

Education and Gaelic Committee
Tuesday 8 September 2026
2nd Meeting, 2026 (Session 7)

Programme for Government

Introduction

1. The Committee will take evidence on the [Programme for Government](#), which was published on Tuesday 1 September 2026.

Supporting information

2. SPICe have provided a summary of the Programme for Government on areas related to the Committee's remit which is attached at **Annexe A**.

Clerk to the Committee
September 2026

Annexe A



Programme for Government 2026-2031

The [Scottish Government's Programme for Government \(PfG\)](#) was announced in the Scottish Parliament by First Minister John Swinney MSP on Tuesday 1 September 2026. It sets out the direction for the next five years, with a focus on public sector reform. It also sets out the legislative programme for [Year One of Session 7](#).

The overarching priorities of the PfG are:

- Eradicating child poverty
- Growing the economy
- Tackling the climate emergency
- Delivering a stronger NHS and Public Services

This briefing provides Committee Members with further information about PfG announcements relevant to the Committee's remit.

Early years and childcare

One of the Scottish Government's flagship policies for this session is to expand the childcare offer to cover children from 9 months old through to the end of primary school, available 52 weeks per year by the end of the Parliament. The PfG said:

"This will be a more flexible system that changes from a focus on 3 and 4-year-olds, to provide childcare support earlier in life and extended to primary school children, making it easier for parents to get to work and get the support they need during holiday periods. Delivery will be phased across the Parliamentary term."

The PfG identifies a number of objectives for this work:

- reducing child poverty;
- lowering household costs;
- enabling parents/carers to work and thereby supporting economic growth. (p 18)

Childcare, particularly in the early years, is also intended to support child

development outcomes. Parliament held a debate on childcare on [27 May 2026](#). The Government's motion included a reference to childcare's contribution to child development. The relative weight given to the different aims of the policy may lead to different approaches. For example, an approach aimed at supporting child development might have a strong focus on the quality of provision and supporting families most in need; whereas one focused on supporting parental employment and reducing costs might have a greater focus on the quantity and flexibility of the childcare available. Furthermore, different approaches may suit different age groups.

The agreed motion after the debate in May called on the Government to “set out a fully costed delivery plan and timeline for its [childcare commitments]” and “as a first step” to work with COSLA to “to ensure that cross-border placements are available across Scotland, that all children can access the current funded hours the week rather than term after the child's relevant birthday, and that the required flexibility in provision will only be achieved with proper workforce planning.”

In 2026-27, the PfG said the Government will:

- Publish and consult on a blueprint for a new childcare offer
- Fund a range of targeted childcare support for low-income families, including the Extra Time programme with the Scottish Football Association, and the childcare Early Adopter Communities
- Continue to support professionals delivering funded ELC to be paid at least the Real Living Wage
- Deliver a national breakfast club offer, with provision for all primary schools from August 2027, backed by £44 million each year.

School education & Gaelic

School education faces a number of challenges in the next five years. The Scottish Government framed its school priorities in the PfG as the “ABCs” – namely attendance, attainment, behaviour and curriculum. The PfG also covered governance and school leadership; additional support needs; teacher and wider school workforce; and Gaelic education.

Structural changes

One of the key structural changes could be the potential reorganisation of local government. The PfG said that the Government would engage in an “intensive dialogue over the next three months with partners in Local Government, and other parties across Parliament reach a clear shared direction about the future of local governance in Scotland”. The PfG said that the Government's position is that there is a “need for regional local government, alongside community empowerment”.

The PfG also promises to empower school leaders and to raise standards and reduce variation. The [Cabinet Secretary gave more details on this in her statement](#)

[to Parliament on 2 September 2026](#) in which she said she would engage with the profession, local government and trade unions to “seize the opportunity of public service reform to deliver meaningful improvements in people’s lives.”

Attendance, Attainment, Behaviour and Curriculum

Under attendance, the PfG committed to “reduce absence and improve attendance, through increased understanding of the underlying issues, improved data, professional learning and bespoke support.”

The PfG frames attainment in the context of closing the poverty-related attainment gap. The PfG said it would continue with the Scottish Attainment Challenge and spend up to £200m in the next financial year. This is roughly the same funding as the annual funding for the SAC in the last session (excluding the COVID-19 top-up in 2021-22).

There are a number of funds under the SAC:

- Pupil Equity Funding (PEF) — £130 million given directly to headteachers in 97% of schools to use as they see fit
- Strategic Equity Funding (SEF) — £43 million shared across all 32 local authorities, based on the number of children in low-income families
- Care Experienced Children and Young People (CECYP) funding — dedicated support to help improve outcomes for young people in or who have been in care, contributing to keeping the Promise
- National programmes to support initiatives such as youth work and mentoring

It is not clear if there are plans to change the approach or structures of the Scottish Attainment Challenge and the funds that underpin it.

In August 2024, the Scottish Government and COSLA published a joint [action plan on improving behaviour and relationships in schools](#). The action plan covered 2024-2027. The action plan aimed to support more consistent “relational approaches based on high warmth and high standards and expectations”. It explained that these approaches include emotional responsiveness and support, and an ability to effectively set limits for behaviour. The action plan had 20 actions, which included the production of new guidance. New guidance on [fostering a positive, inclusive and safe school environment, including the use of consequences in schools was published in June 2025](#).

The PfG said that the government will:

“Implement the joint action plan on relationships and behaviour, providing clarity on recording and monitoring of incidents and the use of exclusion, responding to the independent review of actions taken to tackle gender-based violence and furthering the evidence on the experience of pupil behaviour in schools through independent research.”

The Scottish Government regularly commissions research into the behaviour in Scotland's schools, normally every three or four years. The [findings of the fifth wave of the Behaviour in Scottish Schools Research \("BISSR"\) were published in November 2023](#). The next wave of this research is being undertaken this year and the subsequent report is [expected to be published in early 2027](#).

Related to pupils' behaviour in schools, [the Government is currently consulting on restricting mobile phones in Scotland's schools](#). The PfG also said that it would "continue the work of the Gender Equality Taskforce in Education and Learning and build on the range of work currently available in schools to tackle misogyny through the Gender Based Violence framework."

The PfG highlighted the Curriculum Improvement Cycle. The [Cabinet Secretary gave more details on this in her statement to Parliament on 2 September 2026](#). She said that the CIC will:

- clarify the role of knowledge;
- make progression clearer;
- provide clearer expectations around key areas such as language and maths.

The Cabinet Secretary also addressed how the changes to the curriculum will be implemented and linked this to plans to reduce teachers' contact time:

"Just as important as developing the reformed curriculum is making sure that teachers are supported to digest and use it. We are taking a staggered approach to ensure readiness. In-service time, coupled with structured support, will be offered to ensure that it is understood and embedded successfully. As we deliver curriculum reform with our teaching workforce, we will also be taking forward reduced class contact time from 22.5 hours per week to 21, ensuring that teachers have more protected time to focus on planning and delivering high-quality learning. Having listened to voices consistently highlighting a lack of job certainty offered by their local authority employers, we will also deliver the reforms that are needed to provide a teacher job guarantee for a minimum of three years for newly qualified teachers."

The PfG also included two other curriculum-related commitments. One was to continue "the national approach to LGBTQI+ Inclusive Education across all primary and secondary schools, ensuring age-appropriate integration within the curriculum." The other was "a review of the provision of modern languages in schools and look to expand the opportunities for young people to learn a new language, including Gaelic and Scots." Both of these actions are due to take place in the current parliamentary year.

Additional support needs

Under additional support needs (ASN), the PfG said that this year, the Government

would implement “the routemap for a new National Staged Intervention Model for children with additional support needs [[published on 31 August 2026](#)] and progress implementation of the wider [McManus Review](#) recommendations”. The Cabinet Secretary’s statement on 2 September 2026 stated that the Government intends to deliver all six of the recommendations over the course of the Parliament.

The PfG also stated that in the current parliamentary year the Government would:

- develop “a dyslexia passport to support school leavers entering further education, employment or training”; and
- engage with the profession and schools on the provision of BSL training for teachers and specialist deafblind teachers to support those children who are blind, partially sighted, deaf or deafblind.

Workforce and contact time

In relation to the workforce, the PfG said the Government would create “new employment opportunities for teachers by creating the conditions for a Teacher Jobs Guarantee and new accreditations and better job security for Pupil Support Assistants”. It also said that in the current year, the Government would support more primary teachers to retrain to work in secondary schools and address recruitment challenges in rural and island communities.

In her statement on 2 September 2026, the Cabinet Secretary announced, “a new £1 million teacher recruitment assistance fund to support the recruitment and retention of teachers in our rural and island communities with practical support, including housing support.”

Free school meals

The PfG commits to work on the further expansion of free school meals in primary schools in 2026-27. Alongside this, the government says it will make up to £2.8 million available to local authorities to help write off school meal debt to help families facing ongoing cost-of-living pressures.

Gaelic

The PfG said that the Government would support further expansion of dedicated Gaelic-medium schools and units. In relation to support for Gaelic more generally, the government noted that it would review Sabhal Mòr Ostaig¹ “considering its status and ensuring its future development is supported and its wide contribution to Gaelic learning is protected.” The PfG also said the Government would support local authorities in designating Gaelic areas of linguistic significance in their areas.

Further and Higher Education

During Session 6 of the Scottish Parliament, the Scottish Government's overarching

¹ This is fulfilling a duty under [section 32 of Scottish Languages Act 2025](#).

policy focus was to move toward a more coherent tertiary education system. As financial sustainability became an increasing concern, the Scottish Government set up two working groups to look at sustainability of college and university funding in response to growing concerns about its long-term sustainability. The [Framework for Sustainability and Success of Scotland's Universities](#) (the Future Framework) and the [College Sector of the Future](#) will look at how challenges facing the sectors might be addressed. Work is expected to conclude in Autumn 2026. The PfG commits to:

“...delivering and responding to two reviews we have commissioned for the future of the sector.” – [PfG 2026-2031](#)

The Future Framework published its [first report in August 2026](#). This found that funding received and income generated by universities is not enough to cover the costs of core activities of teaching and research. As a result, the funding gap between cost and all sources of income was around £200 million in 2023-24. The [Tertiary Education and Training \(Funding and Governance\) Act 2026](#) (the 2026 Act) was passed toward the end of last session. The Act contains provisions that, once enacted, are intended to simplify the tertiary education funding landscape and improve the governance of the SFC. It places a duty on Scottish Ministers to fund the SFC to secure and fund provision of national training programmes and all apprenticeships.

Following the passage of the 2026 Act, the PfG provides further confirmation that responsibility for funding apprenticeships will move from Skills Development Scotland (SDS) to the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) in April 2027.

The PfG also highlights the reintroduction of the [Flexible Workforce Development Fund \(FWDF\)](#). This fund was originally available between 2017 and 2023 but was discontinued as a result of budget pressures. The college sector and business stakeholders [highlighted the value of FWDF](#) in evidence to the Education, Children and Young People Committee in 2024. The new FWDF is a £10m fund intended to help colleges upskill in-work parents, carers, young people and other priority groups. It is part of a £22 million package set out in the [Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan](#) to help parents access skills and training. [Colleges RISE](#) and the [Training Access Fund](#) are also mentioned.

The PfG includes a commitment to fund “at least 150,000” apprenticeships, “grow the opportunities provided by Graduate Apprenticeships” and introduce an Apprenticeship Accelerator Grant to support businesses, though timescales for these pledges are not set out.

PfG commitments for 2026-27 include:

- Production of a national skills plan for Scotland by Spring 2027, aligning skills investment with economic need and supporting green and digital transitions.
- Publication of a Careers Ambitions Framework.
- Protection of free tuition for Scottish students.

- Work with the Scottish National Investment Bank to launch a Scottish Innovation Fund with a focus on university spinouts, working with universities to attract private capital.
- Working with universities to deliver new Knowledge Transfer Partnerships (KTPs), connecting businesses with academic institutions to drive innovation and growth.
- Grow and strengthen advanced technology clusters through the Cluster Development Programme; and explore opportunities to boost innovation by linking research, universities and businesses.
- Explore options for reinstating the Glasgow School of Art Mackintosh Building.
- Invest £9 million over the next three years around Mossmorran to support the workforce, local communities, and to secure a long-term future for the site, including working closely with Fife College to provide skills training for displaced workers.
- Work with Universities of Sanctuary to explore further support for students from Gaza, including through the development of a postgraduate Scottish Gaza Scholarship Programme.

Care, care experience and child protection

The children's care system in Scotland is going through a period of reform. This began with the [Independent Care Review](#), commissioned in 2017. The review findings, set out in '[The Promise](#)', were published in 2020 and accepted by the Scottish Government. The Promise gives a vision for a Scotland where, by 2030, all children grow up loved, safe and respected with effective support reducing the need for children to go into care.

The PfG states work to 'keep The Promise' will continue, with an updated Implementation Strategy pledged for 2026-27. Many of the actions mentioned relate to work already in train during Session 6, for example the £2,000 Care Leaver Payment introduced in April 2026.

Implementation of the [Children \(Care, Care Experience and Services Planning\) Act 2026](#) is also mentioned in the PfG. Once enacted, the Act will extend eligibility for aftercare support for young people leaving care to those leaving prior to their 16th birthday, extend corporate parenting duties, require Independent Fostering Agencies to become charities, give Scottish Ministers powers to make regulations requiring non-local authority residential care providers to provide financial and operational information, make various changes to the children's hearings system and add integration joint boards to the list of bodies required to plan children's services.

The PfG commits to continuing the roll-out of Whole Family Support from pre-birth to 3, stating that the intensive family support approach will be embedded. During Session 6 of Parliament, the Scottish Government committed to a [Whole Family Wellbeing Fund](#) (WFWF) to offer support to families at an early stage, rather than at crisis point. The [2021-22 PfG](#) stated this fund was to total £500m over Session 6, and

that from 2030, at least 5% of community-based health and social care spend should be focused on preventative measures. However, WFWF [budget allocations by the end of Session 6 totalled just under £200m](#).

The WFWF is not mentioned in the 2026-2031 PfG, though there is a commitment to provide a £20m Whole Family Support Third Sector Delivery Fund, and to build on existing work to “progress an integrated Whole Family Support programme”. This will provide multi-year funding to organisations providing support.

On child protection, the PfG commits to:

“...legislate to make reporting of harm mandatory by adults tasked with safeguarding children and young people...” - [PfG 2026-2031](#)

This was a commitment in the SNP Scottish Election manifesto 2026. A timescale is not given for when this legislation will be brought forward and it is not mentioned in the [Year 1 Legislative programme](#).

Challenges facing the social work workforce were highlighted by the Education, Children and Young People Committee at various points during Session 6. The PfG commits to work with the recently launched National Social Work Agency (NSWA), local government and other partners to:

“...ensure a sustainable social work workforce and the best support for them to help deliver on our shared priorities.” – [PfG 2026-2031](#)

Other PfG commitments for 2026-27 include:

- Restatement of the commitment to the statutory inquiry into group-based child sexual abuse, [launched earlier this year](#) and chaired by Professor Alexis Jay.
- Support effective information sharing and multi-agency decision-making where there are concerns about harm or risk.
- Enhance workforce learning and development to improve responses to harm, exploitation and coercion.

Public service reform

The PfG commits to engaging with local government over the next three months to discuss the future of local governance in Scotland. A “shared direction for reform” is planned by the end of 2026, with early changes reflected in the first Budget of Parliament.

As local authorities have duties and responsibilities around early years, childcare, school education and social work, there may be impacts on these areas depending on how the reforms progress. Further details are not available at this stage.

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