

Covid 19: Written Answer Reports
Week beginning 18th January 2021

19/1/2021

Oliver Mundell (Dumfriesshire) (Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party):

To ask the Scottish Government what recent discussions it has had with Dumfries and Galloway Council regarding the date for the roll-out of the Dumfries and Galloway Virtual School. **(S5W-34469)**

John Swinney: The Scottish Government has not had direct discussions with Dumfries and Galloway Council, however Education Scotland, in its role as improvement agency for education, has been in contact with the Council in order to share information on progress with its Virtual School.

Education Scotland has confirmed its understanding is that the school covers both the Broad General Education and Senior Phase, that virtual teachers have been appointed to the school and that prior to the recent school closures the virtual school had been providing support to pupils who had been absent for Covid-19 related issues.

The responsibility for the school rests with the local authority, however Education Scotland will continue to liaise with the local authority as part of its role in providing improvement support across Scotland. Dumfries and Galloway Council, in common with other local authorities, can also access options via the National E-Learning Offer.

Further information can be obtained from the local authority.

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Scottish Labour): To ask the Scottish Government what analysis it has carried out of (a) access to and (b) the take-up of online learning for school pupils. **(S5W-34477)**

John Swinney: With regard to online services, the Glow platform is freely available to all learners and teachers in Scotland who have access to an internet connection and a device with a modern browser. During the period in 2020 when schools were closed (Mar-Jun 2020) over 560,000 users logged in to Glow over 40 million times. The first week of remote learning which started on 11 January saw over 464,000 unique users logging in over 5.1 million times. It should be noted that a small number of local authorities do not make

use of Glow as their primary online learning environment and have chosen to use other platforms, therefore learners in these area do not show up in these numbers.

Education Scotland will be monitoring the provision of remote learning on a weekly basis. The first national overview report will be available on 22 January.

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Scottish Labour): To ask the Scottish Government how many school pupils do not have access to online learning, and for what reasons. **(S5W-34478)**

John Swinney: We do not hold this information centrally. Local authorities and schools are best placed to identify learners who do not have access to online learning. We have worked, and will continue to work, with Local Authorities to address these issues.

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Scottish Labour): To ask the Scottish Government what it is doing to ensure that all school pupils have access to online learning. **(S5W-34479)**

John Swinney: Scottish Government has invested £25m to support digital inclusion for school-aged learners across Scotland. At end-December 2020, almost 59,000 devices and over 10,000 connectivity packages had been distributed to learners and more will have been distributed since then. In total the programme is expected to benefit 70,000 disadvantaged children and young people across Scotland.

A further £45m is being provided to councils to support families with remote learning. This additional funding may be used flexibly by councils to purchase additional digital devices, to recruit additional staff and to provide additional family support.

Glow, which provides access to Microsoft Office 365, Google G-Suite for Education and Wordpress Blogs, is freely available to all learners and teachers in Scotland.

In addition, Education Scotland has provided a significant expansion of online learning through the National e-Learning Offer. 600 recorded lessons and 14,000 items of online learning and teaching resources are available to schools.

Education Scotland have also published clear principles and entitlements for remote learning and will be monitoring provision on a weekly basis.

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (Scottish Liberal Democrats): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will allow primary school-aged children of single-parent families to access key worker childcare and learning at school under the latest COVID-19 restrictions. **(S5W-34481)**

John Swinney: The purpose of the current exceptional arrangements is to ensure that workers performing an essential role as set out in the updated schools guidance published on 6 January 2021 and the childcare guidance published on 7 January 2021, can request access to key worker childcare when alternative options, such as home working or access to informal childcare in line with current guidance, are unavailable.

Single-parent families who meet the criteria set out in the guidance are eligible to apply to their school, local authority or childcare provider for key worker childcare. In considering requests to schools, local authorities are expected to take account of the diverse needs of their local communities, families and young people when

applying that guidance. This would include consideration of circumstances giving rise to vulnerability.

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party):

To ask the Scottish Government what additional support it is providing to households that are undertaking home learning during the COVID-19 pandemic.

(S5W-34488)

John Swinney: Scottish Government has invested £25m to support digital inclusion for school-aged learners across Scotland. At end-December 2020, almost 59,000 devices and over 10,000 connectivity packages had been distributed to learners and more will have been distributed since then.

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Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (Scottish Liberal Democrats): To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to ensure that the return to the hub model for schoolchildren takes account of the experience of the previous lockdown. **(S5W-34511)**

John Swinney: The recently updated guidance on schools (published on 6 January) and childcare (published on 7 January) provide information on arrangements for vulnerable children and children of key workers, taking on board experience from the previous lockdown. However all schools and many childcare providers are able to open and there has not been a return to a hub model.

Families who meet the criteria set out in the guidance are eligible to apply to their school, local authority or childcare provider for childcare.

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (Scottish Liberal Democrats): To ask the Scottish Government whether children whose parents are both key workers, but where one parent works entirely at home, are able to access childcare at key worker hubs and, if not, for what reason. **(S5W-34529)**

John Swinney: The purpose of the current, exceptional key worker arrangements is to ensure that those who are critical to essential and lifeline services in Scotland can request places for their children in schools or with childcare providers, where that is necessary to the delivery of those functions. Where a key worker parent working from home cannot fulfil critical functions because of childcare needs, and

no alternative childcare or working options are available, we would expect local authorities and providers to take this into account when making decisions on the availability and prioritisation of key worker childcare places in their area/s.

In order to achieve the primary objective of reducing interactions and helping to drive down community transmission of Covid-19, the number of key worker children presenting to schools during the current strict lockdown must however be kept to an absolute minimum. Employers are therefore asked to strictly prioritise and only request key worker places for staff who are critical to the provision of essential services and have no alternative childcare or working options. Employees should therefore discuss their intention to request a place with their employer, before contacting their council.

20/1/2021

Elaine Smith (Central Scotland) (Scottish Labour): To ask the Scottish Government what the expected uptake among (a) vulnerable children and (b) the children of key workers will be in each local authority area of the (i) childcare and (ii) school provisions it will be introducing following the imposition of the tighter COVID-19 restrictions on 26 December 2020. **(S5W-34313)**

Maree Todd: Until 1 February 2021, early learning and childcare ('ELC') settings and schools will be able to open for children of keyworkers and vulnerable children only.

Those who work directly with children and young people at local authority level are best placed to identify how many children and young people will require support during this exceptional period.

The Scottish Government does not hold information on the expected uptake of ELC and school provision between 26 December and 1 February. We will publish data on actual uptake of this provision in due course.

Figures on children of key workers and vulnerable children who attended critical childcare settings between 30 March and 5 August can be found here [Covid19ELCandHubs - SG Education Analytical Services: Learning Analysis | Tableau Public](#) .

Elaine Smith (Central Scotland) (Scottish Labour): To ask the Scottish Government what nutritional standards apply to the meals served in student halls of residences. **(S5W-34316)**

Richard Lochhead: We have no direct role in the provision of university residential accommodation nor in the catering provision therein. In October last year the Minister for Further Education, Higher Education and Science wrote to accommodation providers welcoming Universities Scotland's Consistent Core of Care package, which outlines a minimum support package for all students including those self-isolating, including help with food and groceries, cleaning supplies and internet access; and emphasising that every effort should be made to ensure that the food provided for and delivered to self-isolating students is nutritious, of good quality and does not result in additional charges for students.

Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (Scottish Liberal Democrats): To ask the Scottish Government what measures are in place to ensure national consistency regarding how vulnerable children that are not presenting at school are contacted and reached out to. **(S5W-34510)**

John Swinney: The national guidance on [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): school re-opening arrangements for January 2021](#) recognises the wide range of circumstances which may lead to a child or young person being considered to be vulnerable at this time. The guidance also makes clear that many of those children and young people will be known to schools and children's services and that children's services are best placed to identify and make appropriate arrangements for the provision of support.

This, in conjunction with education authorities' ongoing responsibilities to follow up absence from school outlined in [national guidance](#), ensure that the support required for all children and young people is in place. The Scottish Government in partnership with local government have revised the system for the monitoring of attendance and absence of pupils at this time, to take account of these particular circumstances. Information on attendance and absence of pupils is published as part of information within [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): daily data for Scotland](#).

22/1/2021

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party): To ask the Scottish Government, further to the statement by the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills on 8 December 2020 (*Official Report*, c. 46), from which budget stream the exceptional, one-off payment to teachers assessing and marking National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher courses in 2021 will be sourced, and whether it will apply to (a) college lecturers and (b) staff at independent schools carrying out the same task. **(S5W-33932)**

John Swinney: In acknowledgement of the additional workload around the quality assurance associated with the alternative certification model for the National Qualifications in 2021, at a time of already significant pressures due to COVID, I announced provision for a one-off, exceptional payment for all teachers and lecturers directly involved in these processes.

SQA, through their National Qualifications 2021 Working Group, are considering whether any adjustment to the alternative certification model processes or timescales is needed as a result of the current remote learning position and will issue further guidance as necessary.

Any such changes will be factored into discussions that are underway to determine how best the additional payments, which would come from within the education budget, might apply to teachers and lecturers involved. This would include those in colleges and independent schools where relevant.

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Scottish Labour): To ask the Scottish Government how many teachers have tested positive for COVID-19 in each

month since February 2020, also broken down by the cumulative number of days of absence from work as a result of this. **(S5W-34366)**

John Swinney: The Scottish Government does not hold this level of detail.

Information on Surveillance of Covid-19 in education from Public Health Scotland can be found here: [Surveillance of COVID-19 in education: key findings for schools, pupils and staff - News - Public Health Scotland](#)

Weekly aggregate figures collected from local authorities on teacher and staff absence due to Covid-19 related reasons can be found here: [COVID19-SchoolsandChildcareInformation - SG Education Analytical Services: Learning Analysis | Tableau Public](#)

Oliver Mundell (Dumfriesshire) (Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party): To ask the Scottish Government what role its agencies play in monitoring the quality of home learning provision in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. **(S5W-34471)**

John Swinney: I have asked Her Majesty's Inspectors of Education to commence with a national review of the quality and effectiveness of remote learning across the country. A programme of 'national overviews', will commence immediately and last for the duration of remote learning.

The purpose of the programme of 'national overviews' is to:

- Learn what is working well and share this widely to celebrate success and support consistency in the quality and effectiveness of delivery of remote learning.
- Surface the challenges and/or issues so that these can be addressed either locally or nationally, as appropriate.
- Identify what further assistance is required to continue to improve the delivery of remote learning so that relevant support can be provided at local and/or national level.

These overviews will be published weekly to ensure they are available for everyone to learn and build from, starting week ending 22 January 2021.

Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (Scottish Liberal Democrats): To ask the Scottish Government what feedback it has received from (a) local authorities and (b) other relevant partners regarding the work available to supply teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic. **(S5W-34604)**

John Swinney: The recruitment and employment of supply teachers in local authority schools are matters for individual councils, as they have the statutory responsibility for providing a complement of teachers which best meets the needs of each of their schools and its pupils.

In July we announced £75 million of additional investment in education staff, sufficient for the recruitment of around 1,400 additional teachers. To date the

feedback we have received from local authorities is that they have recruited more than 1400 additional teachers.

On 13 January we also announced a package of £45 million of new funding to further support education recovery. This funding will allow local authorities to deploy more support to their schools and families as they deal with the challenges of remote learning during lockdown.

The new funding can be used to recruit further staff - which might include teachers, classroom assistants, administrative staff, home/school link workers or other support workers. It is sufficient to employ an additional 2000 teachers to the end of this financial year if required and may offer further employment opportunities for supply teachers.

Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (Scottish Liberal Democrats): To ask the Scottish Government, further to the agreement reached with the Scottish Negotiating Committee for Teachers in April 2020, whether further support will be made available for supply teachers. **(S5W-34605)**

John Swinney: Pay and conditions of service for teachers are matters for the Scottish Negotiating Committee for Teachers (SNCT).

The SNCT is currently considering whether further support will be required. The Scottish Government would expect that additional supply teachers will be required to support remote learning and Covid education recovery.

We have already provided £75m to enable local authorities to recruit an additional 1400 teachers and on 13 January £45 million of new funding was announced to further support education recovery.

This new funding will allow local authorities to deploy more support to their schools and families as they deal with the challenges of remote learning during lockdown. The new funding can be used to recruit further staff - which might include teachers, classroom assistants, administrative staff, home/school link workers or other support workers. We would therefore expect more supply teachers to be recruited where they are needed to support education recovery.

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (Scottish Liberal Democrats): To ask the Scottish Government what maximum number of children is allowed in classrooms in hubs/schools during the current COVID-19 lockdown. **(S5W-34635)**

John Swinney: [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): school re-opening arrangements for January 2021](#) provides guidance on the arrangements for the re-opening of schools in January including the provision for vulnerable children and young people and the children of keyworkers. Those who work directly with children and young people are best placed to identify children and young people who will require support in order to ensure their wellbeing, as a result of these exceptional phased opening arrangements.

When determining which vulnerable children should attend school in person, local authorities and schools should have regard to the overarching policy aim of these exceptional school closures, which is to reduce the number of children, young people and adults from different households interacting in- person within communities (including schools) as far as possible, in order to prevent COVID-related harms. If it is possible for children to be cared for safely and have their learning supported sufficiently well at home, that approach should be preferred.