

Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee  
Wednesday 4 June 2025  
10th Meeting, 2025 (Session 6)

## PE2103: Legislate to standardise the prescribed learning hours for Primary and Secondary schools in Scotland

### Introduction

**Petitioner** Dr Julie Badcock

**Petition summary** Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to standardise the prescribed learning hours for Primary and Secondary establishments across all local authorities in Scotland.

**Webpage** <https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE2103>

1. [The Committee last considered this petition at its meeting on 9 October 2024](#). At that meeting, the Committee agreed to write to the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills.
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 a new written submission from the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills 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 6 June 2022](#).
7. Every petition collects signatures while it remains under consideration. At the time of writing, 3,046 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**

### **PE2103: Legislate to standardise the prescribed learning hours for Primary and Secondary schools in Scotland**

#### **Petitioner**

Dr Julie Badcock

#### **Date Lodged**

29 May 2024

#### **Petition summary**

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to standardise the prescribed learning hours for Primary and Secondary establishments across all local authorities in Scotland.

#### **Background information**

Falkirk Council are seeking to plug a £65m deficit in their accounts over the next 5 years. They have allocated a significant proportion of the required savings, £40m, to Children's Services and are proposing to finish the school week at 12:30 on Fridays to achieve £5.751m of this. However, this requires a reduction of school hours from 25 to 22.5 hours per week for Primary children and from 26.6 to 24.75 hours per week for Secondary education. This is 10% less than every other Primary school in Scotland, putting the children of Falkirk at a significant disadvantage compared to their peers. Over the course of a child's formal education in a Falkirk school they would receive 52 weeks less teacher contact time, more than an entire academic year, and yet will be expected to achieve the same standards of grades.

Alongside the hugely detrimental effect on our children's education, working families will suffer as hours, and thus family income, will have to be cut to accommodate this change.

## **Annexe B: Extract from Official Report of last consideration of PE2103 on 9 October 2024**

**The Convener:** Item 3 is consideration of a number of new petitions. As I always do before we begin consideration of new petitions, I point out to those who might be watching or following the proceedings, or to any petitioner who may have tuned in to see us discuss their petition, that, in advance of this consideration, we invite the Parliament's independent research body, the Scottish Parliament information centre, to provide us with a briefing on the issues that have been raised in it. We also ask the Scottish Government for its preliminary view. We do that simply because, historically, the committee, on our first consideration of a petition, would instruct those bodies to respond. Our current approach allows us to shortcut that and get to a meaningful discussion.

The first new petition, PE2103, from Dr Julie Badcock, calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to standardise the prescribed learning hours for primary and secondary establishments across all local authorities in Scotland.

The SPICe briefing explains that the length of the day and the number of learning hours is a matter for each local authority. It also explains that ministers have the power to make regulations that would set the minimum number of learning hours that each pupil should receive.

In 2023, the Scottish Government consulted on using those powers to prescribe the minimum annual number of learning hours. The consultation closed in June 2023 and the Scottish Government is yet to set out what its next steps will be. The Government's submission states that it is carefully considering the very large number of responses and that it intends to publish its analysis of the responses in due course.

Its submission also states that Government does not support any reduction of learning hours in any local authority. That view was expressed in a letter to all local authorities last year. Ministers are working to reach an agreement with local government on the issue. The submission states:

"If no agreement is reached, Ministers remain open to taking steps towards utilising" its powers to regulate the number of learning hours.

The issues in the petition are live, presently. Do colleagues have any comments or suggestions??

**Foysoi Choudhury:** We should keep the petition open and write to the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills to ask for an update on the Scottish Government's work with local authorities to reach an agreement on the provision of learning hours, including information on how the work is expected to progress and when information on the outcome of that work will be available, and to ask when the analysis of responses to the consultation of prescribing minimum hours will be published. Given that the consultation closed in June 2023, we should ask for an explanation as to why its publication is taking so long.

**The Convener:** I think that the committee can accept that, if there are a considerable number of responses, it might take time to analyse those. However, it is 15 or 16 months since the consultation closed, and it would be interesting to understand what the on-going delay is. Are colleagues content with that approach?

**Members** *indicated agreement.*

## **Annexe C: Written submission**

### **Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills written submission, 10 January 2025**

#### **PE2103/C: Legislate to standardise the prescribed learning hours for Primary and Secondary schools in Scotland**

I write with regard to your letter of 18 October on behalf of the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee where you asked for an update on the Scottish Government's work with local authorities to reach an agreement on the provision of learning hours in Scottish schools and when the analysis of the consultation - *Prescribing the minimum annual number of learning hours: consultation* would be published.

I explained in my response, dated 25 November 2024, that discussion with local government were continuing and that a consultation analysis report would be published in due course.

You will be aware that we announced on 10 December 2024 an agreement between the Scottish Government and local government, via its representative body COSLA - [Education: agreement with COSLA - gov.scot](https://www.gov.scot/education/agreement-with-cosla).

We have committed to working together to restore teacher numbers to 2023 levels next year, and freeze learning hours which will support the learning experience for pupils across Scotland. In addition, we have also agreed to make meaningful progress towards reducing class contact time for teachers, in recognition of the asks made by teachers and teaching unions. Falkirk Council also agreed on 12 December to withdraw their proposals to reduce learning hours in schools in their area for the 25/26 financial year.

I am sure you will agree this joint agreement with local government is welcome. It will give parents across Scotland reassurance that their children's education will not be damaged by a reduction in learning hours.

I would also like to make you aware that Scottish Ministers have also agreed with local government to work together on proposals to establish a statutory minimum number of learning hours, to understand the definition of a "learning hour", and the impact of this ambition on Councils currently providing a lower number of learning hours.

I am also pleased to advise that the analysis report for the consultation *Prescribing the minimum annual number of learning hours: consultation* has now been published and is available here – <https://www.gov.scot/isbn/9781835216088>.

I hope this update is helpful.

**JENNY GILRUTH**