

Education and Gaelic Committee
Tuesday 23 June 2026
1st Meeting, 2026 (Session 7)

Priorities

Introduction

1. This agenda item will enable members to have an initial discussion in public on its priorities for Session 7.
2. Members may wish to consider the issues raised in the [Session 6 Education, Children and Young People Committee's legacy report](#) , and in the [SPICe briefing paper on key issues for session 7](#) which outlines some of the key subjects likely to be of particular interest in the coming Parliamentary Session, and any other potential areas of scrutiny the Committee may wish to consider.
3. In addition, SPICe have provided a further briefing on possible priorities for scrutiny which are contained in **Annexe A**.
4. The discussions will inform the clerks in developing the programme for the Committee's business planning day should Members agree to hold one. Members will then have a further opportunity to discuss priorities at the business planning day before formally agreeing an initial work programme at its first meeting after recess
5. If agreed, it is proposed that the business planning day will take place towards the end of the summer recess.
6. The Committee may also wish to invite the Cabinet Secretary for Education, Culture and Gaelic, to discuss Scottish Government priorities as soon as practical after the programme for government is announced.

For Decision

7. The Committee is invited to agree—
 - to hold an informal business planning day towards the end of the summer recess;
 - to invite the Cabinet Secretary for Education, Culture and Gaelic to give evidence to the Committee after the programme for government is announced; and
 - to delegate arrangements and agenda for the business planning day to the Convener/Clerks.

Clerks to the Committee
June 2026

Annexe A



Education: Potential Topics

Childcare

The Scottish Government aims to extend year-round childcare support to every child from nine months old to the end of primary school.

Families of eligible children are entitled to receive 1,140 hours of funded ELC free of charge. All children are eligible from shortly after their 3rd birthday to the start of primary school; a 2-year old may be an “eligible child” if [their family is in receipt of certain benefits or if a parent or the child has experience of care](#).

The Government in Session 6 undertook a range of work to explore how to expand the provision of pre-school and school-aged childcare.

The Committee may wish to explore this topic. Its focus could be on the outcomes expected from further expansion of childcare and to explore how different models of childcare delivery could best meet those expected outcomes.

Additional support needs

The number of pupils being identified with one or more additional support needs has been steadily growing for over a decade. There have also been reports that since the pandemic both the number of pupils presenting with additional support need and the complexity of the need has increased.

How to ensure that pupils’ needs are consistently met has been a longstanding issue and the subject to regular commentary, review and reports.

Behaviour in Schools

A recurring issue over the past years has been the standards of behaviour in schools. The Scottish Government and COSLA published a joint [Relationships and behaviour in schools: national action plan 2024 to 2027](#). Last June, the Government issued new [guidance on fostering positive, inclusive and safe school environments](#) and [risk assessment guidance for violent, aggressive and dangerous behaviour](#).

The next report on the longstanding and triennial Behaviour in Scotland's Schools Research survey is expected to be published in the autumn. These results are likely to contribute to debates on pupils’ behaviour and schools’ approaches to supporting positive behaviour and relationships.

Scottish Attainment Challenge

There is a negative correlation between pupils' families' experiences of deprivation and the educational outcomes of those pupils. The "attainment gap" is measured by comparing the performance or outcomes for pupils living in the most and least deprived areas in Scotland.

The Scottish Government's Scottish Attainment Challenge (SAC) is the principle national policy aimed at closing the attainment gap. SAC is a range of programmes backed by the Attainment Scotland Fund which is around £200m per year. The Scottish Government measures the attainment gap through 13 "key measures" and [reports on these annually through the National Improvement Plan](#).

Reducing the impact of deprivation on educational outcomes will continue to be a focus of policy and practice in school education. The Committee may wish to explore the Government's approach to closing the attainment gap in Session 7 and progress to date.

Reducing class contact time

The terms and conditions of teachers working in the public sector are agreed nationally through the Scottish Negotiating Committee for Teachers. These include issues such as pay scales, and a range of employment conditions. These [conditions include a maximum of 22.5 "contact hours" for each week](#). Teachers are expected to be teaching a class for a maximum of 22.5 hours a week, with the remainder of their time devoted to preparation, marking, meeting parents/carers, professional development etc. The Scottish Government aimed to reduce this to 21 hours per week in the last Session of Parliament. Delivery of this aim proved to be challenging.

Following a ballot of its members, on [6 March 2026 the EIS announced it would take industrial action](#) in relation to teachers' workload and a lack of progress in the reduction of contact time. [Following further negotiations, on 13 March 2026 the Scottish Government](#) announced that:

"A weekly reduction of 90 minutes will be introduced on a phased basis, with primary school teachers and those working in special schools benefiting from August 2027. Secondary school teachers will follow two years later."

The [EIS suspended plans for industrial action](#). The Scottish Government said that it would provide £40 million in 2026-27 to support this deal and that a "multi-year budget line from 2027-28 onwards will cover the full implementation costs." [COSLA estimates that the annual cost of this policy could be up to £250-£310 million per year](#).

Ongoing reform

The Scottish Government pursued a number of areas of reform in the last session of Parliament. These included: reform of the qualifications' agency, establishing the

inspectorate as a stand-alone body, exploring changes to how school qualifications are assessed, and establishing a process to review Curriculum for Excellence – the Curriculum Improvement Cycle.

In this session we will begin to see the results of this work. For example, initial outputs from the Curriculum Improvement Cycle are expected this summer.

There are a range of areas that the Committee may wish to explore across Session 7:

- The establishment of the new bodies. Have the reforms delivered the changes anticipated?
- The approach to inspections
- Curriculum reform subsequent changes to qualifications

Upcoming publications

PISA

The results of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) are expected to be published in December 2026. This is likely to create debate on the quality of education in Scotland. PISA data is not straightforward to interpret. A one-off session exploring what the PISA results mean may be useful in highlighting the results and how these results can be used.

School Premises Regulations

Just prior to the election, the Scottish Government [consulted on proposals to update The School Premises \(General Requirements and Standards\) \(Scotland\) Regulations 1967](#). The proposals cover a wide range of aspects of school sites, including:

- Kitchens
- Outdoor spaces
- Playing fields
- Minimum educational space
- Toilets
- Wellbeing spaces
- Ventilation, acoustic properties, heat, ventilation and heat.

It is not clear when the Government may introduce new regulations. If the Committee wished to explore and influence these issues, it may wish to undertake some work prior to the Government doing so.

Further and Higher Education

Post-school education and skills reform

The Tertiary Education and Training (Funding and Governance) (Scotland) Bill passed in January this year. The Bill became an Act in March 2026. Once enacted, it will make changes to the SFC's functions in relation to monitoring of financial sustainability of institutions. It also gives SFC new responsibilities in relation to apprenticeship funding. Currently, SDS delivers apprenticeships though their role in this was not set out in legislation.

Moving apprenticeship functions will require moving SDS staff to the SFC. As a result of this, the number of staff at the SFC is to almost double in size. During Bill scrutiny the Session 6 Education, Children and Young People (ECYP) Committee heard stakeholder concerns about the costs associated with this, including uncertainty around pension costings.

[Audit Scotland have a report on preparation for reforms](#) due out 25 June 2026. The scope of the audit is to:

“...assess how well placed the Scottish Government and its partners are to achieve its ambitions for reform. It will examine the Scottish Government's approach to reform, including how well it is working with its partners, the clarity of its vision, the robustness of its plans, and the adequacy of governance arrangements and resources in place to deliver reform. The audit will make recommendations where necessary.”

The Committee may wish to seek an update on these issues during Session 7.

University and college finances and governance

In Session 6 the ECYP Committee carried out various enquires and evidence sessions on university and college finances, and this was the focus of pre-budget scrutiny in 2024 and 2025. Further information about this work can be [found in the Committee's Legacy Report](#) and in the [SPICe key issues briefing](#).

Although the [Scottish Government's 2026-27 Budget](#) set out a rise in resource and capital budgets for colleges and universities, the budget for both sectors has experienced several years of real-terms funding decline.

In addition, universities have voiced concern about the impact [recent UK Government changes to the student visa scheme](#) are going to have on income from international student tuition fees.

Towards the end of Session 6, a number of universities and colleges faced financial challenges, the most high-profile of these being [the University of Dundee](#) (UoD). The [Gillies Report](#) investigated the causes of the situation at UoD and found failures in executive and governance responsibilities. It made recommendations for improving governance across the sector. [Universities Scotland wrote to the ECYP Committee](#)

[in July 2025](#) setting out its response, stating a “direction of travel” was intended by the early autumn of that year. Further information on the Gillies Report, recommendations and sector response can be found in the [SPICe paper for the ECYP Committee’s 29 October 2025 meeting](#).

The Scottish Government set up working groups looking at sustainable funding with both sectors: the [Framework for Sustainability and Success of Scotland’s Universities](#) and the College Sector of the Future. Work is expected to conclude in Autumn 2026.

The Committee may wish to explore the financial sustainability of colleges and universities, taking into account recent developments. The Committee may also wish to inquire about the progress of work to improve governance across the university sector.

College estate

During Session 6, the ECYP Committee heard that colleges were dealing with a maintenance backlog due to the funding pressures they faced. In 2025, [the SFC invited colleges with urgent maintenance needs to bid for a share of £2.5m emergency capital maintenance funding](#). At the time, the SFC acknowledged this funding was “unlikely to be sufficient” to meet the needs of the sector.

The ECYP Committee also heard that the [SFC planned to publish a College Infrastructure Strategy](#). Originally, this was intended to cover the period 2024-34. However, the plan has faced delays.

On 21 January 2026, Minister for Higher and Further Education Ben Macpherson MSP told the ECYP Committee:

“...the SFC is working with the sector on a 10-year college infrastructure investment plan, which is due in autumn of this year. It is important to emphasise that it is a collegiate and collaborative process with the sector and the different colleges. That is being supported by the Scottish Futures Trust, as you would expect.” – [Official Report, 21/01/2026](#)

The Committee may wish to seek an update from the Scottish Government and the SFC on the College Infrastructure Strategy.

Further and Higher Education Outcomes

The SFC’s Outcomes Framework and Assurance Model covers SFC funded further and higher education bodies. It sets out SFC’s expectations of them in return for the funding they receive. The new system replaced previous assurance and accountability measures (most notably, Outcome Agreements) from AY 2024-25 More information can be found on the [SFC Outcomes Framework webpage](#).

The Committee may wish to find out more about the new system of measuring outcomes and how it is bedding in.

Graduate apprenticeships

Graduate Apprenticeships (GAs) are apprenticeships delivered as a partnership between employers and universities. They are work-based learning programmes at [Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework \(SCQF\) levels 9, 10 or 11](#).

Universities accredit and certify GAs, and they lead to an undergraduate degree or post graduate award. The apprentice is in paid employment during their studies. A list of GA 'framework' subject areas is available at Annex A of the [Scottish Funding Council \(SFC\) guidance for Academic Year 2025-26](#).

The SNP manifesto committed to “expanding the number of graduate apprenticeships to over 8,000 over the course of the Parliament”. This works out to around 1,600 per year. In 2025-26, [the SFC’s final funding allocations for academic year 2025-26](#) set the expectation that the sector should deliver 1,378 graduate apprenticeships.

The ECYP Committee’s Stage 1 report on the Tertiary Education and Training (Funding and Governance) (Scotland) Bill acknowledged calls from witnesses for the development of more graduate apprenticeships and noted concerns from witnesses about flat-lining progress in recent years. The report also stated:

The Committee also notes that work is currently underway, under Professor Steve Decent, looking at graduate apprenticeships and how they might be improved. The Committee asks for more detail about this work, including timescales. – [EYCP Committee Stage 1 Report on the Tertiary Education and Training \(Funding and Governance\) \(Scotland\) Bill, 9/09/2025](#)

During the Stage 3 debate on the Bill, Minister for Higher and Further Education Ben Macpherson MSP stated:

“We certainly need the process of developing graduate apprenticeship frameworks to be more efficient, and frameworks absolutely need to be shorter and simpler, as I have said today. The bill gives any person the power to request a framework to be prepared, and ministers can set out in regulations the process to be followed by the SFC in response. We could use those regulations to set out the process and timescales for developing and producing frameworks in future...” – [Official Report, 20/01/2026](#)

The Committee may wish to look at graduate apprenticeships in relation to their continued development and Scottish Government plans to increase provision.

Child protection and looked after children

Funding children’s care reform

During Session 6, the previous committee carried out ongoing scrutiny of ‘The Promise’ to reform the care system for looked after children in Scotland by 2030. The committee also led on scrutiny of the Children (Care, Care Experience and Services

Planning) Bill. One of the recurring themes arising from this scrutiny was a lack of additional funding being made available to councils to support the additional responsibilities achieving The Promise will involve. During Bill scrutiny, the costs of expanding aftercare for those leaving care were questioned.

Audit Scotland published the report [Improving Care Experience: Delivering The Promise](#) on 8 October 2025. The report looked at governance and accountability arrangements, measuring and reporting of progress and trends in spending and resourcing. The report found initial planning for The Promise by the Scottish Government and COSLA did not “give sufficient thought” to how it would be delivered and resourced. As a result, public bodies were not given a strong foundation to work from, and this had resulted in progress being slow.

The report also found: a lack of a “consistent and shared understanding” of how The Promise would be delivered, a lack of clarity around roles and responsibilities, lack of available data, difficulty in quantifying and tracking funding for delivery of The Promise, and only £148m of £500m pledged for a ‘Whole Family Wellbeing Fund’ had been allocated.

The report recommended the Scottish Government, COSLA and The Promise Scotland should progress work to identify where resources should be targeted “in the next six months” (April 2026).

As part of its response, The [Promise Scotland published updates on areas highlighted in the Audit Scotland report](#), setting out planned actions for the coming months. This includes the development of a data map, an information sharing project, information about updates to Plan 24-30, and clarity around roles and protocols.

The Committee may wish to consider whether progress had been made toward improving clarity around funding, roles and responsibilities. The Committee might also consider funding for aftercare provisions and find out what preparations local authorities and others are making in relation to aftercare expansion.

Reporting of child protection concerns

The Committee may also wish to look at the topic of reporting of child protection concerns. The SNP Manifesto stated:

We will legislate to make reporting of harm to children, including child sexual abuse, mandatory by adults tasked with safeguarding young people. We will strengthen current guidance to make it a legal requirement for key professionals to report concerns about a child's welfare - in order to secure greater protection for children and young people, and ensure that the statutory responsibilities of public bodies are adhered to at all times. – [SNP Manifesto 2026](#)

The Committee may wish to seek an update from the Scottish Government on these plans and anticipated timescales attached to them.