

Scottish Government Early Learning and Childcare Covid-19 Update
No. 2 – 4 May 2020

As you'll be aware, we are replacing our monthly Programme Updates with regular Covid-19 newsletters for the duration of the pandemic response. We'll send these to you as often as we have news to share, and will look to build the sharing of good practice into future editions.

I'd like to reinforce the Scottish Government's thanks and appreciation for all that you are doing to deliver critical childcare to keyworker families and vulnerable children, and to maintain continuity of care and learning to Scotland's families in a variety of innovative ways at this most challenging of times.

Take care

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1. Key information, guidance and contact points

Throughout this update, we have provided links to the latest guidance and information. As you will appreciate, the situation continues to change so please continue to check the Scottish Government's website regularly for the latest guidance and information – see <https://www.gov.scot/collections/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance/>

If you have any questions or issues you would like to raise with the team, please use the contact details below and we will respond as soon as we can. Please email:

- ELCPartnershipForum@gov.scot for enquiries about **support for providers and parents**;
- outofschoolcare@gov.scot for enquiries about **critical childcare** and keyworker testing provision;
- ELCDeliverySupport@gov.scot if you work in a **local authority team** looking for advice or support about early learning and childcare, or contact your link person in the delivery team;
- ELCProgrammeOffice@gov.scot for any other queries.

To keep up to date with all the most relevant information and guidance, follow us on Twitter @ELCScotGov or join the Knowledge Hub.

Local authorities can register on the Knowledge Hub at <https://www.khub.net> and request to join [Early Learning and Childcare \(ELC\) Expansion Scotland: Local Authorities](#).

If you would like to join the wider Early Learning and Childcare in Scotland - Discussion Forum and Documents Group, please email an expression of interest to ELCPartnershipForum@gov.scot

2. COVID-19 Education Recovery Group / Critical Childcare and ELC Subgroup

The Deputy First Minister convened the COVID-19 Education Recovery Group (CERG) on 24 April 2020. This group is intended to be a collaborative endeavour, bringing together key stakeholders in school education and early learning and childcare, to support national and local government in the journey to re-opening education and childcare settings when it is safe to do so.

The Group will:

- Bring together decision makers and key influencers to ensure that the delivery of childcare, early learning and education maintains a strong focus on excellence and equity for all, within the necessary constraints of the COVID-19 response;
- Provide leadership and advice to Ministers and Local Government Leaders developing the strategic approach to the response and recovery of the ELC and education system;
- Work across organisational and structural boundaries to support the response and recovery efforts;
- Consider and provide advice on any proposed changes in Scottish education strategy, taking into account any long-term effects of the COVID-19 response; and
- Be a forum for frank and open discussion about what is working and what and where more improvement is required.

Details of membership and minutes of meetings are published on the Group's [webpage](#).

A Critical Childcare and ELC subgroup, chaired by Simon Mair, has been established to take forward two of the ten work streams proposed by the CERG. These are; Critical Childcare and Early Learning and Childcare. The group membership includes COSLA, SOLACE, ADES, Education Scotland, Care Inspectorate, Early Years Scotland, EIS and AHDS. The subgroup is taking forward proposals to establish a partnership reference group.

For further information on the subgroup, please contact ELCDeliverySupport@gov.scot

3. Critical Childcare provision

In response to the Covid-19 outbreak, Scottish Ministers, following consultation with the Chief Medical Officer and Scientific Advisory Group on Emergencies (SAGE), and engagement with COSLA, Education Scotland, ADES, SOLACE and the teaching unions, took the decision that the all schools and local authority early learning and childcare settings should close from Friday 20 March, with the exception of any **critical provision** to protect key interests and groups.

Private, third sector and independent childcare providers and childminders have been strongly advised to close unless involved in providing critical provision. As of 25 March 2020, [childminders](#) are advised limit the number of households for whom they provide childcare to a maximum of two, other than their own, at any one time. Where childminders are working with more than two families over the course of the week, they are advised to consider additional cleaning measures to reduce risk of transmission via surfaces and equipment.

All settings remaining open are strongly advised to follow the latest public health guidance on social-distancing in education and childcare settings, and the latest advice from the Care Inspectorate.

This means that:

- If it is at all possible for children to be at home, then they should be. The higher the number of children in childcare settings, the higher the health risks for us all. This is about saving lives.
- Local authorities will coordinate and fund the provision of emergency childcare services and have been asked to give priority to private and third sector childcare providers to deliver this.
- To support this, the Care Inspectorate has produced registration contingency plan guidelines for childcare settings continuing to operate to provide emergency childcare for key workers and vulnerable children.

[Guidance on childcare closures and emergency provision - 30 March](#)

[Guidance on social distancing in education and childcare settings - 31 March \(being updated with PPE guidance – due w/c 4 May 2020\)](#)

[Health Protection Scotland COVID-19 guidance for non-healthcare settings](#) (updated regularly)

[Care Inspectorate Registration Contingency Plan - 20 March 2020](#)

Critical childcare surveys

We have set up two daily surveys to monitor the delivery of critical childcare during the Covid-19 outbreak – one which local authorities respond to and one which private and voluntary settings and childminders complete. Both surveys collect data on open settings, staff working at these settings, and the number of children receiving childcare. This information is analysed and used to support reporting and decision-making.

Contact info: Kate Smith and the Emergency Childcare team: outofschoolcare@gov.scot

4. Definition of Keyworkers

Scottish Government, COSLA and local government partners have agreed that it is vital that decisions about keyworkers and the childcare places allocated are taken locally.

Local authorities will make provision for children of keyworkers in their areas where this is absolutely necessary to ensure that parents/carers with no other option for childcare can continue to work in their role of delivering essential services.

We need to keep the number of children taking up these places – whether these are in schools or in other settings – to an absolute minimum. Only keyworkers who cannot fulfil their critical functions when they are working remotely from home may qualify for critical childcare provision.

The key interests and groups for whom critical provision should be made available are:

- **Keyworkers:** to ensure that children of keyworkers, for example NHS and social care staff, can still get learning and childcare if they have no other option for childcare.
- **Vulnerable children:** to ensure that protection and support is still available for identified children who may be particularly vulnerable in the current circumstances, for example those in receipt of free school meals, children with additional support needs and at-risk children.

Detailed guidance on the definition of keyworkers, and how decisions are made about provision can be found at: [School and ELC closures - guidance for keyworkers](#)

If you have questions about the definition of keyworkers, The Scottish Government, COSLA and local government partners have supported the establishment of the Keyworkers Brokerage Hub to co-ordinate the most complex range of queries and issues relating to keyworker status. This includes liaising with employers and sectors on keyworker access to childcare and learning support.

The hub can be contacted at: keyworkers@gov.scot

5. Keyworker Testing

Those involved in delivering emergency childcare to key workers and vulnerable families are now eligible for testing under the Scottish scheme and are listed within “priority group 3”. The guidance document refers to “*staff providing childcare / education in schools for key workers*”. However, all childcare workers delivering emergency childcare are in scope of the testing programme, not just those who work in schools. Childminders can apply under the “self-referral” portal outlined in the guidance.

This key worker testing programme operates separately from the NHS testing programme which supports testing for clinical purposes and priority staff in the NHS and social care sector. This programme is designed to allow key workers to return to work as soon as it is safe to do so by offering testing to key workers and members of their household.

[Advice and guidance](#) on the testing programme is available on the Scottish Government website.

The testing programme is run by the UK Government, and key workers and their employers in Scotland should also use the portal operated by the Department of Health and Social Care to book tests. There are further contact details in the guidance documents above. However, we would appreciate feedback on accessing the portal and obtaining access to tests which will be reflected in our feedback to the UK Government.

Please share any comments with Kate Smith’s policy team at outofschoolcare@gov.scot.

6. Outdoor Play and Learning

We have recently published [guidance about outdoor play](#) in emergency childcare provision during the Covid-19 restrictions. Jason Leitch, National Clinical Director also recorded a couple of video messages for us – one providing advice about [outdoor play](#) and another about [social distancing](#) in childcare settings.

If you need any further information get in touch with us at outdoorELC@gov.scot

7. Support for childcare providers

A range of financial and business support measures have been announced by the UK and Scottish Governments since March. Information about the different schemes that may be available to private and third sector providers and childminders is available on the Scottish Government’s website and updated regularly at:

[Information for private and third sector childcare providers about business support](#)

[Information for Childminders about business and financial support](#)

The most recent updates include information on additional grant support for small and medium sized businesses (SMEs) and for newly self-employed people, which are now open for applications. Applicants can access these funds and find more information on the www.FindBusinessSupport.gov.scot website.

The page on support for private and third sector providers includes additional information relating to the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (which opened for applications on 20 April). This follows the publication of additional guidance on the Scheme by the UK Government, including specific guidance for early years providers in England. While this guidance is for England only, the CJRS is a UK-wide scheme administered by HM Revenue & Customs so this will impact on providers in Scotland.

We are aware these recent announcements have resulted in considerable uncertainty and concern amongst providers in Scotland as to what level of overall support they are entitled. In light of this the Scottish Government have provided initial clarification and updated their information pages on support measures for providers, which can be found [here](#). This sets out:

- There is no change to Scotland's position on ELC payments, and payments for funded ELC hours will continue for the duration of closures. The Scottish Government sees these payments as a vital part of safeguarding our childcare sector for the pandemic recovery, and achieving our 1140 ambition for Scotland's children together.
- The guidance published by the UK Government on 17 April does not prevent childcare providers from receiving support through both: (1) continued payments for statutory (funded) ELC hours; and (2) the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme.
- Support cannot be claimed through the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme for staff costs that already covered by other forms of public funding.

We continue to seek further clarification from the UK Government on aspects of this guidance, and following this we will provide further updates to our own guidance as soon as we possibly can.

We know that there are still many questions to be answered, and we are working through questions that being shared by individual providers and the representative bodies. It is important to be aware that many of the financial support schemes are the responsibility of the UK Government rather than matters on which the Scottish Government can reach its own decisions. This means it may take us longer to establish answers as we work across administrations.

Please continue to share your questions with Euan Carmichael's Service Models Team through the ELCPartnershipForum@gov.scot mailbox. We are working through them as quickly as we can.

8. Support for parents

Parent Club Scotland (www.parentclub.scot) has created an extensive digital hub to provide advice for parents and carers around coronavirus. This includes critical childcare for keyworkers and vulnerable children and the ELC expansion, as well as information on a range of topics including mental health and wellbeing, home learning, keeping active, eating well, child safety and tips for working from home. It is updated regularly to reflect the latest public health advice and also features tips from other parents to provide support and reassurance that they are not alone and support is available. It is supported by a marketing and PR campaign, the assets of which have been shared with partner organisations to reach as many parents and carers as possible, so you

may have heard from the Union agency, or from our marketing colleagues directly about this. We recommend linking to this site in any advice for parents.

We are also working with colleagues across government to consider the needs of families with limited digital connectivity. Play Scotland; the Smart Play Network; and Scottish Book Trust are considering (and in some cases trialling) ways of sharing physical resources in addition to digital resources.

The Parent Club coronavirus hub can be found here: www.parentclub.scot/coronavirus and on social media: @ParentClubScotland on Facebook and @parentclubscot on Twitter.

Scottish Government guidance for parents can be found at: [Information to parents on closure of daycare of children services](#)

Parentline Scotland also has a helpline for parents and carers who would like advice and support. Tel: 08000 28 22 33.

Learning at home

We are working with colleagues from across the Scottish Government and other organisations to ensure that parents have the information and resources that they need right now. We know that settings are doing a great job in communicating with parents and sharing activities via email or YouTube, etc.

We want to make it easy for parents and carers to understand the support on offer while ELC settings are closed, so we are working with COSLA to produce a resource which makes clear the role of individual settings, Local Authorities, the Scottish Government and others in supporting learning at home at this time.

If you have any questions, please contact Katherine Tierney's Uptake, Eligibility and Engagement team through the ELCPartnershipForum@gov.scot mailbox.

9. 1140 hours expansion

On Wednesday 1 April, [The Children and Young People \(Scotland\) Act 2014 \(Modification\) \(No. 2\) Revocation Order 2020](#) was approved by the Scottish Parliament. The order revokes the change to the 2014 Children and Young People's Act that requires education authorities to secure 1140 hours of ELC provision for all eligible children from August 2020, rather than 600 hours. It effectively means that there will be no statutory duty to provide 1140 hours from August.

On 30 March 2020, the Minister for Children and Young People and COSLA spokesperson for Children and Young People issued a [joint statement](#) about the early learning and childcare expansion. The Minister for Children and Young People also released a video on Twitter explaining the decision.

The decision to re-phase the expansion programme and revoke the statutory duty to roll out 1140 hours of ELC was very difficult for everyone involved in the expansion. However we are committed to ensuring that the expansion will still be delivered in full, just to a different timetable than originally envisaged.

We know that everyone in the early learning and childcare sector in Scotland will be working to do this as soon as is practical. High quality and nurturing early learning and childcare is the

foundation from which every child can develop socially, emotionally and educationally, enabling them to reach their full potential, and the expansion of hours will give children greater access to all of those benefits.

At this point, we cannot reasonably assess when full delivery may be achievable and will not be able to do so until the extent and duration of the impacts of the pandemic are clear. Through the Joint Delivery Board, Scottish and Local Government will work together to bring forward new implementation proposals at the appropriate time.

To support this, the delivery assurance team will:

- Continue to work closely with local authorities to understand progress to 1140, and where Covid-19 issues have delayed this
- Work with ADES, COSLA and other bodies to gather data, resolve operational issues, and jointly assess how delivery will continue once more normal provision resumes
- Work jointly with ADES, COSLA and other bodies to discuss a reasonable future timetable for delivery of 1140 hours for all children, and provide advice in due course to the Joint Delivery Board.

Please use the ELCDeliverySupport@gov.scot mailbox for support and queries regarding 1140

Information for parents on 1140

Parents will be keen to find out what this means locally, and local authorities will be putting out their own communication as early as possible. In the context of the work on the immediate response to the Covid-19 pandemic, it may take time to work through how local plans will be affected and communicate with parents and carers.

Parent Club (www.parentclub.scot/ELC) has been updated in the meantime to explain the suspension of the legislation and that local authorities will be in touch with parents when they can. Parent Club also includes Frequently Asked Questions which we will continue to update. <https://www.parentclub.scot/articles/early-learning-and-childcare-in-scotland-is-changing>
Please contact Katherine Tierney's Uptake, Eligibility and Engagement team through the ELCPartnershipForum@gov.scot mailbox with further suggestions for the FAQ or other parental communication.

10. SEEMiS Early Years

The SEEMiS Early Years project is continuing despite the COVID-19 outbreak and the delay to the 1140 hours expansion. The developers are making progress with the system build remotely, and the working group and Project Review Board continue to meet and shape the project. Hopefully you will have received the communication from David McClelland, product owner, detailing this.

A new Knowledge Hub site specifically for the development of SEEMiS Early Years for local authorities to hear updates and share knowledge in preparing for the roll out of the new system is up and running. We welcome your questions and comments through this communication tool. SEEMiS is planning to upload a video in coming weeks with more information on the system functionality and a glimpse of what it will look like. The working group had a remote session with the developers on the 22 April to see some of the developments so far and the feedback was positive.