

# Data Pipeline – One Year On

## What Have We Learnt?



### Data sharing success for Scotland's most disadvantaged two-year-olds

We wanted to maximise the number of [eligible two-year-olds taking up funded ELC](#), an offer designed to improve long-term outcomes and reduce poverty-related attainment gap, but didn't know enough about our eligible two-year-old population or their families, or how to expand awareness of the offer to the right people.

After a lengthy data review, legal processes, and the development of a new data sharing platform, Scottish local authorities can now gain access to information on households in receipt of relevant benefits for two-year-olds to access funded ELC, for the purpose of communicating with them directly.

### Why focus on two-year-olds?

The offer for funded ELC in Scotland is available for all three- and four-year-olds, with a targeted approach for two-year-olds who may benefit from this most. This includes children who are care-experienced, children of parents or carers who are care-experienced, and children of parents in receipt of qualifying benefits.

With 98% of all three- and four-year-olds in Scotland accessing funded ELC, it's important to understand why only around half of two-year-olds that are eligible are currently registered, especially given the policy's aims to reduce poverty-related attainment gaps and improve outcomes for the children most in need.

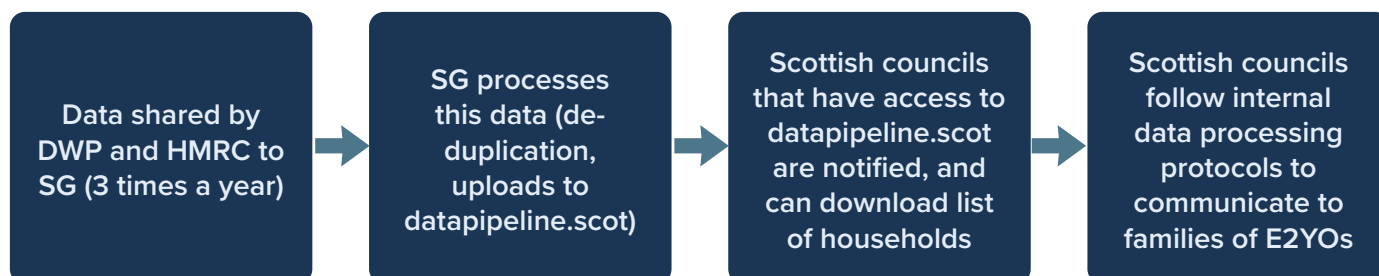
The Scottish Government estimates that around 90% of [eligible 2-year-olds](#) qualify due to their parents' receipt of a qualifying benefit, so identifying these families was our focus.

## How do we reach out to families with eligible two-year-olds?

Historically, this has been difficult and there isn't a consistent process across all areas of Scotland. Before June 2023, there wasn't a whole nation, systematic approach with regular updates to understand the eligible population of two-year-olds, only estimations based on statistical analysis.

Approximately 52% of eligible two-year-olds are accessing their funded ELC entitlement. Research suggests that the major barrier to uptake is lack of awareness that they might be eligible for funded ELC. Getting information at a local level has been dependent on ELC teams going above and beyond expectations to establish data sharing with local DWP.

Almost all local authorities in Scotland have now established data sharing agreements with the Scottish Government to access data shared for this purpose, by DWP. Since June 2023, the high-level process for local authorities contacting families of eligible 2-year-olds where their parents are in receipt of a qualifying benefit is as follows:



## Data challenges and solutions on the datapipeline project

### GDPR - establishing a legal gateway and lawful basis for accessing and processing the relevant data

Local authorities are the body with the legal duty to provide access to funded ELC to eligible children within their area. However, information on these households is held by the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) and HMRC and needs to be processed by the Scottish Government before being sent on to Scottish local authorities. A legal gateway was established through legislation in 2022.

## **Developing data sharing agreements between Scottish Government and relevant UK Government departments (DWP and HMRC)**

This was, as expected, a lengthy part of the process as it required the development of a legal data sharing agreement between three parties.

Although we weren't involved in the detail of this, having an awareness of the process helped us identify the need to develop the mechanism with which to share data with Scottish local authorities, which was a new challenge.

## **Developing data sharing agreements between the Scottish Government and each Scottish local authority**

A template data sharing agreement was developed, but each local authority needed an individual agreement with the Scottish Government, to detail their own data processing responsibilities and protocols, and to identify those responsible within the council for upholding UK GDPR with respect to this data.

The Improvement Service facilitated learning events for local authority teams (ELC teams and data professionals) as well as numerous individual conversations to support local authorities in developing the processes that would feed into their data sharing agreements.

## **Developing a mechanism with which to share the data with Scottish local authorities**

The Improvement Service facilitated conversations early on that led to the realisation that no existing mechanism for sharing data between Scottish Government and local authorities would fit the purpose for this work.

Teams across IS developed a proposal for a solution that supported this work, but most importantly used existing protocols for engaging with local authorities (see next point on data sharing agreements).

Across this piece of work, key challenges were:

- Gaining clarity on the data format to develop the solution
- Designing a solution that processed data without the Improvement Service having visibility of the data itself
- Ensuring that the solution could hold data and only make visible what is allowable based on a number of conditions:
  - multiple agreements had to be signed before a council could have visibility
  - each council could only have visibility of households within their council area

- the system had to hold data even if a council hadn't agreed to accessing it, pre-empting the point where they might want access to it
- ensuring the right people across each local authority understood what was required of them to access the platform from a legal and technical perspective

The resulting solution was [datapipeline.scot](https://datapipeline.scot).



To enable the solution to be successful, we provided a number of resources: Learning events, a dedicated mailbox, training materials, and a new Knowledge Hub area were created to support access to resources, shared learning and disseminate information to all who needed it.

## **Developing data sharing agreements and statements of work between Scottish local authorities and the Improvement Service**

Many local authorities had existing data sharing agreements with the Improvement Service, for other platforms that are owned or managed by IS. These needed to sign a statement of work which specified additional details about the datapipeline.scot platform. For local authorities that hadn't engaged with IS platforms before, they needed to sign a data sharing agreement with IS, along with a statement of work for the platform itself.

The biggest challenge with this element was the confusion among local authorities over the number of different legal documents to sign with multiple parties. In some cases, we lost traction with LA teams when they focused on one DSA over another in this process.

There were a number of additional challenges once we had access to the data:

**The data can only be used for the purpose stated in the legal gateway: ... to— (a) identify a person who may be the parent of a relevant child; and (b) make contact with such a person**

This means councils aren't allowed to process this information in other ways that may be helpful to supporting the family, above and beyond making them aware that they may be entitled to funded ELC.

**The data share provides the minimum data items required to meet the purpose (to write to households with an eligible child to inform them of the local offer of funded ELC)**

The personal data provided to local authorities includes:

- Name of parent
- Postal Address, including postcode
- Whether there are multiple children
- Whether a child within the same age range has died

With no unique identifier, challenges to councils included matching up names and addresses which may be spelled differently on DWP or HMRC databases to any existing applications for funded ELC. The Scottish Government recommended and requested unique identifiers, such as NINO or UPRN, and are awaiting feedback from DWP.

With no email addresses, the cost for postage (both monetary and time involved) and the environmental impact is higher than some local authorities would like. The Scottish Government recommended and requested email addresses and are awaiting feedback from DWP.

### **The age range for the data is 18 months to 36 months, but child-level details are not shared**

Councils don't know if the child is eligible, or is in the group that would become eligible in the next six months, or is about to move on to the universal three-year-old offer (and therefore might not need to go through the same verification process).

Councils used the learning events and Knowledge Hub forum to discuss different approaches with their peers, and this has led to shared concepts in how letters are worded to mitigate risk or confusion for households receiving letters. A few local authorities have asked for this age range to be reviewed, and the Scottish Government are taking this forward for discussion.

### **Varying existing application processes for funded ELC means there is a range of approaches**

This included:

- whether households can use the letter as part of verifying their eligibility when applying for funded ELC;
- whether councils are tracking if households apply due to receiving their letter or through some other means of awareness (and therefore understanding a return on investment for the council in using this data)

A few councils received the data but did not write out to households, their primary concern being the risk of mismanaged expectations for families that receive the letter. For example, if many more households appear on the list than a council understands there to be places available, the council worries about families receiving a letter to say they are entitled to a place which they are unable to facilitate.

We are working with councils around these concerns to understand what more information would be needed, and to model scenarios to see a variety of impacts.

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The logo for Improvement Service, featuring the lowercase letters 'is.' in a white, sans-serif font. The 'i' and 's' are connected, and there is a period at the end. Below the 'is.' is the text 'improvement service' in a smaller, lowercase, sans-serif font.  
improvement **service**