

Audit scope

Early learning and childcare

Follow-up audit



ACCOUNTS COMMISSION 

AUDITOR GENERAL 

Prepared by Audit Scotland
May 2019

Background

The Scottish Government and councils are working together to expand funded early learning and childcare (ELC) for three and four-year-olds and eligible two-year-olds.¹ Entitlement for eligible children will almost double from the current 600 hours per year (equivalent of around 16 hours per week during school term time) to 1,140 hours per year (equivalent of around 30 hours per week during school term time) by August 2020.

The Scottish Government will provide councils with an additional £567 million per year by 2021/22 to fund the expansion. This will increase annual spending on funded ELC to around £990 million by 2021/22.

The aims of the expansion to 1,140 hours focus on improving outcomes for children. The Scottish Government has emphasised that providing high-quality ELC will be necessary to achieve the desired impact on children.

Note: 1. Two-year-olds are eligible if they are, or ever have been since their second birthday, looked after, subject to a kinship care order, or had a parent-appointed guardian or their parent receives qualifying benefits.

Why is this audit important?

Given the scale of changes to funded ELC, we are carrying out a series of three audits to understand and assess progress with the expansion and its impact. We published our first audit in February 2018. This audit looked at an earlier expansion from 475 hours of funded ELC to 600 hours from August 2014 and initial progress in planning for the subsequent expansion to 1,140 hours by August 2020.

Our initial audit highlighted the challenges facing the Scottish Government and councils in delivering the expansion to 1,140 hours of funded ELC by August 2020. This included risks around agreeing funding levels, expanding the workforce and increasing the necessary infrastructure. This second audit will examine subsequent progress in planning for the expansion and follow up on the recommendations in our initial report.

Our third audit in this series, currently planned for 2021/22, will focus on the longer-term implementation and impact of this policy. It will assess how well the expansion was delivered and whether it has made a difference to the lives of eligible children and their families.

What will the audit look at?

The audit aims to provide an update on how effectively the Scottish Government and councils are planning for the expansion to 1,140 hours of funded early learning and childcare by August 2020. We aim to assess:

- How well are the Scottish Government and councils progressing planning to ensure there is sufficient workforce, infrastructure and private and third sector provider capacity in place to deliver the expansion?
- What progress has the Scottish Government made to plan and progress how it will assess the effectiveness of the policy?

How will we carry out the audit?


We will gather information using a range of methods including:

- analysing data collected by the Improvement Service and the Scottish Futures Trust on progress with the expansion across councils
- reviewing documents such as meeting papers of the national groups overseeing the expansion, council committee papers and published guidance
- interviews with a range of stakeholders including the Scottish Government, COSLA and bodies representing private and third sector funded providers.

What impact will the audit have?

The audit will provide an independent assessment of progress in addressing the key risks to the expansion of funded ELC. We will assess progress in planning since our last audit. We will make recommendations for the Scottish Government and councils as they continue to plan for the expansion and for how the impact of this will be evaluated.

Timetable and contacts

We plan to publish a report in early 2020. Audit Scotland is carrying out the work on behalf of the Auditor General for Scotland and the Accounts Commission. If you have any questions, please get in touch with Rebecca Smallwood, senior auditor, on 0131 625 1852 or at rsmallwood@audit-scotland.gov.uk 



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