

Scottish Government Early Learning and Childcare Covid-19 Update

No. 1 – 7 April 2020

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.

As you're probably already aware, we've had a few staffing changes within the Scottish Government team over the last few weeks as the organisation refocuses operations and resources to meet the needs of the pandemic response. Joe Griffin took up post as Director for Safer Communities on 16 March and I am now Interim Director for Early Learning and Childcare. Chris Dunne, Liz Levy, Fiona McDiarmid and Niamh O'Connor have also moved into roles in the Health and Social Care Directorates, but we hope to see them back in Team ELC in a few months' time.

Our team is also supporting a Learning and Children's Hub, which is shared with our colleagues in Children and Families and Learning Directorates, so some of us are moving in and out of shifts there. To make sure you can always get in touch with the team and know your response has been picked up, we're making greater use of shared mailboxes, and updated contact details for different areas are included in this update.

Before we move into the rest of the update, I'd like to take a moment to reflect on the very difficult decision that we have taken in partnership with local government to effectively pause the 1140 hours implementation programme while we focus our collective efforts on meeting the needs of children and families during the pandemic. I know how hard we have all worked over the last few years to ensure that the expansion could be delivered on time to all eligible families. Our ambition and commitment remains as strong as ever, and I am confident that we will all work together as soon as we safely can to make sure that as many children as possible can benefit from expanded ELC as early as possible.

I'd also like to emphasise 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

Alison Cumming

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Interim Director, Early Learning and Childcare

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** 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. 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](#)

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

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

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

3. 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

4. Support for childcare providers

A range of financial and business support measures have been announced by the UK and Scottish Governments in recent weeks. Information about the different schemes that may be available to private 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](#)

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.

5. Support for parents

We know this is an unsettling and worrying time for families across Scotland. We are working closely with parenting representative organisations and we are keen to talk further to any colleagues about how we can better support families through this difficult time.

Parent Club Scotland (www.parentclub.scot) has been updated with 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 from health and wellbeing to home learning and tips for working from home. It is updated regularly to reflect the latest public health advice. We recommend linking to this in any advice for parents.

We are working with colleagues from across the Scottish Government and other organisations to consider the information and resources that parents 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 don't want parents to feel overwhelmed with resources, but do want them to feel supported. Parent Club will be our main channel for communicating with parents and providing resources and guidance. We are also considering what additional support may be required for those that have limited access to the internet, or who don't read English well, who are not able to benefit from the online resources that are available.

The Parent Club coronavirus hub can be found at:

[Information for parents about coronavirus on ParentClub](#)

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.

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

6. 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>