in relation to PE2111: Funded early learning and childcare from 9 months.

Keeping children in Scotland out of poverty is the First Minister's top priority and will remain the focus of this Government as we deliver and develop our childcare offer over the remainder of this Parliament.

The Scottish Government has made difficult choices in order to prioritise investment of almost £1 billion a year in delivering 1140 hours of high quality, funded early learning and childcare to eligible children. Scotland remains the only part of the UK that already offers 1140 hours per year of funded ELC to all 3 and 4-year-olds and around a quarter of 2-year-olds regardless of whether their parents are working or not because we are committed to promoting equality for all of Scotland's children, putting their interests first. If eligible families paid for this themselves, it would cost them more than £5,500 per eligible child per year.

It's important to note that the Scottish Government is operating in one of the most difficult financial environments since devolution, and we are moving as far and as fast as we can to develop and deliver a further expansion to funded early learning and childcare for younger children within those constraints.

The 2024 [Programme for Government](#) (PFG) set out that this year we will work with local authorities to maximise uptake of our existing offer for eligible two year olds, with a focus on families most at risk of poverty and on areas with some of the lowest take up rates.

Following years of work with the UK Government we now have access to much better information on the size and distribution of the eligible population in Scotland at both a local and national level. This allowed us to publish more accurate uptake rates for the first time in the ELC Census last year (December 2023) and identify areas where improvements to uptake can be made.

We are now working with local authorities and the Improvement Service on a National Improvement Project which will take focussed action in five local authorities as well as seek out and promote good practice to increase uptake for eligible two year olds across all local authority areas.

In addition, we are progressing our early adopter community (EAC) work in six local authorities, backed by £16 million in 2024/25 and 2025/26. This place-based, people-centred work will help the Scottish Government and our local partners to understand what it takes to deliver expanded local childcare systems that support families with children from the early years to the end of primary school, and the difference this can make in ending child poverty. Whilst some of the EAC projects will directly support children aged 9 months, at this stage we do not have firm data on

participating families as this information will be collected through grant reporting and evaluation activity.

Grant offer letters for these projects have now been issued and in this current year the EACs will focus on engagement with families with younger children for the first time to understand more about their needs and what approaches could deliver the greatest impact for families with children of different ages. Small-scale delivery of early learning and childcare is also being established in a number of EAC communities. These tests of change will be a leading source of evidence and insights about the role childcare can play in supporting families most at risk of living in poverty.

In Shetland, for example, they have identified an ELC setting which currently delivers childcare for younger children as well as breakfast provision for school age children. Increased delivery in this area could offer key insights into both high-quality provision for two year olds in target groups, and models of breakfast provision in rural communities.

In Clackmannanshire, in addition to delivering ELC provision in nursery settings for under twos, they are aiming to strengthen their local infrastructure for baby and toddler groups. Clackmannanshire will extend their toddler groups to four communities, targeting families most in need. This aims to support isolated families and those furthest from support services, providing intervention and support for families at the earliest point, whilst delivering a service that is informed by families' needs. A further baby and toddler group with a specific focus on additional support needs will also be introduced.

The EACs will be a key element of our developing evidence base to inform a future childcare expansion for younger children. Other elements will include building on the research we have undertaken in 2023/24 including our [mapping work](#) and [evidence review](#) to help us understand and identify what models of early learning and childcare are best for younger children. We are also piloting new approaches to early learning and childcare for families with children under three via projects funded by the Whole Family Wellbeing Fund.

We know that the needs of younger children can be different from those of older children, and it is important that we take the time to better understand this through the work we have planned over the coming year.

Early Learning and Childcare