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Provision of Early Learning and Childcare During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Equalities Impact Assessment (EQIA)

February 2021

Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba
gov.scot

Title of Impact Assessment	Equalities Impact Assessment
Title of Policy	Provision of Early Learning and Childcare During the COVID-19 Pandemic – February 2021
Directorate: Division: team	Early Learning and Childcare Programme Directorate: Strategy and Delivery Unit

Executive Summary

The Scottish Government made the difficult decision to impose new restrictions on regulated childcare, including early learning and childcare (ELC), from January 2021, with daycare of children services only able to remain open for the children of key workers and vulnerable children. The legal basis for this is set out in the Education Continuity Direction for local authorities; private, voluntary and third sector providers are asked to follow the supplementary guidance published by the Scottish Government.

The Scottish Government recognises that these restrictions on ELC settings are likely to have a negative impact on many of Scotland's young children, ELC sector staff, parents and carers, and is taking measures to minimise this impact. Lessons have been learned from the closures in 2020, however it is not possible to mitigate all of the negative impacts for most young children.

This document aims to update the impact assessments undertaken during the COVID-19 pandemic, using the most up to date evidence, to explore the impacts of limited access to ELC, with the intention of supporting ongoing policy development.

Background

On 19 December 2020[1] the First Minister announced that following the Christmas break a phased return would be put in place in January 2021 for all school children and young children in ELC. These exceptional arrangements were intended to ensure sufficient time to assess the impacts of the festive period on community transmission of the COVID-19 virus in light of a new strain having emerged, before fully reopening the ELC sector for all children. Following a reassessment of COVID-19 cases across Scotland, and in line with emerging evidence on the new strain, the First Minister confirmed in her statement of 19 January 2021[2], that the period of remote learning would be extended beyond January.

Decisions about restrictions on childcare services have been informed by scientific advice and discussion and agreement through a number of reference groups. For childcare the COVID-19 Education Recovery Group (CERG)[3] and the Critical Childcare and Early Learning and Childcare (CCELC) have been the main reference groups. In addition to this the COVID-19 Advisory Sub-Group on Education and

[1] Coronavirus (COVID-19) update: First Minister's speech - 19 December - gov.scot (www.gov.scot)
[2] Coronavirus (COVID-19) update: First Minister's statement - 19 January 2021 - gov.scot (www.gov.scot)
[3] COVID-19 Education Recovery Group - gov.scot (www.gov.scot)

Children's[4] issues was established in June 2020 to provide expert scientific advice for education and children's issues.

Scope of this EQIA

This EQIA will update the impact assessments undertaken to date during the COVID-19 Pandemic on the impacts of restrictions on access to ELC on children who would normally access ELC.

This should be read in conjunction with:

- Coronavirus (COVID-19): strategic framework for reopening schools and early learning and childcare settings: initial impact assessment[5] – May 2020
- Assessing the impact of re-opening childcare as part of the COVID-19 recovery process in Scotland – September 2020

Methodology

This impact assessment sought to update the impact assessments undertaken to date during the COVID-19 Pandemic on the impacts of remote learning on young children who would normally access ELC.

Primary data sources utilised in this process include:

- Assessing the impact of re-opening childcare as part of the COVID-19 recovery process in Scotland – September 2020
- Children's Parliament's 'Listen and Act' project[6]
- Connect's 'Back to school' survey[7]
- Coronavirus (COVID-19): strategic framework for reopening schools and early learning and childcare settings: initial impact assessment[8]
- COVID-19 Early Years Resilience and Impact Survey (CEYRIS)[9]
- ELC Census[10]
- Lancet, Mapping global trends in vaccine confidence and investigating barriers to vaccine uptake: a large-scale retrospective temporal modelling study[11]

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[4] Coronavirus (COVID 19): Advisory Sub-Group on Education and Children's Issues - gov.scot (www.gov.scot)
[5] Coronavirus (COVID-19): strategic framework for reopening schools and early learning and childcare settings: initial impact assessment - gov.scot (www.gov.scot)
[6] Listen and Act (wordpress.com)
[7] Connect_Back_at_School_Parent_Carer_Survey_Report_FINAL_2020.pdf
[8] Coronavirus (COVID-19): strategic framework for reopening schools and early learning and childcare settings: initial impact assessment - gov.scot (www.gov.scot)
[9] COVID-19 Early Years Resilience and Impact Survey - report 4 final findings (publichealthscotland.scot); The impact of COVID-19 on children adn young people: 2 to 4 year olds (publichealthscotland.scot)
[10] Early learning and childcare statistics - gov.scot (www.gov.scot)
[11] Mapping global trends in vaccine confidence and investigating barriers to vaccine uptake: a large-scale retrospective temporal modelling study - The Lancet

- National Records of Scotland, Analysis of deaths involving coronavirus (COVID-19) in Scotland, by ethnic group[12]
- ONS, Annual Population Survey, July 2019 – June 2020
- Royal Society for Public Health (RSPH) polling of BAME communities[13]
- Scottish Government, Coronavirus (COVID-19): children, young people and families - evidence summary - December 2020[14]
- Scottish Government, COVID-19 Childcare Monitoring Survey[15]

Key Findings

Due to the need for registered childcare to once again close quickly to suppress transmission of the virus it was not possible to assess the impact of remote learning for most young children ahead of the policy taking effect. However, lessons have been learned from the period of closure in 2020 and where possible mitigation actions have been put in place. The findings from the impact assessment 'Assessing the impact of re-opening childcare as part of the COVID-19 recovery process in Scotland' are still valid, and this section will update these findings with new evidence.

Age – Children

During the first wave it was established that young children were less likely to be affected by or to transmit the virus. The reopening of ELC settings in August 2020 was therefore deemed to be safe and guidance was put in place to protect both children and adults within settings. The guidance is updated frequently based on the most up to date scientific evidence. However, the variant of the virus that emerged in December 2020 is up to 70% more transmissible and time is required to understand the role that young children play in the transmission. The COVID-19 advisory subgroup on education and children's issues published updated advice on a phased return to in-person learning in schools and ELC settings on 3 February 2021[16].

As highlighted in the impact assessments already undertaken[17], evidence from both UK and international studies of ELC programmes supports the fact that all children, and especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, can benefit in terms of social, emotional and educational outcomes from attending high quality ELC. We know from evidence collected throughout the pandemic that the closure or limited access to ELC has had a negative impact on aspects of young children's learning, development and wellbeing.

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[12] Report (nrscotland.gov.uk)
[13] RSPH | New poll finds BAME groups less likely to want COVID vaccine
[14] Coronavirus (COVID-19): children, young people and families - evidence summary - December 2020 - gov.scot (www.gov.scot)
[15] First lockdown (April to Aug 2020): Covid19ELCandHubs - SG Education Analytical Services: Learning Analysis | Tableau Public
Autumn Term (Aug to Dec 2020): COVID19-SchoolsandChildcareInformation - SG Education Analytical Services: Learning Analysis | Tableau Public
Second Lockdown (Jan 2021-): COVID19 - Schools and Childcare Information 2021 - SG Education Analytical Services: Learning Analysis | Tableau Public
[16] Advice From The Covid-19 Advisory Sub-Group On Education And Children's Issues – Phased return to in person learning in schools and ELC settings.
[17] Coronavirus (COVID-19): re-opening childcare - impact assessment - gov.scot (www.gov.scot)

The Scottish Government sought to give parents, carers and ELC providers more time to explain the changes to young children by announcing the intention to limit access to ELC to children of key workers and vulnerable children as soon as possible ahead of the restrictions entering into force. This action sought to mitigate the impact that no notice had on children's wellbeing when the first period of closures was announced at very short notice in March 2020.

Evidence from the COVID-19 Early Years Resilience and Impact Survey (CEYRIS) of parents of two- to seven-year-olds, carried out between June and July 2020, suggests that children's wellbeing has been adversely affected by the first lockdown between March and May.[18] Among the 2-4 year old subsample:

- 43% of parents of 2–4 year olds agreed or strongly agreed that they were concerned that the post-lockdown childcare environment would not be good for their child's wellbeing.
- A worsening of behaviours among 2–4 year olds compared with pre-lockdown, including in relation to behaviour overall (50% worse or much worse), mood (42% worse or much worse), amount of physical activity (44% worse or much worse) and eating behaviours (35% worse or much worse).
- The overall wellbeing of 3 year olds was below what would be expected (as measured by the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire; when using Scottish Study of ELC data as 'baseline' wellbeing).
- Overall, the majority of children had access to private outdoor space for play, but this varied by household income. Just over one-fifth of low-income families reported that they did not have access to a private or enclosed garden at home, compared with just 5% of high income families. Just under 11% of low income households also reported that they did not have access to good quality greenspace, compared with just over 4% of high income households.
- Since the beginning of lockdown, only a very small proportion of 2–4 year olds in the sample had attended a local authority hub, a childminder or outdoor childcare setting. As a result of this lack of socialising. Only 12% of 2–4 year olds had spoken to friends either every day or on most days over the previous seven days. Although a further 36% had spoken with friends on at least some days, 52% had had no contact with friends over the previous week. Young children had, however, had the opportunity to speak with members of their extended family.

Connect's online 'Back to School' survey of parents in Scotland during September and October 2020 was completed by 572 parents across 29 local authorities.[19] It found:

- 56% of parents and carers of 0–3 year olds, and 54% of parents and carers of 3–5 year olds were worried about their child's return to nursery.

[18] CEYRIS is an open survey; therefore, the findings are not representative of all parents in Scotland.
[19] This was an open survey; therefore, the findings are not representative of all parents in Scotland.

- Parents worried that their children were missing their friends, with 76% of parents of children aged under 3 years and 77% of parents of children aged 3–5 years identifying this as a main area of concern.

The Children's Parliament's 'Listen and Act' research project aimed to understand the lived experiences of families with children aged 3-7 during lockdown in Scotland. A total of 15 families were involved in this qualitative research, which used artwork and online interviews and which took place in September 2020. It found:

- The reopening of early learning centres (ELC) was identified by all families as the most positive thing to happen since the start of the pandemic. Parents and children were largely happy with the procedures in place to mitigate Covid transmission risks, although there were varying levels of ELC communications.
- Parents' biggest concern was further nursery closures which they felt would take them and their children back to a period of isolation – from friends, family and learning.
- The closure of parks and play areas in the early months of lockdown, along with closing down organised play and sporting activities, had a profound impact on children. Parents welcomed the increased emphasis on outdoor learning and play since ELC settings reopened.

Childcare uptake increased significantly when the sector reopened in August. The Scottish Governments weekly childcare monitoring survey[20] recorded 17,480 children and young people receiving childcare in the final Tuesday of July; this rose to 44,499 by the final month of August. Accordingly, uptake has decreased between December and January following the new sector guidance. Attendance at 15 December stood at 66,485; by 19 January it was 18,567. (Please note the weekly survey has a low response rate so all figures will be underestimates).

We know that there has been a slight decrease in the percentage of children accessing their funded ELC entitlement. Data from the Scottish Government's ELC census[21] published in December 2020 shows that 95% of eligible three and four year olds were registered for funded ELC, down from 98% the previous year, and that 9% of two year olds were registered, down from 11% in 2019. The decrease in the uptake of funded ELC this year may be due to the effects of COVID-19, with some parents choosing not to register their children. There are a number of reasons that this may be the case, including that parents do not currently feel confident to send their child to an ELC setting during the COVID-19 pandemic. A number of non-representative Scottish parent surveys undertaken over summer 2020[22] show reasonable levels of parental concern about children returning to school

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[20] First lockdown (April to Aug 2020): Covid19ELCandHubs - SG Education Analytical Services: Learning Analysis | Tableau Public
Autumn Term (Aug to Dec 2020): COVID19-SchoolsandChildcareInformation - SG Education Analytical Services: Learning Analysis | Tableau Public
Second Lockdown (Jan 2021-): COVID19 - Schools and Childcare Information 2021 - SG Education Analytical Services: Learning Analysis | Tableau Public

[21] Summary Statistics for Schools in Scotland 2020 - gov.scot (www.gov.scot)

[22] Coronavirus (COVID-19): impact on children, young people and families – evidence summary September 2020

(approximately 50%), especially among single parents. CEYRIS found that just under half of parents surveyed in June-July 2020 were concerned about their child becoming ill with coronavirus (41%) or their passing coronavirus to someone else (49%).[23] The Scottish Government has sought to mitigate this impact by continuing to engage parents on the benefits of ELC, including through Parent Club, which links directly to local authority ELC pages.

Only full reopening of ELC services will fully mitigate the negative impacts of the current limited opening for some children. However, the Scottish Government have sought to support parents to establish home learning routines by providing resources and ideas through the Parent Club webpages[24].

Children who are eligible for a free school meal in their ELC setting are still able to access this. As set out in the guidance note on the Educational Continuity Direction issued on 8 January, local authorities and ELC settings will continue be required to provide free school lunches or reasonable alternatives for children who are eligible to receive a free school lunch, under section 53 of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 and associated regulations, even when they are unable to attend their ELC setting as a result of the COVID-19 restrictions. This does not include children who were in receipt of a 'universal' free meal as part of phasing for the 1140 expansion but does include children who are:

- looked after by a local council
- the subject of a kinship care order
- the subject of a guardianship order

In addition, it includes children whose parents are claimants of these benefits:

- Income Support
- Job Seeker's Allowance (income based)
- any income related element of Employment and Support Allowance
- Incapacity or Severe Disablement Allowance
- State Pension Credit
- support under part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999
- Child tax credit, but not Working Tax Credit, with earnings of £16,105 or less
- Child tax credit and Working Tax Credit, with earnings of £7,330 a year or less
- Universal Credit with household income of £610 a month or less

Age – Parents/Carers

The parents and carers of all children who would normally access ELC provision will have been effected by the measures put in place to reduce transmission of the virus.

Informal childcare where essential is allowed and is often provided by grandparents. The Scottish Government advised people who had shielded in 2020 to begin

[23] COVID-19 Early years resilience and impact survey (CEYRIS) - Report 3 - The experience of parents and carers
[24] Early learning resources | Parent Club

shielding again from 15 January[25]. Grandparents are likely to be older and are more likely to be shielding and unable to support parents who require support at this time.

Only full reopening of ELC services will fully mitigate the negative impacts of the current limited opening for parents and carers. However, the Scottish Government have sought to support parents to establish home learning routines by providing resources and ideas through the Parent Club webpages[26].

Age – Workforce

The Scottish Government advised people who had shielded in 2020 to begin shielding again from 15 January[27]. It is likely that older member of the workforce may have to shield during this time. This could be due to reasons linked to their own health or that of a family member.

Disability – Children

The ELC census 2020[28] showed that 14% of children in ELC are assessed as having an additional support need (ASN) and 1% are assessed as having a disability.

Children with certain ASN or disabilities may be clinically vulnerable or extremely clinically vulnerable to COVID-19. At this time those who were advised to shield in 2020 have been advised to shield once more. This may mean that children of key workers or vulnerable children are not able to access ELC settings or informal childcare.

In addition, evidence from the CEYRIS suggests children with long-term conditions (LTCs) may be adversely affected by closures to a greater extent:

- Children with LTCs fared worse in terms of mental health and wellbeing than those without LTCs. For example, parents of children with LTCs reported their children having more emotional problems during lockdown.
- Children living with a health condition are less likely to sleep through the night than children who do not live with a health condition. 26% of those living with an LTC slept through the night every night, compared to 43% of children with no LTC
- In every area of behaviour, a higher proportion of children with LTCs had experienced worse behaviour than before lockdown than children without LTCs. The biggest differences can be seen in relation to sleeping and the ability to concentrate. For the former, 45% of parents of a child with an LTC said that this had become worse, compared to 31% of parents of a child with no LTC. Similarly, in terms of the ability to concentrate, 52% said this had become worse, compared to 39% of parents of a child with no LTCs.
- Parents of children with LTCs were more likely to be faring poorly in terms of their own mental health and wellbeing during lockdown than parents whose child did not have LTCs

[25] Coronavirus (COVID-19): shielding advice and support - gov.scot (www.gov.scot)
[26] Early learning resources | Parent Club
[27] Coronavirus (COVID-19): shielding advice and support - gov.scot (www.gov.scot)
[28] Early learning and childcare statistics - gov.scot (www.gov.scot)

The ELC Inclusion Fund is a £2 million fund which supports children with ASN to access their funded ELC entitlement. The Inclusion Fund opened for a funding round in October 2020, when ELC settings were able to operate fully in line with Covid sector guidance. The fund received over 589 applications, this was 36% higher than the number of applications received in the last round before the pandemic. This suggests that more children are presenting within their ELC settings as having ASN and requiring support to fully realise the benefits of ELC provision. The Scottish Government has released £500,000 to the fund to support successful applications.

Disability – Parents/Carers

Parents and carers who have a disability may be disproportionally impacted by the move to home learning. Some parents and carers with a disability will be clinically vulnerable or extremely clinically vulnerable to COVID-19 and may require to shield at this time. This will limit their ability to acquire support for childcare through an ELC setting or informal childcare.

Evidence from the CEYRIS suggests children whose parents have LTCs may be adversely affected by closures to a greater extent:

- Children whose parents have LTCs fared worse in terms of mental health and wellbeing than those parents do not have LTCs. For example, children whose parents have LTCs had more emotional problems during lockdown.
- Parents with LTCs reported that 33% of their children slept through the night every night over the last two weeks, compared to 43% of children whose parents did not have LTCs
- In every area of behaviour, a higher proportion of children whose parents have LTCs had experienced worse behaviour than before lockdown than children whose parents do not have LTCs. The biggest difference can be seen in relation to sleep, where 43% of parents with LTCs reported that their children's sleep was worse compared to 30% of other parents. Similarly, 41% of parents with LTCs reported that their child's eating behaviour was worse compared to 29% of other parents.
- Parents with LTCs were more likely to be faring poorly in terms of their own mental health and wellbeing during lockdown than parents without LTCs

Disability – Workforce

Disabled employees may be clinically vulnerable or extremely clinically vulnerable to COVID-19 and not able to work at this time as the medical advice at present is for this group to shield.

Sex – Children

No information is currently available on the sex of children accessing ELC. However, existing research on children accessing 600 funded hours of ELC[29] indicates boys'

[29] See for example: Scottish Study – ELC Leavers Phase 2 report

development lags behind that of girls at age four and five across a number of assessment domains, so limited access to ELC may have different impacts on the development of boys and girls.

Sex – Parents/Carers

Women generally carry out the majority of unpaid childcare and other caring responsibilities, as well as housework (census data shows that nine out of 10 single parent households are headed by women). Women are also the vast majority of lone parents, who may be less likely to have someone to share childcare with, making paid work harder. This responsibility for unpaid care and domestic work can restrict women from entering the labour market – there is a much higher proportion of economically inactive women (25.3 per cent) that cite "looking after family/home" as the reason, compared with men (6.8 per cent).[30] These responsibilities also act as a significant constraint on women's choice of jobs, often compelling women to seek part-time
or flexible work.[31]

UK-level findings suggest that with restrictions on access to school and childcare, housework and childcare has fallen more on women than men, which may make it harder for them to maintain or take on employment. There is evidence that mothers have been around twice as likely to take unpaid time off work to look after children as fathers.[32] As of the end of June 2020, 16% of women in Great Britain who said that COVID-19 was affecting their work said that this was because they were having to work around home schooling responsibilities (compared to 4% of men), while 18% of women whose work was affected said that they would have to work around childcare responsibilities (compared to 4% of men).[33] Research by the IFS in May 2020 found that mothers were more likely than fathers to have quit or lost their job, or to have been furloughed, since the start of the lockdown.[34] Compared with fathers, mothers are spending less time on paid work but more time on household responsibilities and the differences in work patterns between mothers and fathers have grown since before the pandemic.

The CEYRIS findings show:

- There is some indication that children in households with two adults fared more positively than children in single-adult households in relation to mental health and wellbeing. For example, single-adult households reported their children having more emotional problems compared with two-adult households (as measured by the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire).
- In every area of behaviour, a higher proportion of children in single-adult households had experienced worse behaviour than before lockdown than children in two-adult households. The biggest differences were for sleeping and eating. For the former, 40% of parents in single-adult households

[30] ONS, Annual Population Survey, July 2019 – June 2020
[31] Gender Pay Gap Action Plan: Analytical Annex (www.gov.scot)
[32] Mothers on the lowest incomes are nine times more at risk of losing their job due to school closures in the UK - Womens Budget Group (wbg.org.uk)
[33] Coronavirus and the social impacts on Great Britain
[34] How Are Mothers and Fathers Balancing Work and Family under Lockdown?

reported this was worse, compared to 32% of two-adult households. For the latter, 37% of single-adult households reported this was worse, compared to 31% for two-adult households

- Children in two-adult households take part in home learning activities on a more frequent basis compared to children in single-adult households.
- A greater proportion of children in two-adult households had access to a garden (92% compared to 79%) and to good quality greenspace (95% compared to 91%).
- With regards to activities, children in two-adult households also walked, cycled or scooted and visited the park more frequently than children in single-adult households. On the other hand, children in single-adult households more frequently spoke to family every day (24% compared to 17% for children in two-adult households) and friends every day (9% compared to 5% for children in two-adult households).
- Single-adult households reported lower mental health wellbeing than two-parent households.
- Prior to lockdown, single-adult households were less well off than two-adult households. A much higher proportion of main earners in two-adult households were employed on permanent contracts when compared with single-adult households (83% and 62% respectively). A greater proportion of parents in single-adult households were working on fixed-term contracts, students, were stay-at-home parents or unemployed.

Sex – Workforce

The majority of the ELC workforce are women, and without mitigation may be exposed to a greater health risk in the workplace. The Scottish Government has developed a suite of non-statutory sectoral guidance to support the safe operation of ELC settings during the pandemic[35]. This guidance, which is updated regularly, provides advice on safety measures and mitigations that can be put in place to lower the risk of infection as far as possible within ELC settings.

We are conscious of the effect of the pandemic on wellbeing of the ELC workforce. It is vital that they are able to look after their own wellbeing if they are to provide the care and learning necessary for the children they support. For that reason we have worked with Early Years Scotland, a voluntary organisation who support professionals and families in the early years, to develop a wellbeing resource for the sector. The TeamELC Wellbeing Hub is a website which provides a wealth of information and practical advice on managing individual wellbeing. The site includes a feature which allows ELC practitioners and childminders to connect and share experiences. The site can be found at: www.TeamELCWellbeingHub.org

Alongside the website, a series of online wellbeing events have been held for anyone in the sector to attend. These free events, provide practical advice and tools to manage wellbeing and have had hugely positive feedback from those who have attended. Those events will continue for the foreseeable future.

Temporary Restrictions Fund

[35] Coronavirus (COVID-19): early learning and childcare (ELC) services - gov.scot (www.gov.scot)

The Scottish Government has also sought to support the ELC workforce by providing support to those childcare services who are currently only permitted to operate for vulnerable children or those of key workers, to help mitigate the reduction in income resulting from operating below capacity and ensure these settings can remain open.

This includes day care of children's services operating at any registered capacity; childminders who currently care for 12 or more children at a time; and, out of school care providers. During the current period of restrictions, £3.8 million has been made available for grants in each 4 week period, this will total £11.2 million between January-March 2021.

In view of the reopening of the ELC sector from the 22 February we are considering how best to utilise the one third of the fund identified for March to best support those in the sector in greatest need, in particular if restrictions continue for school age childcare settings.

Childminding Business Sustainability Fund

It is recognised that operating during the pandemic has been a challenge for childminders, and that there have been increased pressures on their businesses as a result. The Scottish Government has made funding available to provide grant support to childminders in the light of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on their businesses.

Discussions held with the Scottish Childminding Association and with Unite childminding branch about how best to target this funding, and make it available as quickly as possible, resulted in an increase of the fund to more than £3.2 million.

This £3.2 million fund will provide for a £750 business sustainability grant to be made available to all childminding services which are registered with the Care Inspectorate as of 1 February 2021.

Gender Reassignment – Children

We did not find any information on this protected characteristic in relation to young children.

Gender Reassignment – Parents/Carers

We do not consider there to be aspects of this policy that could disproportionately impact on parents, carers or families with this protected characteristic.

Gender Reassignment – Workforce

There are not considered to be any areas of this policy that could disproportionately impact on members of the workforce with this protected characteristic.

Pregnancy and Maternity – Parents/Carers

There is no evidence that pregnant women are more likely to get seriously ill from coronavirus, but they have been included in the list of people at moderate risk (clinically vulnerable) as a precaution[36]. As a result of this some pregnant women may choose to shield. This may mean that some vulnerable or key worker children who would be able to access ELC at this time are not able to take up this provision.

Pregnancy and Maternity – Workforce

With a disproportionate number of women in the workforce, the needs of pregnant women and mothers must be a key consideration for ELC service managers when planning who can deliver provision at this time.

There is no evidence that pregnant women are more likely to get seriously ill from coronavirus, but they have been included in the list of people at moderate risk (clinically vulnerable) as a precaution[37]. As a result of this some pregnant women may choose to shield.

The Scottish Government's sector guidance[38] advises childcare settings to follow the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists advice to try and keep the risk of exposure as low as is practically possible to pregnant women, particularly in the third trimester.

Race – Children

While the ELC Census[39] shows nine per cent registrations are of children whose home language is not English, no data on lockdown's impact on minority ethnic children has been collected.

Race – Parents/Carers

Evidence suggests that COVID-19 disproportionately impacts on minority ethnic groups. Analysis by National Records of Scotland suggests deaths amongst people in the South Asian community were almost twice as likely to involve COVID-19 as deaths in the White ethnic group, after accounting for age group, sex, area-level deprivation and urban rural classification.[40] Additionally, Royal Society for Public Health (RSPH) polling suggests vaccine confidence and uptake is lower among minority ethnic groups.[41] Therefore, without appropriate mitigation minority ethnic groups could be exposed to a greater risk from the virus. This may impact on the decisions that parents of children eligible for ELC at this time make in regards to accessing childcare.

Race – Workforce

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[36] Pregnancy and coronavirus (COVID-19) - NHS (www.nhs.uk)
[37] Pregnancy and coronavirus (COVID-19) - NHS (www.nhs.uk)
[38] Coronavirus (COVID-19): early learning and childcare (ELC) services - gov.scot (www.gov.scot)
[39] Summary Statistics for Schools in Scotland 2020 - gov.scot (www.gov.scot)
[40] Report (nrscotland.gov.uk)
[41] RSPH | New poll finds BAME groups less likely to want COVID vaccine

Evidence suggests that COVID-19 disproportionately impacts on minority ethnic groups. Analysis by National Records of Scotland suggests deaths amongst people in the South Asian community were almost twice as likely to involve COVID-19 as deaths in the White ethnic group, after accounting for age group, sex, area-level deprivation and urban rural classification.[42] Additionally, Royal Society for Public Health (RSPH) polling suggests vaccine confidence and uptake is lower among minority ethnic groups.[43] Therefore, without appropriate mitigation minority ethnic groups could be exposed to a greater risk from the virus. As a result of this some of the workforce from an ethnic minority background may choose to shield at this time, and this should be a key consideration for ELC service managers.

Religion of Belief – Children

We do not record data on children's religion of belief in ELC.

Rooms normally used for religious practice/observance may have been re-purposed to meet the requirements of the ELC Covid guidance. Space must still be made for any children requiring this.

Religion or Belief – Parents/Carers

Rooms normally used for religious practice/observance may have been re-purposed to meet the requirements of the ELC Covid guidance. Parents must be assured that space will still be made for any children requiring this.

Cross-national analysis indicates vaccine confidence and uptake is lower among minority religious groups. This could potentially increase the risk of parents from these backgrounds.[44]

Religion or Belief – Workforce

Rooms normally used for religious practice/observance may have been re-purposed to meet the requirements of the ELC Covid guidance. Space must still be made for any staff requiring this.

Cross-national analysis indicates vaccine confidence and uptake is lower among minority religious groups. This could potentially increase the risk of staff from these backgrounds.[45]

Sexual Orientation – Children

We do not collect data on the sexual orientation of children in ELC.

Sexual Orientation – Parents/Carers

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[42] Report (nrscotland.gov.uk)
[43] RSPH | New poll finds BAME groups less likely to want COVID vaccine
[44] Mapping global trends in vaccine confidence and investigating barriers to vaccine uptake: a large-scale retrospective temporal modelling study - The Lancet
[45] Mapping global trends in vaccine confidence and investigating barriers to vaccine uptake: a large-scale retrospective temporal modelling study - The Lancet

We do not consider there to be any aspects of this policy that could disproportionately impact parents, carers or families with this protected characteristic.

Sexual Orientation – Workforce

We do not consider there to be any aspects of this policy that could disproportionately impact member of the ELC workforce with this protected characteristic.

Marriage & Civil Partnership – Parents/Carers
We do not consider there to be any aspects of this policy that could disproportionately impact parents, carers or families with this protected characteristic.

Marriage and Civil Partnership – Workforce

We do not consider there to be any aspects of this policy that could disproportionately impact member of the ELC workforce with this protected characteristic.

Public Sector Equality Duty

For each of the 8 protected characteristics detailed above, this EQIA process assessed how the Scottish Government is giving due regard to the 'needs' of the public sector equality duty. The 'needs' are to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation; advance quality of opportunity; and foster good relations.

The Scottish Government acknowledges that there have been impacts on people who have certain protected characteristics, as set out above, and has sought to mitigate these where possible.

Recommendations and Conclusions

This EQIA process did not identify any direct or indirect unlawful discrimination on anyone with a protected characteristic.

Only the full reopening of ELC setting will fully mitigate all of the impacts that limited access to ELC have had on young children. The Scottish Government should continue to engage with the most up to date scientific evidence to ensure that any restrictions in place in the interest of public health remain proportionate and necessary. The Scottish Government intend to fully reopen the ELC sector as soon as it is safe to do so.

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