

Education, Children and Young People Committee

2nd Meeting, 2022 (Session 6), Wednesday 19 January

Covid and Schools: January 2022

Introduction

The Committee will hold a one-off evidence on the impact of Covid on schools at the start of the new school term in January 2022. Current Covid case numbers present several challenges to schools and communities. This evidence session will involve evidence on how pupils parents and teachers have been coping with the start of the January 2022 term and whether there are any additional measures that could be undertaken which would be helpful.

Committee meeting

The Committee will take evidence from—

- Douglas Hutchison, President of the Association of Directors of Education (ADES) and Executive Director of Education, Glasgow City Council;
- Greg Dempster, General Secretary, Association of Headteachers and Deputies in Scotland (AHDS);
- Simon Cameron, Chief Officer, Employers' Team, Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA); and
- Margaret Wilson, Chair, National Parent Forum of Scotland (NPFS).

Supporting Information

The Committee has received written submissions from COSLA and these are provided at [Annexe A](#) to this paper. A SPICe briefing on the issues being considered at this evidence session, is provided at [Annexe B](#).

Education, Children and Young People Committee Clerking Team
14 January 2021

Annexe A

COSLA

Covid-19 Impacts on Education

12 January 2022

Introduction

1. COSLA is the voice of Local Government in Scotland, we are a Councillor-led, cross-party organisation who champions councils' vital work to secure the resources and powers they need to deliver effectively. We work on councils' behalf to focus on the challenges and opportunities they face, and to engage positively with Governments and stakeholders on policy, funding and legislation.
2. Local Government continues to meet the challenges of the pandemic, while also playing a key role in recovery from the impacts of the pandemic. Councils are the anchors in our communities and continue to focus on those who are potentially more vulnerable as a result of the pandemic. Local Government, and the communities we serve, continue to show innovative and creative thinking in responding to the pandemic and the impacts of public health restrictions. The Committee are encouraged to consider [COSLA's "Live Well Locally" campaign](#) as it will be vital that Local Government is properly funded in order to support communities to thrive as we recover.
3. The COSLA Resources Spokesperson gave evidence to the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee on 11th January 2022 on the Scottish Government's Budget 2022-23. The Committee will be aware of the disappointment and concern shared by all 32 Council Leaders at the Local Government Settlement and will want to consider the [Budget Reality](#) document. .
4. We welcome the opportunity to discuss the continuing impact of the pandemic on children and young people's education and the mitigations being taken by Local Authorities and our wider partners to ensure the best level of education continues to be delivered.
5. Supporting children and young people to achieve the best outcomes possible as we recover from the pandemic is a key priority for Local Government. We note the worrying findings of the Achievement of Curriculum for Excellence Levels data released last month. Whilst these results are, unfortunately, unsurprising considering the disruption to in-person learning as a result of COVID, we will work with renewed focus on the health and wellbeing of our children and young people in the months and years ahead.

Covid-19 Education Recovery Group (CERG)

6. Since the start of the pandemic COSLA's Children and Young People Spokesperson, Councillor Stephen McCabe has Co-Chaired the CERG alongside the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills. CERG meets on a fortnightly basis and continues to discuss how to maintain effective education provision moving forwards, including consideration of the implications of the Omicron variant and the knock on impact on staff and pupils required to isolate in high numbers.

7. Guidance for reducing risks from COVID-19 has been through a number of revisions over the past 2 months, in light of Omicron, cover a range of mitigations including self-isolation and ventilation.
8. COSLA has also been an active member of the COVID-19 Children and Families Collective Leadership Group, and many other groups focused on facilitating the best possible support for children and young people during this difficult period.

Impact of the Omicron variant on absence rates and contingency planning

9. The committee will be aware of the impact of the omicron variant across society, businesses and the public sector, where there have been high-levels of staff absences due to COVID and self-isolation. Education has similarly been affected with increases in the absences for children, young people and school staff.
10. Over the period of the pandemic Local Authorities have demonstrated their ability to adapt to the continually changing nature of the pandemic and therefore are practiced at responding to the evolving challenges of COVID. In line with COVID guidance for education, Local Authorities and schools have prepared a wide range of contingency plans, including partial attendance (either due to distance requirement or self-isolation) or the return to full remote learning.
11. Whilst scenarios will be specific to each schools any closure of schools (or sending specific classes home) will stem from either:
 - public health advice, provided by the local incident management team in line with advice on contact tracing and self-isolation, or
 - a decision by a local authority, headteacher or other senior officers that there is not enough school staff available to open
12. Whilst the presumption that children and young people are able to access in-person learning as far as possible, should one of the two scenarios above require the full or particular closure of a school, support to children and young people will continue. Schools will provide materials and support to children and young people if they are unable attend in-person learning within the staffing resources available.
13. Building on the assets that have been developed during earlier stages of the pandemic, children and young people will also be able to access the National E-Learning Offer (which has been developed and supported by Education Scotland, Local Authorities and Regional Improvement Collaboratives) including live lessons from e-Sgoil and recorded resources through WestOS.

Supporting Staff / Using Additional Funding

14. The monies provided for the recruitment of additional teaching and support staff has been used to recruit an additional 2,200 staff based on the needs of children and young people locally. The money has been baselined into Council funding and as such

individuals will be employed on permanent or temporary contracts as appropriate to the role and identified needs of services.

15. Throughout the pandemic COSLA has worked closely with Scottish Government, Education Scotland, Trade Unions and individual local authorities to ensure a range of supports have been available to the education workforce to enable them to look after both their own health and wellbeing, that of those they work with and of the children and young people that they teach and support. The work nationally has complemented the suite of supports that have been made available locally by councils and work continues to ensure that the national offer connects meaningfully with this.
16. Staff wellbeing communities of practice have been developed to ensure the workforce feel supported in managing their own mental health and wellbeing and have the capacity to support the mental health and wellbeing of learners. This followed on from the successful development of spaces for wellbeing across different sectors of the education workforce over the session 2020/21. These were evaluated positively, for example, key impact themes were highlighted around empowerment, trust and permission, focussing on their own mental health and wellbeing, connections across the education system and innovation and experimentation. They also aid in providing a common language and shared understanding of the mental health and wellbeing needs of children and young people, as well as supporting the workforce to recognise the impact trauma can have on their own, and learners, actions and behaviour.

Supporting Pupils

17. As noted previously, children and young people's mental health and wellbeing was consistently identified as at risk of being negatively impacted by school closures and the wider impacts of the pandemic and public health measures. It is also widely recognised that the uncertainty and anxiety caused by COVID-19 at all stages during the pandemic will have an impact on health and wellbeing, including changes to public health measures and guidance, including at the end of 2021 and return to school in January 2022. Local Government has continued to work with partners to support children and young people's mental health and wellbeing and a range of approaches and provisions continue to be in place. These include art-based therapies targeting those not engaged in school and/or finding it hard to leave home and return to school, a hybrid online/offline youth work-based approach, and digital services.
18. Youthlink Scotland have undertaken and published a series of [surveys](#) regarding access to facilities for youthwork provision throughout the pandemic. Provision, delivery, and access has changed throughout the pandemic and local authority youth work services have adapted to provide support to young people in a variety of ways, both in person and digitally, as restrictions have changed. There are still ongoing barriers and challenges related to youth work access to facilities and provision, some of which could be alleviated should additional funding be provided by Scottish Government.
19. Similar to youth work has been the provision of extra-curricular physical activity and sport clubs and sessions which provide health, wellbeing and social activities for children and young people. Where restrictions have allowed, and facilities, staff and volunteers are available, activities have continued. Access to facilities for sport and physical activity face similar challenges to youth work which could also be alleviated by funding from Scottish Government to additional Covid19 related costs.

20. Local Government and Scottish Government have worked together to provide those working in schools with the advice, information, and support that they need in order to signpost and link into sources of advice and support for children, young people and their families, aligned to the Getting it Right for Every Child approach. Ongoing focus has been placed on delivery of counselling support through schools, and a whole-school approach to wellbeing, and professional learning for school staff to enhance their ability and confidence in supporting children and young people.
21. A wide range of approaches continue to be used, such as telephone helplines, bereavement support, educational psychology, bespoke support packages and resources, virtual and telephone counselling, advice lines, regular contacts and relationship maintenance, family support, links to CAMHS, youth work to support pupils who are not able to regularly attend school. Approaches to resilience, nurture and trauma-informed approaches, Scottish Mental Health First Aid, LIAM and ASSIST are also frequently used.
22. It is also recognised that changes may affect children and young people who have additional support needs more significantly. Given the wide range of additional support needs individual learners have, the expertise and judgement of the school staff and children's sector professionals working mostly closely with them continues to be key. As the March 2021 [Education Scotland published report](#) noted, local authority support, professional learning and ongoing reflection has resulted in improved approaches to meeting the needs of learners with complex needs, and positive steps in increasing engagement and support for parents of children and young people with complex learning needs. It is recognised that there is learning from the experiences of remote learning in terms of how support for learners can be further developed.

Digital

23. Local Government have distributed over 122,000 digital devices to children and young people. This includes 72,000 devices provide to children and young people identified by their schools as being at risk of digital exclusion supported by £25m of funding from the Scottish Government, with over 14,000 connectivity solutions provided. While local authorities entered the first period of remote learning from different starting points, in terms of digital devices, programmes and approaches, all councils worked quickly to provide devices to as many children as possible who were at risk of digital exclusion. However, we note that our remote, island and rural communities continue to face challenges with broadband and connectivity issues, which can be a barrier.
24. Schools and our education and children's services workforce showed their creativity and innovation in adapting both to remote learning, when there was not the time or opportunity for digital learning, and to support children and young people without devices.
25. COSLA continues to work with the Scottish Government on their commitment to provide a device for every school-aged child, we look forward to using further investment to ensure all children and young people can benefit from digital education.

Ventilation

26. Last year Local Government and Scottish Government agreed to undertake a programme of CO2 Monitoring in all learning and teaching spaces across the school estate during the first term of the 2021/22 school year. This was supported by £10m funding. As the committee will be aware from correspondence with the Cabinet Secretary, despite supply and delivery challenges, 100% of learning and teaching spaces were assessed by November 2021. As a result, improvements have been made within learning and teaching spaces where areas of poorer ventilation have been identified.
27. Through COSLA's Workforce Issues Group, a quick [guide](#) has been developed for all school staff to support their understanding and use of CO2 monitors in classrooms. Any concerns about ventilation or CO2 Monitors are raised at the school level in the first instance, however where escalation routes have been exhausted there are avenues to discuss concerns both locally and national that we have established with our partners in the trade unions.
28. As set out in the most recent update to the guidance for reducing the risk of COVID in schools, published in December 2021, COSLA had worked with the Scottish Government and partners to agree a regular programme of CO2 monitoring with a minimum of one assessment of all learning, teaching and play spaces in Scotland per week, or more often in areas of persistent concern. Importantly the guidance notes that some Local Authorities may need time at the start of term to procure and distribute additional CO2 monitors to achieve this strengthened commitment, recognising the different challenges that will be faced by schools depending on their individual estate.
29. We note the continued interest in the use of air clearing devices. Local Authorities and schools continue to follow the latest guidance from the Scottish Government which is clear that:

“Air cleaning devices / HEPA filters may play a role in reducing airborne transmission of aerosols where it is not possible to maintain adequate ventilation. However, the available scientific evidence to date continues to support a primary focus on improving natural or mechanical ventilation, with CO2 monitoring playing a supporting role in identifying areas of concern

Expert advice from groups including SAGE and HSE states that air filtration devices do not provide any ventilation and should never be used as a substitute for efforts to improve ventilation – other actions should be undertaken to improve ventilation before, exceptionally, considering use of air cleaning devices. It is therefore important to understand that air cleaning devices must not be used as a substitute for natural or mechanical ventilation (including the opening of windows and doors) during cold weather – doing so may increase risks to staff and pupils.”.
30. On 11th January 2022 the Scottish Government announced that £5m to support urgent remedial work that has been identified as a result of ongoing CO2 monitoring work, in line with our existing school safety guidance. Remedial measures that may be considered for persistent problem areas include adjustments to window - and door-

opening, use of fan systems, and use of air cleaning devices as a temporary mitigation while viable methods of improving ventilation are identified. At the time of writing, COSLA are in early discussions with the Scottish Government to determine the approach to the distribution and use of this funding.

Recovery

31. Local Government and Scottish Government have agreed that the physical, emotional and mental wellbeing of children and young people are central in recovery from the pandemic. The guidance on 'Curriculum for Excellence in the Recovery Phase', makes this clear.
32. While Local Government continues to respond to the challenges brought by the pandemic and recovery from the impacts of the pandemic for their whole communities, a focus is on those who are potentially more vulnerable for a range of reasons. The committee will also be aware of COSLA's concerns set out in the [Budget Reality](#) document regarding the real-terms cut in core funding of £371 million within the Local Government financial settlement which will affect the most vulnerable in our communities most acutely. The committee will be aware of COSLA's "[Live Well Locally](#)" campaign which sets out our shared ambition for everyone in Scotland.
33. As stated in previous submissions, Local Government continues to work closely with Scottish Government on the COVID Recovery Strategy, focusing on tackling the inequality and disadvantage exposed and exacerbated by the pandemic. The Wellbeing of Children and Young People is one of the strategy's three key outcomes. The strategy recognises that "local" is key - local leadership, local partnerships, local government, local transport, local children's services planning, local employability partnerships, local resilience, and local service design. Local Government, in collaboration with the Scottish Government, will provide that local leadership to the approach to recovery that is at all times rooted in the needs of the people that we serve.

Annexe B

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An t-Ionad Fiosrachaidh

Education, Children and Young People Committee

19 January 2022

COVID 19: Return to School January 2022

Introduction

The Committee has agreed to undertake a one-off session looking at the return to schooling in light of the Omicron variant of COVID 19.

At the time of writing there is limited information on this issue. This short briefing is intended to support the Committee in exploring the issues further with the panel of witnesses. There are three broad areas of interest identified in this paper. These are: mitigations to minimise the impact of the virus; the absences of staff and pupils; and the continuity of learning.

Mitigations

The [Scottish Government's Guidance on Reducing the Risks in Schools](#) was last updated on 7 January 2022. Guidance is based on advice from the [Advisory Sub-Group on Education and Children's Issues](#) and input from stakeholders, including through the [Covid-19 Education Recovery Group](#). Mitigations currently in place in Scottish schools include:

- Encouraging [uptake of vaccinations](#) among eligible groups.
- [Use of face coverings](#) by adults and secondary school pupils in class and when moving around school buildings.
- [Ensuring adequate ventilation in schools](#) (whilst also maintaining a minimum temperature of 17°C).
- Physical distancing in [primary](#), [secondary schools](#) and for [adults](#).
- [Use of PPE](#) where staff are in contact with a child or young person with symptoms of COVID-19.

- [Use of asymptomatic, symptomatic and close contact testing.](#)

[Arrangements for managing outbreaks, following core public health measures, carrying out risk assessments](#) and ensuring [enhanced hygiene and cleaning](#) are also identified by the guidance as measures schools and ELC settings should implement.

The COVID-19 Recovery Committee looked at mitigations in schools [at its 25 November 2021 meeting](#), taking evidence from ADES, EIS, NPFS and School Leaders Scotland. The [SPICe paper for the meeting](#) can be viewed on the Committee's webpage, as can the [Official Report of the meeting](#). It should be noted that this meeting took place prior to the emergence of the Omicron variant.

Advisory Sub-Group on Education and Children's issues: latest advice

At its [14 December 2021 meeting](#), the Advisory Sub-Group on Education and Children's Issues welcomed the First Minister's statements that closing schools would be a last resort. The risks to education and also to the safety and wellbeing of vulnerable children were identified as wider harms of national level school closures.

The need for more knowledge of the impact of mitigations on the R number so that more informed decisions could be made when advising on measures in schools was noted.

The Sub-Group agreed to monitor data on paediatric admissions to hospital with the Omicron variant.

Testing and isolation

[Updated guidance on self-isolation](#) applies from 6 January 2022:

- **Positive cases** must isolate for 10 days. If the person tests negative on lateral flow tests taken on day 6 and 7, taken at least 24 hours apart and with the first test no earlier than day six, they may leave isolation. Lateral flow tests should not be taken before day 6 following a positive test.
- **For close contacts**, adults who have had three doses of the COVID-19 vaccination and those under 18 years and 4 months should take seven daily lateral flow tests and report negative results instead of isolating. There is no requirement for a PCR test in order to end isolation. Children under 5 who are close contacts do not need to isolate or take daily lateral flow tests, though a one-off test is recommended before ending isolation.
- **Unvaccinated/partially vaccinated adult contacts** must take a PCR test and isolate for 10 days.

Ventilation

The [First Minister announced in August 2021](#) that funding of £10 million was provided to councils to cover the costs of CO2 monitors and other improvements to

ventilation. The [Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills wrote to the Committee on 29 October 2021](#) stating that local authorities had completed initial monitoring of 83% of all learning, teaching and play spaces in Scotland. The letter also included details of local authority funding allocations and completed ventilation assessments.

On 11 January 2022, the [First Minister announced](#) funding of £5 million for ventilation in schools and early years settings. The [Scottish Government press release stated](#):

The funding is to improve air flow, such as adjustments to windows and doors, use of fan systems and use of air cleaning devices in line with existing safety guidance. This is in addition to Scottish Government funding of £10 million provided local authorities for ventilation and CO2 monitoring last year.

Following the announcement, the [EIS commented](#):

“Whilst the additional funding of £5 million for air cleaners is welcome, it, frankly, is long overdue. We have been talking about improving ventilation in schools for over a year and now, in January 2022, we finally have funding made available but it will take weeks for this to be processed, air cleaners procured and then supplied to schools. In the meantime, teachers and pupils will continue to face the challenge of Omicron in busy, crowded schools.”

At last week’s Committee meeting (12 January), members questioned the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills Shirley-Anne Somerville MSP about the funding. Members had particular concerns around whether the funding was sufficient to procure HEPA filters in classrooms. On this, the [Cabinet Secretary told the Committee](#):

“Of course this funding could be used for HEPA filters if they were identified as the only appropriate solution for particular spaces, but I would point out once again that the expert advice we are getting in on this issue is that air cleaning devices should not be used as an alternative to improving ventilation, and it makes very clear in the updated guidance the circumstances in which the use of air cleaning and filtration devices may be appropriate, and that is aligned with the advice we are getting from the Health and Safety Executive.”
– [Education, Children and Young People Committee, 12 January 2022](#)

The Committee asked the Cabinet Secretary to provide further detail on how the figure of £5 million additional funding had been arrived at and whether it was sufficient.

The Cabinet Secretary also said local authorities can report teacher concerns to government via the Workforce Issues Group, and the government is writing to unions to ask for any issues on ventilation or other concerns to be raised.

An [EIS survey of 16,056 members](#) (32% of the union’s membership) published in December 2021 asked questions on ventilation. The survey found:

- 65.9% of all respondents felt working spaces were well ventilated. 29.2% did not.

- 62.8% of all respondents knew the ventilation of their working space had been checked by the school. 11% did not.
- 32% of all respondents said their school had set out a procedure for raising ventilation concerns. 21.6% said their school had not and 41.9% did not know.
- 72.4% of all respondents said their school had used CO2 monitors or set out how workspace ventilation may be measured. 9.4% said this had not been done and 18.2% did not know.

A breakdown of the results can be found in the [survey publication](#). The EIS analysis of the survey stated: "...whilst the safety mitigations around CO2 monitors and ventilation are in place, there remains inconsistency in member experiences."

Advice on ventilation in schools

At its [14 December 2021 meeting](#), the Advisory Sub-Group on Education and Children's Issues recommended ventilation guidance be updated to provide clarity around ratio of CO2 monitoring devices to learning, teaching and play spaces, including clarification on air cleaning devices. The Sub-Group said information on air-cleaning devices required "clarification" and that such devices "do not replace the need for good ventilation".

[Scottish Government advice on ventilation in schools](#) was updated in December 2021. This guidance identifies measures for increasing ventilation such as keeping windows and doors open where possible, opening doors and windows during periods when a room is unused, the use of mechanical ventilation where it is necessary.

On air cleaners/HEPA filters, the guidance says these should not be used as a substitute for natural or mechanical ventilation as this may increase risks to staff and pupils. The [guidance states advice from groups including SAGE and HSE](#):

"...states that air filtration devices do not provide any ventilation, and should never be used as a substitute for efforts to improve ventilation – other actions should be undertaken to improve ventilation before, exceptionally, considering use of air cleaning devices."

The Scottish Government has said it will consider further scientific advice on HEPA filtration and UV treatment as it becomes available.

Vaccinations

[On 14 September 2021, Scottish Ministers accepted advice](#) from the four UK CMOs to proceed with vaccination of 12-15 year olds with the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine. From 20 September 2021 the roll-out of first doses began.

As at 12 January 2022, [Public Health Scotland data](#) showed:

- 66.3% of 12-15 year olds in Scotland have had a first vaccine dose, while 16% have had a second dose. 12-15 year olds [can now be offered a second](#)

[dose](#) 12 weeks after the first. 0.8% of this age group have had a third dose of the vaccine.

- 81.4% of 16-17 year olds in Scotland have had a first vaccine dose, while 49.4% have had a second and 8.1% have had a third.

Children under 12 are not currently eligible for the COVID-19 vaccination in the UK.

The [minutes of the 14 December 2021 meeting](#) of the Advisory Sub-Group on Education and Children's Issues state:

“The Sub-Group highlighted its concern around the delay in a decision on vaccination for 5-11 year olds, with further advice from JCVI and MHRA approval awaited.”

During the same meeting, it was also noted there had been “good uptake” of the booster vaccination in the education workforce, with uptake levels higher in this group than in the overall population.

Absences

The Scottish Government has regularly been publishing data on absences. [Scottish Government data](#) on attendance on Friday 7 January 2022 showed:

- “the percentage of school openings (i.e. half days) that showed pupils were in attendance was reported as being 79.1%, of which 0.5% was reported as planned home learning
- “the percentage of school openings (i.e. half days) that showed pupils were not in school because of non Covid-19 related reasons (including exclusions) was 13.8%
- “the percentage of school openings (i.e. half days) that showed pupils were not in school because of Covid-19 related reasons was 7.1%.”

To provide context, we can compare these figures to just prior to the Christmas break and early November 2021.

On 1 November 2021, the level of pupil absence attributed to the pandemic was 1.5%. There was some variation between that date and the early-December, broadly speaking the figure for that period was around 2%. By mid-December this figure rose to 4.4%. Of these pupils not in school for COVID-related reasons, the large majority was consistently reported as being off to self-isolate, rather than being unwell.

On 2 November 1,215 teachers and 919 other staff were off with Covid related reasons. On 14 December 2,048 teachers and 1,243 other staff were absent with Covid related reasons.

One of the approaches of the Scottish Government supporting local authorities and schools is to provide additional resource for teachers and staff. The initial release of

the teacher census, published in December reported that in September 2021 there were 53,581 FTE teachers in schools, which is an increase of 909 FTE teachers year-on-year.

Ultimately it is for local authorities to employ teachers. The December publication stated—

“Although the number of teachers has increased since 2020, this was not the case for each local authority. In 28 local authorities the number of teachers increased or stayed the same, with the largest increase of 9% seen in Moray; followed by Inverclyde, with an increase of 6%. The other four local authorities saw small decreases in teachers this year, of up to 2%.”

The numbers of pupils also vary. The December release of the Summary Statistics stated discussed the pupil teacher ratios (PTR)—

“The numbers of teachers increased in primary, secondary and special schools while the number of centrally employed and early learning & childcare teachers decreased. The decrease in primary pupils combined with the increase in primary teachers meant there were fewer pupils per teacher and consequently the primary PTR decreased to 15.1. This is the lowest ever PTR for primary schools. In secondary schools the increase in teachers was proportionally higher than the increase in pupils meaning there were fewer pupils per teacher, so the secondary PTR decreased slightly to 12.4.”

Continuity of learning

To support schools and teachers with remote learning, Education Scotland along with partners developed a “[National eLearning Offer](#)” which included eSgoil as well as other resources and professional development. This remains available this year and includes—

- Live, interactive lessons through e-Sgoil;
- Expansion of the online and remote learning options available to schools in both the Broad General Education and Senior Phase;
- Study support webinars and resources; and
- Recorded content for learners to use as directed by their teacher.

The Scottish Government also aims to ensure that every child in Scotland is provided with a “device to get online, including a free internet connection where required and the support to use it during the life of this parliament.”

In November, the EIS undertook a survey on teachers’ workload which had 16,000 responses from teachers. Commenting on the report, [Larry Flanagan stated](#)—

“The increased emphasis on digital learning – be that in the classroom or remotely from home – has created challenges for teachers, often associated with a lack of suitable equipment and resources.”

On [13 December, the SQA 'reminded' schools of its contingency plans for the 2022 diet](#). This noted the three scenarios which had been [set out by the SQA in September](#):

Scenario 1

This is the current scenario schools and colleges are working to and will include, where appropriate, exams. In this scenario, the SQA had already announced “significant modifications to the 2021-22 course assessments ... taking account of disruption to learning caused by the pandemic.”

Scenario 2

If there is further significant disruption to learning and teaching this session, appropriate additional support measures for learners will be put in place to help reduce pre-exam stress. For example, where possible in some subjects SQA may provide additional information to help learners focus their study on the run up to the exams. This will not be possible in all subjects due to the types of modifications which are already in place. The actual assessments will not change under this approach.

Scenario 3

If the Covid-19 pandemic gets worse to the point where physical gatherings are restricted at the time of the exams, the SQA exam diet will be cancelled. If this happens, teachers and lecturers will be asked to determine provisional results by using their professional judgement of evidence that shows each learner’s skills, knowledge and understanding.

The SQA stated that under this approach there is no requirement for schools, colleges and training providers to run additional assessments. Doing so would place excess workload on teachers, lecturers and learners. Provisional results would be based on in-year assessments that normally take place during the school year such as prelims, practical activities, performances and class tests.

At the time of writing, the Scenario 1 remains the current plan for 2022.

Lynne Currie and Ned Sharratt, Senior Researchers, SPICe Research

13 January 2022

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