

First Minister pledges increasing funding for childcare

The First Minister the Rt Hon Nicola Sturgeon has promised that there will be twice as much spent on free nursery places, early learning and childcare over the term of the next Parliament.

In a wide-ranging education speech at the David Hume Institute in Edinburgh, Ms Sturgeon laid out the Scottish Government's ambition to see every child have the educational opportunities that she benefitted from.



During her address, the First Minister set out the contribution education makes to tackling inequality and growing the economy, focusing on the importance of all children, no matter their background, having the best opportunities through early learning and childcare, strong school education and wider access to higher education.

In a move she described as “one of the best investments any government can possibly make”, she confirmed that free early learning and childcare provision would rise to 30 hours per week, matching the time children spend each week in primary school, by the end of the next Parliament.

Committing to funding this expansion, she pledged that by 2019/20 annual revenue spend on early learning and childcare will have increased from an anticipated £439 million this year to around £880 million.

The First Minister said:

“Today I want to highlight some of the areas where we can and

must do better. In particular, I want to focus on how inequality in attainment – starting in the very early years, and persisting into adulthood – is weakening our society, holding back our economy, and constraining the life chances of too many of our fellow citizens.

“Early Learning and childcare promotes opportunity twice over. It enables parents to enter the workforce now and provide a better standard of living for their children, and it helps all children to make the most of their potential later in life. It’s one of the best investments any government can possibly make.

“In my view, it is central to any enlightened view of what modern Scotland should look like and that is why it is such a driving priority of my government. That’s why I can confirm today my intention that spending on early learning and care will double over the course of the next parliament.

“That’s in addition to the extra capital spending we will provide. The great capital investment project of this parliament is the Queensferry Crossing. If I am re-elected as First Minister next year, I intend that the great infrastructure project of the next parliament will be perhaps less visible, but arguably even more transformational.

“It will be the investment in care and learning facilities needed to ensure our early years provision matches our primary school provision. These facilities will create a bridge to a better future for children and families across the country.”

Addressing the need to widen access to university Ms Sturgeon said:

“When I became First Minister, I set out the clear ambition that a child born today in one of our most deprived communities should, by the time he or she leaves school, have the same chance of going to university as a child born in one of our least deprived communities.

“And let me stress that – the same chance. Not just a better chance than they have today. But the same chance as anyone else. In other words, where you are born and brought up and your parents’ circumstances will not be the driver of how likely you are to go to university.

“But to ensure we’re doing everything we can, as early as we can, we are establishing a Commission on Widening Access. The Commission will propose milestones, measure progress, and identify improvements. It will be central to ensuring that our ambition of equal access within a generation becomes a reality.

“It is part of a far broader approach to post-school learning. After all, the key test we need to apply is not whether learning takes place in college, at work or in university. It’s whether the learning is relevant, engaging and widens people’s opportunities.

“So since 2007 we’ve focused colleges on promoting skills which help people to work, and which support economic growth. The number of students gaining recognised qualifications has increased by a third in the last 5 years.”

The First Minister concluded:

“So from supporting mothers in the early stages of pregnancy, to helping people gain their first experience of work, this government is committed to promoting opportunities and reducing inequalities. That’s not something that Government, schools, colleges and universities can do on our own – although our role is hugely important. It’s got to be part of a shared endeavour.

“I want Scotland to be a land of opportunity – a country where every individual, regardless of background or race or gender, gets the chance to fulfil his or her potential. Can that be achieved? Yes, I believe it can and education is the key.

“The removal of obstructions to education, and the opening up of new opportunities, has been the focus of many of the major initiatives of my first 100 days. It is a subject which will receive sustained attention for as long as my government holds office. Because education is not just part of our sense of ourselves, it’s the key to a better future for young people growing up in Scotland today. And it is at the heart of the fairer, more prosperous Scotland, that all of us seek to build.”