

# Ministers urged to fix childcare plan 'flaws' <sup>[1]</sup>

Opposition MSPs have united to demand the Scottish government takes urgent action to address "flaws" in its plan to double free childcare provision.

**Author:**

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## AVAILABILITY

Access online <sup>[2]</sup>

## EXCERPTS

Eligible children will be entitled to 1,140 hours of free pre-school education in Scotland from August 2020.

The Scottish Conservatives have claimed the plans are behind schedule - an accusation the government denies.

MSPs voted by 58 to 57 in favour of a motion calling for concerns about the implementation to be addressed.

Ahead of the Wednesday's debate in the Scottish Parliament, the Conservatives published statistics which they said showed that 83% of public sector nurseries are currently unable to meet the target.

And they said there was still "huge uncertainty over staff recruitment, funding rates and access to capital funding for private nurseries."

Tory children's spokeswoman Alison Harris said: "Private nurseries feel they're being left behind and excluded because of the way the SNP have rolled out this expansion.

"We are hearing more and more examples of businesses either pulling out of impossible partnerships, or closing down all together, and August 2020 gets closer by the day.

"The SNP launched this policy to huge fanfare. They must get it right or parents will be bitterly disappointed."

'Scale of the challenge'

But Maree Todd, the government's Children and Young People minister, stressed that the policy is to nearly double childcare from 600 hours to 1,140 hours from August 2020 - not now.

She insisted that the multi-year funding package that had been agreed with councils meant the policy remained on track to be delivered on time, but that the government did not "underestimate the scale of the challenge involved in achieving our ambition".

Ms Todd said: "The current entitlement is 600 hours and no provider has a legal obligation to offer 1,140 hours.

"Councils are expanding the offer between now and August 2020, allowing councils and providers to test the practicalities and gather feedback from parents.

"Our policy agreed with local government is that the expansion is 'provider neutral', meaning local authorities should use all kinds of ELC provision to increase flexibility and choice for parents."

During the debate, Scottish Labour MSP Mary Fee said her party supports the Scottish government's proposals - but it was vital that the concerns of childcare providers were addressed.

Ms Fee said: "This debate is not about opposing the ambitions of delivering the 1,140 funded hours.

"It is about expressing the confidence that we have in the Scottish government to meet the 2020 deadline that delivers for children and families, with the backing of all early-years providers.

"And our confidence in the delivery is not because we have a dislike for any one party or any one organisation. It is based on the feedback that we receive from providers, from parents and from bodies like the National Day Nurseries Association and from Audit Scotland."

**Related link:**

**Region:** Europe <sup>[3]</sup>

#### Links

[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/19/03/ministers-urged-fix-childcare-plan-flaws> [2] <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-scotland-scotland-politics-47476547> [3] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/region/europe>