

# **PE2112/B: Conduct an independent review of childcare costs and availability in Scotland**

## **Petitioner written submission, 16 September 2024**

In 2021, Pregnant Then Screwed launched a petition at Westminster calling for a review of childcare in England. The response from the UK Government was very similar to the response received to this petition from the Scottish Government. Neither recognise that the system of early learning and childcare cannot be rebuilt without an independent evaluation of what is working well and what isn't. The Scottish Government marking its own homework is not an effective way of evaluating the system.

The Scottish Government's response to this petition has not identified why there are problems with early learning and childcare in Scotland. It does not explain why childcare in many parts of Scotland is both unaffordable and inaccessible for parents. Expanding funded childcare in Scotland will simply paper over the cracks when the Scottish Government doesn't even know if the system can cope with the expansion. We cannot continue to bolt on new parts to a system that is fundamentally flawed.

An independent review of all early learning and childcare would assess whether the £1 billion of public money being spent on funded childcare is being used in the most effective way. It would identify other ways of spending that money to improve this public service. Reviewing whether taxpayers' money is being spent in the most effective way is the moral and right thing to do.

The Scottish Government's response to this petition mentions the Scottish Household Survey. This asks questions of parents who have children of all ages up to 11 years old. This evidence is therefore irrelevant as we are looking at childcare provision for those under five years old. We know from our own surveys that parents across Scotland cannot get the childcare they want and need because it is inaccessible and unaffordable.

A year ago, the Labour Party commissioned a review of the early years sector in England. Labour said this review would develop a plan for the upcoming English expansion of the early entitlement offer, consider major reform of the early years workforce, and inform the party's plan to deal with challenges around the lack of availability of places in early years settings. This is the sort of review that we know is needed in Scotland. We know the early learning and childcare system in Scotland is broken but without understanding why it is broken, we can't fix it.