

PLANNING FOR A HUMAN INFLUENZA PANDEMIC: GUIDANCE FOR SCHOOLS ON SUPPORTING LEARNING IF SCHOOLS HAVE TO CLOSE FOR EXTENDED PERIODS

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SUPPORTING LEARNING IF SCHOOLS HAVE TO CLOSE FOR EXTENDED PERIODS DURING A FLU PANDEMIC

Scottish Government Guidance for Schools and Local Authorities

KEY MESSAGES

- The overall objective is that as far as possible, local authorities and schools should provide pupils with the support needed to enable them to continue learning if schools close to pupils for an extended period during a flu pandemic;
- Recognise that there may be a need to prioritise the effort;
- The overall objective is equally important for the continuing education of young children, especially where the interruption diminishes the support structure for vulnerable two year olds and their families;
- The overall strategic and planning responsibilities lie with education authorities (see para 6 below), of course working with schools and early year providers on local planning and delivery;
- It is important that authorities consider and co-ordinate this work and discuss now with local schools and early year providers their current planning and readiness, their ability to deal with this issue. The work that falls to schools themselves needs to be reasonable and proportionate;
- Resources for planning ideally should take account of the current World Health Organization phase (see para 2 below), and should – as far as possible – be aligned with broader work on remote learning options and IT developments;
- It will be useful for schools in all sectors to establish the proportion of pupils with IT facilities at home, and the extent to which those with such facilities could access school IT systems from home;
- It will also be beneficial if authorities and schools also consider other possible (non-IT) systems for getting work to and from students in the event of lengthy school closures;
- The style of learning for young children, where learning is more around active play, is different from older children. Consideration should be given to appropriate educational learning opportunities for example, early year schemes which provide activity sacks for parents to take home. Particular consideration will be required around infection control.
- Staff – both teachers and support staff – have a role to play in emergency planning and, together with their trade unions or professional associations, should be consulted on the authority's and schools' emergency plans (for pandemic flu or other emergencies);
- Schools should engage with their Parent Councils to ensure that consistent messages are provided to all parents

- All guidance here is subject to an ‘as far as is reasonably practical’ proviso; a severe pandemic would cause major disruption to all aspects of life, including what it is reasonable to expect of authorities, schools and staff – but that is not a reason to neglect planning.

Background

1. In July 2006 the then Scottish Executive Education Department published guidance¹ for authorities, schools, and providers of childcare and children’s services on Planning for a Human Flu Pandemic. That guidance, which of course still stands, set out the potential impact of a pandemic, which could lead to 25-50% of the population being infected during the pandemic, and between around 50,000 and 750,000 people in the UK dying as a result.
2. It is considered inevitable that there will be a pandemic at some time, but no-one knows when it may be, nor how serious it would be – though the potential severity mentioned in the previous paragraph underlines how significant it might be. The World Health Organization has a scale of pandemic and pre-pandemic phases to reflect its perception of the risk. We have for a few years been at Level 3, where “there is a new sub-type of virus, but no human-to-human transmission”, but that has been raised over the last week (end April 2009) to Level 5.
3. The 2006 guidance set out the principal reason why Government might advise local authorities and others responsible (including providers of group early years and childcare settings) to close schools and early year establishments to children and pupils during a pandemic: to reduce the spread of infection among them. Decisions on staff (whether they attend school or not if it is closed) are the responsibility of the employer, in discussion with headteachers. Depending on the duration of the pandemic and its severity, this could mean schools and pre-school providers being closed for a period of several weeks (at worst, closures could last up to a term during a pandemic wave).
4. The guidance indicated that in the event of schools being closed to pupils, they would remain open for staff, although it would be for local authorities in conjunction with headteachers to determine whether staff need come into school or could work from home. Once agreed with the local authority, headteachers should, in consultation with the likes of parent councils, staff, trade unions and professional associations, take into account among other factors (including the well-being and family needs of staff), how and where staff could best support the school’s plans for remote learning.
5. The 2006 guidance (section 2.8 on “Remote Learning”) referenced local authorities’ powers to provide education other than at a school and the importance - given the extent to which school closures could affect pupils’

¹ <http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/humanflupandemic>

education – of endeavouring to ensure that a reasonable level of education is provided for all pupils in their area if schools are closed during term time.

6. The earlier guidance recommended that authorities make preliminary plans and also enter into discussions with all schools, including in the independent sector, around how schools individually, or working together, might best provide support remotely for pupils working from home. This subsequent guidance sets out some of the steps that authorities, schools and pre-school providers could take now to develop an action plan alongside other critical incident procedures. It also highlights the important role of the local authority in co-ordinating work and providing a framework within which schools and pre-school providers could operate in these unusual circumstances.

7. Local authorities have a key role in co-ordinating planning for such a situation, and co-ordinating work in a pandemic. Schools and early year providers should seek to work within a framework developed and managed by their authorities who, in turn, should be reasonable in terms of what they expect of schools and early year centres. Local authorities will take steps where they can to ensure that the care and welfare needs of pupils, as well as their learning needs, are addressed. For example, authorities will wish to consider what arrangements may be made to ensure that pupils entitled to free school meals receive these. Also where there are concerns about the family circumstances of particular pupils then it is expected that social work services will be alerted, especially where there may be issues around child protection.

8. Some schools, especially those with access to more advanced technology – increasingly through the benefits of GLOW – will however be well placed to deliver aspects of remote learning. Even for these schools, it is important that they work with, often through, the local authority. This may for example be the best way to provide some form of helpline for students at the secondary stages; across the authority it may be possible to provide specialist staff support for students taking particular subjects (though differing curriculum details may make this difficult at times), whereas this might be hard for individual schools to achieve. It may also be the most effective way to co-ordinate (non-IT) systems for getting work to and from students. This reinforces the need for authority discussion, planning and agreement with schools.

9. As indicated by the reference to a 'reasonable' level of education in paragraph 5 above, objectives need to be realistic. In the event of school closures for an extended period of time, although one would hope to provide as broad a curriculum as possible in the circumstances, one could not hope to provide the full and balanced curriculum that would normally be offered by schools, nor could fully personalised learning be offered. However, young children and pupils should be able to expect help with some remote learning activities, taking account of their special support needs as far as possible. Some pupils with additional support needs may require to use specialist technology such as communication aids or low vision aids and schools will

need to consider whether these can be loaned out. In some cases where pupils have complex additional support needs it will be parents who will be taking forward learning programmes and who will be the main point of contact with the school.

10. Other services may also be affected by staff shortages. Though all providers of essential services are being encouraged to develop contingency plans that would allow them to continue to operate, there could be some disruption to postal or transport services (or at least a reduction in levels of service) and, though the internet could be expected to continue to function, high levels of usage might make it significantly slower.

11. The guidance aims to be practical. It is based on current practices. It covers both the potential use of new technologies and 'non-technological' approaches. Some schools will be better placed than others to make best use of new technologies, and in most schools there will be some pupils without home access to such technology. The advice in the guidance for schools is equally relevant and should be considered by early year providers in partnership with their local authority.

12. The main part of this guidance sets out general advice for local authorities, schools and pre-school providers, with some issues specific to newer technologies in an Annex. As newer applications, such as grids for learning, are developed and as learning platforms are adopted in schools and the level of access from the home increases, the guidance will be updated to reflect the possibilities they offer. Additionally, we are looking at how other channels, such as television, might provide support at a national level.

13. Whichever approach is used, it will only provide an effective channel for ensuring continuity of service to learners and parents if it is effectively managed and supported throughout the closure period. Local authorities and schools need to review their current critical incidents policy in light of the possibility of a longer emergency.

14. Plans should take account of the numbers of staff who are likely to be available, on the school site or working from home, with appropriate contingency arrangements to cover the absence or non-availability of staff with specific skills or knowledge.

Staff absence

15. As set out in the 2006 guidance, if schools close, they would close to pupils but staff would still, if well (and subject to the issues highlighted in the following paragraph), be expected to report for work – as would staff in all other sectors. It would be for the employer to decide (with the decision generally delegated to the headteacher) whether a school closed to pupils should also close its premises to staff, with work conducted in some other way.

16. Depending on the severity of the pandemic, absences due to illness of staff or their family members might peak at around 30% (the peak lasting around 2 weeks), but would be much lower at other stages in the pandemic 'wave'; school and childcare closures might also mean staff needing to stay at home with their healthy children, but such staff might be able to do some work from home, depending on the nature of the work and their home circumstances (see next paragraph). There should however be no question of expecting staff absent from school because they are ill to carry out work.

17. As in all other sectors, it is for employers to consult and agree with trade unions and professional associations the special arrangements within which schools should operate during a pandemic (for example on special leave to take care of ill family members or children whose schools have closed). Schools will need to work in accordance with the national frameworks and regulations, including the SNCT, and any statutory guidance issued by the Scottish Government. It will also be necessary to take into account any local collective agreements covering such eventualities. It will be for schools' senior management to make decisions within this context.

Getting work to and from students

18. In considering this issue, schools need to take account of:

- a. The accuracy of contact details they have for students and their families; the Scottish Government's general guidance on planning for a pandemic stresses the importance of up-to-date contact details for pupils' families;
- b. The proportion of children who have access to the internet and e-mail at home – and whether the school's IT systems allow those pupils with IT facilities to access the school's own systems from home (and, for example, use their school e-mail addresses); schools might wish to include in their plans options for providing temporary IT access (eg by loaning lap-tops) to pupils who would not otherwise have this facility, but this will not be possible for all schools, and some pupils might not be able to use a laptop from home (eg problems with telephone links);
- c. Security and child protection issues; for example, the personal addresses, e-mail and telephone details of staff should not be made available to pupils or their parents, so there must be systems to enable them to make appropriate contact through the school's systems and networks if they need to contact staff. Such contact should be on teaching and learning matters only, and should be within the agreed school session times. Schools will also need to be aware of the need to protect the confidentiality of pupils' home and e-mail addresses and telephone numbers.

19. Schools will need as far as possible to be able to get work to and from pupils. The authority can potentially play an important role here in co-ordinating such arrangements for some or all schools in the area. E-mail is one tool that can be used for pupils that have access to e-mail systems, and for materials that can be sent electronically. The postal service is an alternative, and it is expected to continue to operate during a pandemic. Another option may be for arrangements to be made for work to be collected from the school, town hall, local library etc. Any plans made now would need to be reviewed in the context of the services available in the event of a pandemic, and need to be appropriate and reasonable in the context of effective workforce deployment and the statutory duty to ensure that teachers and headteachers benefit from an appropriate work/life balance.

20. For pupils to return work to the school without burdening families with potentially high postal costs, schools may wish to have arrangements for parents or pupils to deliver completed work to the school or a collection point. If schools were advised to close to pupils because closure would reduce the risk of infection from their mixing together in the classroom over the school day; care would need to be taken so that any arrangements that would bring pupils into school to deliver or collect work were managed so as to reduce mixing between them.

21. Alternatively, families living close to one another might arrange for one parent to deliver work from a group of pupils. Schools might also consider issuing stamped addressed envelopes to students to use for returning homework. Again, the authority could play a role in this, co-ordinating arrangements for a number of schools. Authorities and schools would have to assess costs and budget accordingly.

22. Whichever channel they use, schools will likely want to explore, in consultation with the authority and school staff, how best they might be able to provide access to a range of on-line materials, text books, worksheets or similar materials for pupils. They could also consider the provision of school telephone numbers or a school e-mail address by means of which pupils or parents could reach staff during school session times in order to raise any questions on the work that has been sent home. In doing this, schools would need to consider how such facilities would be staffed.

23. Authorities may instead or also agree with schools that such support be provided centrally by the authority, with schools pooling some resources to make sure that support is available for all subjects and all key stages. Any such cross-authority plans, particularly for secondary pupils in exam years, should as far as possible take account of curriculum plans and the requirements of SQA and other examination bodies. In this context it is worth emphasising that both authorities and schools may need to prioritise their efforts and focus. Pupils in exam years should perhaps be top of the list and especially those taking Highers and Advanced Highers.

24. SQA have detailed contingency plans to deal with disruption to normal procedures throughout the examination Diet through to certification of results

and appeals. These are invoked where required and operate effectively ensuring candidates are not disadvantaged and their work assessed and qualifications awarded.

25. For any large scale or widespread disruption SQA has well established business continuity plans. There are a variety of measures which could be invoked depending on the timing and scale of the disruption and detailed advice and guidance would be issued at the time. However one of the measures might be the use of alternative candidate evidence which schools already gather in preparation for absentee and appeal consideration and schools are advised to ensure that evidence in line with SQA's current guidance is being collated.

26. Informing and engaging with parents is particularly important for younger children although it equally applies to all. Here is where discussions with a school's Parent Council and any other parent organisations at the school or pre-school provider can really pay dividends. Schools and pre-school providers should be planning to provide parents with some simple, straightforward advice on how they can support their children's learning while the school or pre-school provider is closed. This may include information on the curriculum, or hints about how to use a child's home surroundings – or programmes on television or radio – to inform their work.

Pupils studying 'elsewhere'

27. It is becoming increasingly common for secondary pupils to spend part (occasionally all) of their week studying at institutions other than their school: other schools, colleges or work-based providers. The school with which they are registered would remain responsible for them, and should liaise with the other institutions concerned.

Examinations and coursework

28. The Government and SQA are working on ways of addressing potential disruption to public examinations through school closures during a pandemic, or any loss of coursework that would contribute to pupils' final grades. The special consideration rules that are currently used when individual pupils miss exams, or are unwell or upset during exams, would be applied on a larger scale. The SQA would issue detailed advice at the time, but procedures are being developed that would allow the great majority of examination candidates to have their work assessed and grades allocated.

Television/radio/internet

29. In a pandemic, the Government would seek to ensure that information would be made available to LAs, schools and families about what materials are available where and when. Discussions are underway with public sector broadcasters to develop a collective response to any pandemic. This could include the possibility of using television (and radio) channels to broadcast

more educational programmes during a period of school closures, or to make categories of programmes and other materials available through the internet.

30. One factor may be the timing of a pandemic in terms of the roll-out of digital TV across the country: it would doubtless be easier to dedicate a free-to-air digital channel to educational programmes than one of the 5 (in some areas, 4) terrestrial channels. However, if a pandemic closes schools while a substantial proportion of the population does not have access to digital TV, this might disadvantage pupils without digital TV, who may well also be those without access to ICT systems. We would therefore hope that at least a reasonable proportion of educational programming could appear on terrestrial channels, though clearly what would be most appropriate and its availability will be the subject of on-going discussions.

31. We would ensure that schools were advised of the content of forthcoming educational programmes on TV/radio so that they could – if they wished – try to link the materials being sent to pupils' homes (by post or electronically) to the programmes they would be able to view. The Scottish Government could provide such information through its own website and/or via GLOW, as well as flagging programmes or materials being made available on the internet. The parentzone website also be used to direct parents and families to appropriate sources of information and advice.

Post-pandemic

32. After a pandemic wave, if schools or pre-school providers have been closed for an extended period, they and authorities would need to work together on activities to help children catch up on education that they have lost during the pandemic. Government would expect to issue further guidance on this towards the end of the pandemic when the circumstances, and the impact of the closures, would be clearer.

33. Even if there have not been extended widespread school closures, a significant number of pupils will have missed out on at least some days' schooling as a result of illness or being unable to get to school. Authorities and schools would need to work together to identify those affected and coordinate the delivery of appropriate activities and support.

34. Priorities for 'catch-up' work would depend on the extent and duration of any closures, and the time of year at which they occur. Any 'catch up' work provided by school staff within their existing contracts would need to be scheduled within the existing school sessions. Staff could not be expected to work extra hours to provide extra 'catch up' classes.

Correction/revision to earlier/2006 guidance

35. In paragraph 2.8 of the 2006 guidance mention was made of the 'BBC JAM' service. This service has now been discontinued. The guidance in the following Annex covers (in general terms) some of the alternatives.

Schools Directorate (1 May 2009)

THE ROLE OF TECHNOLOGY

As with other aspects of remote learning, the local authority can and should play an important role in planning, identifying what schools can do themselves and what the authority can do for schools.

New technologies provide a number of ways of:

- maintaining communications between home and school and keeping the community informed through email and the school website, where available
- providing learners with access to learning materials and support through the school's learning platform or website, where these exist.

However, technology also poses its own problems. Without effective planning there is a real risk of access and security issues preventing the school from utilising technology to provide effective solutions in an emergency. Schools should review their current policies to ensure they are in a position to ensure a satisfactory level of engagement with learners, their workforce and community in the unfortunate event of an emergency. A number of practical steps that schools should take to ensure that their use of technology will provide continuity during an emergency are set out below.

This guidance relates only to the use of ICT systems for supporting teaching and learning during a pandemic.

Policies and plans

Within the context of an overall plan, the following steps will help schools ensure that their technology remains fit for purpose to support distance learning throughout the closure period :

- ⇒ The school should review the security implications for technology equipment if, for example the ICT suite is not being regularly used; staff may be in the school in daytime, but the headteacher may agree to many of them working from home.
- ⇒ If a number of schools are closed for extended periods this may place additional burdens on local authority or other ICT support. For example, there may be increased calls on help-desk support. Local Authorities or other providers may wish to work together to develop an ICT support plan to ensure that support is effectively distributed between centres through scheduling or cluster arrangements.
- ⇒ In some areas of the country an erratic supply of electricity for the schools ICT system might disrupt provision. Data will need to be backed-up regularly in the case of a break down in service.

Emergency communication and connectivity strategy

If the school is closed to students, the following steps should be taken to ensure that students and parents can be contacted (for example to update them on the current position) and supported (for example, by making learning resources available).

- ⇒ Ensure all details for students are electronically stored and are readily available to a range of authorised users.
- ⇒ Ensure that secure facilities are available to communicate in an emergency with all parents/students eg by text, by phone, by e-mail, by the web or by local media
- ⇒ Establish and plan for a two way method of communication via the school website, the learning platform or telephone system.
- ⇒ Ensure all possible emergency resources are available in a range of formats so a range of possible communication channels can be utilised.
- ⇒ Establish emergency protocols with users for appropriate usage eg daily messaging.
- ⇒ Ensure that all protective measures, including anti-virus software and firewalls, are installed and up-to-date to protect the remote learning arrangements from being compromised or sabotaged.

Becta's Functional specifications for connectivity services and school infrastructure set out a set of requirements for effective ICT services that schools should expect from their service providers. These are available at http://industry.becta.org.uk/content_files/industry/resources/Specification_key_docs/functional_spec_connectivity_v1.pdf

Support for remote learning and teaching

Schools can take a number of steps to ensure that curriculum materials will be available to learners throughout the crisis period. The suggestions below reflect what many schools are already doing to extend learning beyond the school day and to provide learners with access to the school's materials at home. At present many schools with websites are providing these services through the web site. Increasingly, as the use of learning platforms becomes more embedded they will become an important means of supporting out-of-school learning.

- ⇒ **Curriculum resources:** Develop a core online set of content to support specific curriculum objectives that can be managed in the main by learners themselves. These resources may be provided from a range of sources and may include school-generated and commercial content, and free material available via Teachers TV or similar to support formal and informal learning. If learners' access to the Internet is limited, these resources should be printed and delivered to homes. Schools will want to allow sufficient directed time for the production and assembly of such curriculum material.
- ⇒ **Feedback to learners:** Schools will wish to ensure that learners receive feedback on any work they have completed at home. This will be particularly important for examination classes. While some on-line resources (such as the major examination revision sites) are sufficiently interactive to provide feedback directly to the learner, students' responses to much school-generated and other resources will need marking by teachers. Ensure that facilities are available, either through e-mail, the school website or the learning platform, for students to communicate with staff and gain feedback and support. Schools will not be able to devote inordinate amounts of time to chasing up work that students have not returned, but will need contact details so that they may contact students in the event of failure to return work.
- ⇒ **Peer to peer support:** Students benefit from discussing their work with other learners. Where students are unable to meet because of the risks of contagion, schools may develop facilities for online student dialogue through the learning platform facilitated by learning mentors. A number of local authorities and schools already making this facility available through their online learning services.

Where schools have learning platforms, they should review the functionality of the school's learning platform to ensure it can be used for a range of activities during an emergency.

http://matrix.becta.org.uk/GMATRIX_6381882_acb95f499dd8aebd-D5CF9F47-A42C-8310-EFE0ECB3B63CC3CC/1166004952223/rebrand/matrix/index.cfm?matrix=136&forcenew=yes

Developing competencies to utilise remote learning and teaching

Technology will only support the continuity of learning if learners and staff have the necessary skills to utilise it effectively.

- ⇒ Ensure that learners are experienced users and have developed the competencies needed to make best use of online resources.
- ⇒ Develop learners' competencies to learn effectively independently with little supervision.

The value of cluster arrangements

Many schools would benefit by entering into cluster arrangements to put in place the recommendations set out above (though cluster arrangements may also benefit schools using more 'low tech' approaches).

For example:

- Schools that are well advanced in providing out-of-school hours support to learners through the use of a learning platform could become cluster leaders, registering students and staff from other schools on their services.
- Schools in a cluster could pool online resources to maximise the amount of the curriculum that is covered, using a central hosting arrangement.
- Technical and other support could be more effectively managed across a cluster of schools.

While the above recommendations set out above are aimed at providing out of school access for students in the case of a school closure, many are in line with existing school and local authority plans for extending learners' access to learning generally. Schools and local authorities may wish to consider the guidance in this document alongside their wider strategies for engaging learners through the use of technology.