

Coronavirus (COVID-19) Strategic Framework Update February 2022: Child Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessment (CRWIA)

February 2022



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Executive Summary

This CRWIA sets out the various impacts the Strategic Framework Update will have on children's human rights. It covers children up to and including the age of 18 in early learning and childcare, schools and higher and further education.

The Strategic Framework Update sees us shift from a focus on suppressing cases to managing COVID-19 effectively. Children's rights and wellbeing continue to be at the heart of our response to COVID-19.

The Scottish Government has taken a proactive approach to ensuring that the voices of children and young people are heard throughout the pandemic and this CRWIA summarises their views and experiences. The assessment also provides evidence of the impact of COVID-19 on children and young people. These have largely been negative, with key negative impacts having been in children's development, the decline in family resilience, increased exposure to domestic abuse, increased poverty and deprivation, and the worsening of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). Positive impacts included an improvement in imaginative play, increased meaningful interactions in the family environment and an increase in physical activity following the initial downturn at the start of lockdown.

Summary of Policy Aims & Desired Outcomes

Our management of the COVID-19 pandemic has been guided by a Strategic Framework first published in October 2020, which has been updated as we have moved through various stages in February, June, and November 2021, and now in February 2022. We are publishing an updated Framework, supported by the remarkable progress first on vaccination and also in new treatments, which will see a shift in strategic intent from a focus on suppressing cases.

In light of the current state of the epidemic and our consideration of future potential scenarios, we judge that the strategic intent guiding our COVID-19 response should be changed to reflect the new calmer phase of the pandemic that we are hopefully moving into:

“To manage COVID-19 effectively, primarily through adaptations and health measures that strengthen our resilience and recovery as we rebuild for a better future”.

Practically, whilst this accepts a level of COVID-19 circulating in society, it ensures that the harm-reduction measures are proportionate and consistent with the broader purpose of creating a more successful, sustainable and inclusive Scotland. We have considered the impact of COVID-19, as well as measures used to control transmission throughout the pandemic. A [CRWIA](#) was published on 8

February 2022 which brings together the most current evidence and analysis of the impacts of COVID-19 measures and restrictions on children and young people.

A separate evidence paper is also being published to provide an overview of the key analysis and evidence underpinning the [Strategic Framework Update](#). The evidence paper¹ contains a section on the impact of COVID-19 on education, children and young people, which is relevant to and supports the CRWIA.

Management of the pandemic demands a flexible approach and an ability to respond quickly and decisively. Whilst we may be beyond the peak of the latest Omicron variant, we know that there will be a continuing COVID-19 risk to manage in the future. There is no absolute certainty in what lies ahead, but by carefully monitoring the situation and having in place effective contingency plans, we can reduce risk and harm in more proportionate and less restrictive ways.

Over the period from initial lockdown in March 2020 through to spring 2021, when the risk of infection was high and before the positive impact of vaccination was fully present and more effective treatments were available, our response was characterised by extensive (though variable) use of legal restrictions and requirements. Individuals and organisations also adapted their behaviours and physical environments to reduce transmission risk.

Since summer 2021, the use of protective measures, both regulations and guidance, has remained important – particularly to deal with the Omicron wave – but has been much more targeted, as the positive impact of the vaccination programme has helped reduce serious health harm.

In line with advice from the WHO and elsewhere, one of our top priorities has been, and will remain, to keep early learning and childcare (ELC) settings and schools open and safe, and to ensure continuity of the care, education and support they provide to children, families and communities. We will also wish to ensure that child contact centres remain open and continue to provide services to enable some children and non-resident parents to see each other.

We must continue to ensure that future adaptations and mitigations in respect of COVID-19 work for everyone. Children and young people are amongst those who have particularly experienced impacts.

It is imperative that we continue to ensure that any continuing or new mitigations do not exacerbate the impacts already experienced by children and young people or inequality, which is why children's rights and wellbeing remain key aspects of our ongoing response. The Scottish Government will continue to ensure that our approach to restrictions in society and in education settings is necessary and proportionate, and informed by evidence and data.

We also recognise that COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the Further Education (FE), Higher Education (HE) and Community Learning and Development (CLD)

¹ [Evidence paper to accompany: Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) Scotland's Strategic Framework Update – February 2022 - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#)

sectors for the past three academic years. During academic years 2019-20 and 2020-21 there were significant restrictions placed on students for long periods of time. For the 2021-22 session, although the student experience has been closer to what it was pre-pandemic, there has still been a cumulative wider impact on students and learners, where institutions have been implementing voluntary additional measures going beyond the requirements of the statutory guidance. The wider harm impacts of COVID-19 on students and learners are in the following areas:

- Disruption to student learning;
- Mental Health and Wellbeing;
- Social effects;
- Financial effects.

Policy Proposal

Looking forward, we expect to be able to rely much more on the beneficial impact of immunity, on the increasing availability of effective treatments, and on routine adaptations to behaviours and environments, to render the use of legal measures at best unnecessary and at worst limited and temporary.

Building an infection-resilient society includes adapting how and where we work, live and access services. We will provide clear and up-to-date guidance on safer buildings and behaviours to ensure we can live and work safely.

However, we must also acknowledge the risks we face – of new, more harmful variants appearing, or waning immunity. In addition, seasonal factors may shape people’s behaviours and increase transmission, with meeting outside more difficult in the winter months. Each of these - and in particular a combination of them - might cause a period of increased harm from the virus and require us to consider whether, when and to what extent a temporary increase in protective measures was necessary and proportionate. We expect that, often, no additional intervention will be required but we need to be ready to respond if and when it is.

Policy Aims & Desired Outcomes

Schools and ELC

Specifically in relation to children and young people, our key strategic aims over the next 12 months are:

- Continued commitment to working in partnership to prioritise outcomes for children and young people, and deliver the right balance of specific measures, ensuring a continuing focus on priority groups.
- Re-focusing efforts on sectoral resilience and proofing against pandemic and other shocks, to keep staff, children and families safe.
- A focus on recovery to address the impacts of COVID-19 on children, young people and their families.

We look to ensure the best possible outcomes for children and young people as we open up society and learn to live safely alongside COVID-19.

Our [Reducing Risks in Schools Guidance](#) and COVID-19 safety guidance for ELC settings, school-age childcare and childminding services set out the protective measures that local authorities, schools and settings should ensure are in place within those settings. Those protections are kept under close review based on advice from the Advisory Sub-Group on Education and Children's Issues, and through consultation with the COVID-19 Education Recovery Group (CERG) and other stakeholder groups.

As the Strategic Framework sets out, our ambition for education in Scotland remains to deliver excellence and equity for all, with health and wellbeing at the forefront of our plans. This includes the previous recommendation of our International Council for Education Advisers to implement a 'pandemic-proof' education system.

We will continue to review the protective measures set out within the guidance for ELC and schools, to ensure that they support a strategic move over time to managing rather than suppressing the virus, and that they support the best possible outcomes for children.

More generally we will look to ensure that the childcare and education system is as resilient and 'pandemic proof' as possible, for example by ensuring that the workforce can access professional learning resources and specialist services that will support them as they work with children and families through our recovery from the pandemic.

- As part of Scotland's commitment to education recovery, improving attainment and tackling child poverty while we learn to live alongside COVID-19, we continue to address the most important areas in relation to education. This includes:
 - the funding for additional teachers and support staff
 - tackling the attainment gap through the refreshed Scottish Attainment Challenge free instrumental music tuition
 - extending free school meals to ensure equity of provision for children within different communities
 - ensuring every school-aged child has access to a device and connectivity to address unacceptable issues of inequality

Further Education, Higher Education and Community Learning and Development

This update of the Strategic Framework should lead to a reduction in the impact of the wider harms on students as measures/restrictions are eased allowing for a more normal student experience as the strategic intent shifts from suppressing to managing the virus. The aim is to ensure in-person teaching is the appropriate and desirable position for most courses and to address the impacts of the accumulated wider harms – disruption to student learning, mental health and wellbeing, social effects and financial effects – and lost learning on students and learners.

Relevant United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) articles

We have identified the following UNCRC articles as relevant in our consideration of the impacts on children and young people:

Article 2 - Non-discrimination

Children should not be discriminated against in the enjoyment of their rights. No child should be discriminated against because of the situation or status of their parent/carer(s).

Article 3 - Best interests of the child

Every decision and action taken relating to a child must be in their best interests. Governments must take all appropriate legislative and administrative measures to ensure that children have the protection and care necessary for their wellbeing - and that the institutions, services and facilities responsible for their care and protection conform to established standards.

Article 6 - Life, survival and development

Every child has a right to life and to develop to their full potential.

Article 9(3) - Parties shall respect the right of the child who is separated from one or both parents to maintain personal relations and direct contact with both parents on a regular basis, except if it is contrary to the child's best interests.

Article 12 - Respect for the views of the child

Every child has a right to express their views and have them given due weight in accordance with their age and maturity. Children should be provided with the opportunity to be heard, either directly or through a representative or appropriate body.

Article 13 - Freedom of expression

Every child must be free to say what they think and to seek, receive and share information, as long as the information is not damaging to themselves or others.

Article 15 - Freedom of association

Every child has the right to freedom of assembly: to meet with other children, and to join groups and organisations, as long as it does not stop others from enjoying their rights.

Article 18(2) - Parental responsibilities and state assistance

Parents, or legal guardians, have the primary responsibility for the upbringing and development of the child, and should always consider what is best for the child. Governments must provide appropriate assistance to parents and carers to help them.

Article 18(3) - Parental responsibilities and state assistance

Governments must take all appropriate measures to ensure the children of working parents have the right to benefit from childcare services and facilities.

Article 23 - Children with disabilities

A disabled child has the right to enjoy a full and decent life in conditions which ensure dignity, promote self-reliance and facilitate the child's active participation in the community. Governments must recognise the right of the disabled child to special care, and ensure the disabled child has effective access to education, training, health care, rehabilitation, preparation for employment, and recreational opportunities.

Article 24 - Health and health services

All children have a right to the highest attainable standard of health, and to health care services that help them to attain this. Governments must provide good quality health care, clean water, nutritious food and a clean environment so that children can stay healthy.

Article 28 - Right to education

Every child has a right to education on the basis of equal opportunity. Primary education must be free. Secondary education must be available to every child, with financial assistance available in case of need. Information and guidance on education should be available to all. Governments should take measures to encourage regular attendance and reduce drop-out rates. School discipline should be administered in a manner consistent with the child's human dignity.

Article 29 - Goals of education

Education must aim to develop every child's personality, talents and abilities to their fullest potential. It must encourage the child's respect for human rights, their origins and identity, for other cultures around the world, and for the natural environment.

Article 30 - Children of minorities/indigenous groups

Every child has the right to learn and use the language, customs and religion of their family, whether or not these are shared by the majority of people in the country where they live.

Article 31 - Leisure, play and culture

Every child has a right to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities, and to take part in a range of cultural and artistic activities.

Article 36 - Protection from exploitation or maltreatment

Governments must protect children from all forms of exploitation or maltreatment.

Article 39 - Recovery and rehabilitation of child victims

Children who have been the victims of any form of exploitation or abuse; cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment; or who are victims of war should receive the help they need to recover their health, dignity and self-respect, and reintegrate into society

Scope of the CRWIA, identifying the children and young people affected by the policy, and summarising the evidence base

In respect of early learning and childcare (ELC), the suite of guidance in this area covers all children in ELC settings (nurseries, play groups, creches and family centres), school-age childcare and childminding services.

For schools, the measures within the Reducing Risks in Schools guidance all have a direct impact on all children and young people in Scotland who are registered at a local authority, independent or grant-aided school. The main themes to consider are:

- The impact of mitigations within school settings on pupils' health and wellbeing²;
- The impact of mitigations within school settings for disadvantaged and vulnerable pupils;
- The impact of mitigations within school settings on all groups of pupils, but particularly those who are at highest clinical risk from COVID-19, or living with someone who is at highest risk.

For children and young people attending university, college or Community Learning and Development provision, although they are a relatively low proportion of the overall student and learner population, those affected will be impacted in a way similar to school pupils.

Children & Young People's views and experiences

The Scottish Government has taken proactive measures to ensure that the voices of children and young people have been heard throughout the COVID-19 Education Recovery Response. The [Education Recovery Youth Panel](#) created in November 2020 and delivered by Young Scot in partnership with [Children in Scotland](#), supported the Scottish Government's [CERG](#) – as a successor to the earlier Scottish Learner Panel project. The youth panel have taken part in CERG meetings and were invited to comment specifically on the issues of importance to children and young people. This level of engagement is a valuable contribution to developing policy but is also essential for effective communication of the agreed policies.

Membership of the CERG also includes representation from the Scottish Youth Parliament, who provide ongoing insight into the lived experiences of young people throughout the pandemic and contribute to suggestions for change in the short, medium and long term recovery period.

Officials have also drawn from survey work carried out by third sector organisations to access young people's views on these issues.

² The impact assessment focusses on the impacts to children and young people, it is recognised that children and young people's families are also impacted by restrictions in place to safely return to school, and that the impact to them may also impact on children and young people. This assessment recognises where possible, those impacts also.

The Scottish Government continues to work in collaboration with Young Scot, on advertising across Young Scot's social media channels (TikTok, Snapchat, Instagram, etc.) including to encourage young people to test and record Lateral Flow Device (LFD) test results, and to signpost to the latest support and guidance on www.young.scot/coronavirus. In addition, we worked closely with Young Scot to ensure young people were involved in the design and development of a direct mailer pack sent to every secondary school in Scotland, with a range of posters, stickers, door hangs, etc. to make the messages as relevant and engaging as possible.

Students in FE/ HE and Community Learning & Development

Student representatives all reported that because of the pandemic's cumulative impact on student learning, restoring more face-to-face learning provision on campus is increasingly important to ensure that course progression is maintained. *The National Union of Students' Coronavirus Student Survey Phase 3, in November 2020*, sampled the views of over 4,000 students in Scotland and highlighted the deficit in practical skills and a need to take steps to avoid longer term employability issues for affected students as it might lead to future challenges in the workplace including students not having the required level of skills and experience when looking for a job. In addition, more than half of the students surveyed indicated their mental health was worse than it was pre-COVID-19 and cited a number of challenging wellbeing issues including isolation, loneliness, anxiety, inability to make new friends and depression. Other findings from the survey include that 75% of surveyed students were missing social interactions with their peers and also staff;

There has been a cumulative impact on mental health during this third academic year of disruption affecting many students and learners' capacity to progress. The Thriving Learners report published in November 2021 by the Mental Health Foundation showed 74% of the more than 15,000 students surveyed had low wellbeing and more students were dissatisfied with their learning than satisfied; nearly 20% of students had had suicidal ideation in the six months prior to the survey. In rural student halls, it was reported that deterioration in mental health has contributed to an increase in substance misuse.

Many learners undertaking courses within the CLD sector are from disadvantaged backgrounds and vulnerable groups. CLD representatives have reported that the reduction in face-to-face activity over the course of the pandemic has had a significant impact on learners' mental health with many experiencing feelings of isolation, anxiety and reduced self-esteem, thus exacerbating already poor mental health outcomes, especially in the most vulnerable.

Key Findings, including an assessment of the impact on children's rights, and how the measure will contribute to children's wellbeing

The safety of children, young people and education staff remains our over-riding priority, while minimising further disruption to learning.

Information has been gathered through statistical evidence and data, and information from Scottish Government publications such as:

- [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): Advisory Sub-Group on Education and Children's Issues - evidence on children, schools, early learning and childcare settings and transmission- summary report - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\) Summary Statistics For Schools In Scotland 2021 - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\) and Achievement of Curriculum for Excellence \(CfE\) Levels 2020-21 - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\) COVID-19: Children, young people and families – June 2021 Evidence Summary,](#)
- [COVID-19 Mitigation Measures Among Children and Young People in Scotland – Summary of the Evidence Base](#)
- [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) - experiences of vulnerable children, young people, and parents: research](#)

Evidence has also been gathered from [The Impact of COVID-19 on children and young people in Scotland](#) published by Public Health Scotland.

The evidence above confirms that children and young people's learning and wellbeing have been negatively impacted by intermittent attendance at school due to school closures and self-isolation requirements. The changes to self-isolation and associated compensatory measures described by this policy will act to counter the negative impacts of interrupted education and school-based support to children and young people overall.

As schools move closer to a more normal school experience it is expected that children and young people will benefit further from the improved continuation of their 'usual' routines and the support for their continued learning.

Regulated Childcare

It is recognised that the public health measures to control the transmission of COVID-19, such as restriction of access to early learning and childcare (ELC) and out of school care settings, strict self-isolation of close contacts of COVID-19-positive individuals, and restrictions on movement and physical contact with family and friends, are likely to have significantly changed children's experience of regulated childcare, impacting upon their learning and development, relationships with peer groups and family and their mental health and wellbeing.

Key findings of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on young children (age 0-5) includes impacts in the following areas:

Children's development

- [Public Health Scotland evidence on the wider impacts of COVID-19 on the health care system](#) shows a rise in the number and proportion of young children for whom there was a concern identified about their development over the period of the COVID-19 pandemic (comparing data collected during 2021 with pre-pandemic data) (UNCRC 6);
- An increase in social/emotional difficulties has also been found among 2-3 year old children in [research on the impact of COVID-19 on children and young people \(2-4 year olds\)](#);
- In [research on the experiences of vulnerable children, young people, and parents](#), parents in the perinatal period felt particularly affected by the lack of social interaction for their children, who had lived all or most of their life during the pandemic (UNCRC 15);
- Research in the [COVID-19 Early years resilience and impact survey \("CEYRIS"\)](#) has shown a decline in behaviour among ELC-aged children during the pandemic, including in relation to mood and concentration.
- Parents reported in the [CEYRIS 2 survey](#) that the pandemic has negatively impacted their child's speech and language development. (UNCRC 6).
- The [CEYRIS 3](#) survey supports the findings from the 1st and 2nd study and parents continue to report that the pandemic has negatively impacted their children's learning and development. Areas impacted included; behavioural and emotional difficulties; speech and language development, learning, interaction with others and relationships.

Decline in family resilience

- Parents of children aged 2-7 had a poor wellbeing score as measured by the Short Warwick and Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale in all three rounds of the CEYRIS survey, and over 80% felt the pandemic had affected their mental health;
- Research suggests that family wellbeing was impacted during the pandemic, with 48% of respondents to a [2021 Buttle UK survey on child poverty](#) saying that family mental illness was 'a lot more severe';
- An [association has been shown between parental and children's wellbeing](#) (UNCRC 19, 24 and 39).

Exposure to domestic abuse

- It is likely that more children have suffered domestic abuse over the periods of lockdown as evidenced in a [2020 report on the impact of COVID-19 restrictions on people experiencing domestic abuse and other forms of violence against women/girls](#) (UNCRC 19, 24, 34 and 39);
- [UK-wide data on the impact of COVID-19 on child welfare](#) indicates that the conditions created by the pandemic have led to more stress and physical conflict in some families, and the stay-at-home rules prevented children from leaving home and escaping from physical abuse.

Poverty and deprivation

- [Qualitative research on the experiences of vulnerable children, young people, and parents during the COVID-19 pandemic](#) found that many families experienced increased financial difficulties, which heightened anxiety and stress in the home;
- The [CEYRIS 1 survey](#) also found that household income had reduced because of lockdown for 44% of children (35% in CEYRIS 2, 26% in CEYRIS 3). Of those who stated that their household income had reduced as a result of the pandemic:
 - 11% indicated that they had been unable to buy enough food; 14% indicated that they had been unable to pay for childcare; 20% indicated that they had been unable to pay credit card bills; 14% indicated that they had been unable to pay rent or mortgage; and 19% had been unable to pay household bills (UNCRC 18).

Worsening of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

- [Buttle UK research with support workers](#) reported that they perceived that all ACEs had been made worse by COVID-19. Reported reasons for this included a lack of access to support, both through informal networks (i.e. family and friends) and formal support services, a lack of respite for parents, reduced time in education (meaning that the issues that education institutions often monitored have not been picked up) and decreased levels of exercise, poor diets and increased isolation (UNCRC 19, 24, 34 and 39);
- In [CEYRIS 1](#) parents and carers of 5.5% of children reported concerns about their own or someone else in the household's alcohol use.

Positive impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on young children that have been highlighted by research include:

Improvement in imaginative play

- [CEYRIS 1](#) and 2 found that almost half of respondents rated their child's imaginative play as better than before lockdown (UNCRC 31);
- 45% of respondents indicated that their children spent more time outdoors than before lockdown ([CEYRIS 1](#)).

Meaningful interactions in the family environment

- Many parents felt that lockdown had enabled them to maintain good relationships with their children in [research on the impact of COVID-19 on children and young people \(2-4 year olds\)](#); (UNCRC 16).
- The CEYRIS 3 reported that 48% of parents/carers felt that the pandemic had a positive impact on their relationship with their child.

Increase in physical activity following the initial downturn at the start of lockdown

- While there were some reports of reduced physical activity in the initial lockdown (see CEYRIS 1), this improved as the pandemic went on (see CEYRIS 2), and [evidence suggests children largely remained active in lockdown](#) (UNCRC 24 and 31).

How restrictions may impact different groups of children

Access to high quality early learning and childcare (ELC) is a cornerstone to closing the poverty-related attainment gap. Evidence from both UK and international studies of ELC programmes supports the fact that all young children, and especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, can benefit in terms of social, emotional and educational outcomes from attending high quality ELC. Any restrictions on access to regulated childcare without mitigation are therefore likely to negatively impact on all children's outcomes, but may be more acute for those children from disadvantaged backgrounds who stand to benefit most from ELC.

Consideration has been given to the potential disproportionate impacts on different groups of children. This includes:

The child's socio-economic status (UNCRC 2, 3, 6, 19, 24, 39)

- CEYRIS 1³ found that ELC-aged children in affluent and/or two adult households were more likely to do well psychologically and behaviourally during lockdown than children in less affluent and/or single adult households. Children in single adult households experienced a bigger decline in behaviour, sleep and concentration, were less likely to participate in home learning activities and to be physically active;
- Children living in more deprived areas are more likely to have a concern noted about their development than children in less deprived areas;⁴
- The Public Health Scotland wider impacts dashboard⁵, showed that the largest percentage point increase in children having developmental issues noted was found among children living in the most deprived areas. However, an increase was seen among children in all deprivation groups, and the relative difference between most and least deprived remained similar;
- CEYRIS 1⁶ found that high-income households experienced less change in employment status or income during lockdown

Children with Additional Support Needs ("ASN"), disabilities and health conditions (UNCRC 2, 3, 6, 18, 23, 24, 31, 39)

- Children with ASN, disabilities and health conditions are also likely to have been disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. CEYRIS 1⁷ found that the decline during lockdown in relation to children's behaviour and life was more severe for children with a long-term health condition than without;

³ https://publichealthscotland.scot/media/3103/background-report_ceyris.pdf

⁴ <https://publichealthscotland.scot/publications/early-child-development/early-child-development-scotland-201920/>

⁵ <https://scotland.shinyapps.io/phs-COVID-19-wider-impact/>

⁶ https://publichealthscotland.scot/media/3103/background-report_ceyris.pdf

⁷ https://publichealthscotland.scot/media/3103/background-report_ceyris.pdf

- A qualitative study⁸ of the experiences of 16 families in Scotland with children having ASN and disabilities also found that children with ASN and disabilities are likely to have had existing inequalities exacerbated, and that disruption in educational provision was likely to have a negative impact on their educational progress and wellbeing;
- The Lockdown Lowdown surveys that heard directly from young people also showed that those with a long-term illness or disability were more likely to express concerns about the support arrangements while learning at home;
- Stakeholders that work with families with children and young people with additional support needs indicated that learning at home can be significantly harder for disabled children and highlighted concerns expressed throughout the COVID-19 pandemic in regard to the level of support in place while learning at home as well as upon return to schools.

While it is possible that similar restrictions would result in similar disproportionate impacts on these children, these impacts would need to be balanced against any intended positive impact on the health of children (e.g. during the COVID-19 pandemic, safety guidance for schools and childcare services which generally helped to keep the transmission within settings low).

Further Education, Higher Education & Community Learning and Development

A proportion of the student population who were affected by COVID-19 measures fall into the scope of this impact assessment. Information provided by the Higher Education Statistics Agency indicates that in academic year 2019-20, out of Scotland's 260,490 students in the higher education sector, 32,530 students were aged under 18 (95 of whom were aged under 16). For the same period, information provided by the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) indicates that of Scotland's 302,092 students in the further education sector, 86,818 students were aged under 18 (44,651 of whom were aged under 16). Information provided by the SFC indicates that in academic year 2019-20, 6,162 further education students aged up to 24 and 678 higher education students aged up to 24 were care-experienced.

In addition to children and young people who attend colleges as full-time students, there are school pupils who attend college as part of school-link participation programmes, in order to study subjects or obtain qualifications that may not be available at school. In academic year 2019-20, out of the 60,219 students who participated in school-link participation programmes 59,503 were aged under 18 (42,061 of whom were aged under 16). These pupils, many of whom will be studying for qualifications in practical subjects, will have been impacted by both the closure of schools during the pandemic and the restrictions on in-person learning and teaching in place for colleges and universities.

⁸ <https://www.research.ed.ac.uk/en/publications/the-impact-of-COVID-19-on-children-with-additional-support-needs->

The Strategic Framework Update will provide a firm basis for adopting approaches that will alleviate the wider harms on this group. Child wellbeing could therefore be enhanced in the following ways:

- Students, learners and staff who have been required to study or work at home can now have increased face-to-face contact
- CLD learners have been unable to access in-person educational provision due to a lack of facilities/lets due to COVID-19 restrictions. There should now be an increase in available facilities/lets and therefore increased opportunities for learners to access in-person learning
- Reduced drop-out rates resulting from student and learner disengagement from online learning provision, particularly in younger learners
- The emergence of online educational provision in some cases has improved access to courses for disabled and vulnerable students and learners and there are opportunities to embed this emerging good practice into future educational delivery.

Monitoring and review

Protective measures and mitigations in schools and ELC settings continue to be kept under constant review, including through the expert Advisory Sub Group on Education and Children's Issues and members of CERG. This has ensured that all mitigations are proportionate and practical. Adjustments will continue to be discussed, where data and evidence suggests that is required and includes seeking expert advice if it is necessary to enhance the mitigations at a later stage.

The COVID-19 Advisory Sub-Group on Universities and Colleges has focused much of its work over the past two academic years on the impact of the pandemic on the wider harms and lost learning on students. In the next 12 months we will continue to consider these impacts as work intensifies across the Scottish Government on recovery from the pandemic.

CRWIA Declaration

Authorisation

Policy Lead:

Paul Atkinson, Strategic Adviser, Exit Strategy

Date:

24 February 2022

Deputy Director or equivalent:

Dominic Munro, Director for COVID-19 Exit Strategy

Date:

24 February 2022



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