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The Delivery of Education and Certification: Research Commission for the Scottish Covid-19 Inquiry

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Disclaimer:

This report was commissioned by the Scottish Covid-19 Inquiry as introductory scoping research. It was written to assist the inquiry with its planning process about the shape and direction of its investigation, and is published in the interests of transparency. The inquiry is grateful to the author[s] for their work. The inquiry is an independent body, and will be carrying out its own investigations to fulfil its terms of reference. The introductory research represents the views of those who wrote it, and nothing in it is binding on the inquiry. The introductory research is one of many sources which will be considered by the inquiry during the course of its investigation.

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Executive Summary

Aim and Focus of This Oversight Study

This report provides an introduction to the areas of investigation within Portfolio 4, *The Delivery of Education and Certification*, in order to assist preparations for the Scottish Covid-19 Inquiry, and in support of the overall aim of the Inquiry: to establish the facts of, and learn lessons from, the strategic response to the Covid-19 pandemic in Scotland.

We have undertaken a comprehensive desk-based analysis of relevant national and international literature and research evidence reporting on issues relating to education and certification in the context of the pandemic. The findings of our investigation are the outcome of a robust assessment of a) the impact of Covid-19 on the delivery of education and certification for *all* learners at all stages of education in Scotland, and b) the impact of Covid-19 on identified groups of children and young people known to face particular disadvantage within education.

Key Issues

The evidence base is still nascent and partial at this time. However, we are confident that our findings identify key issues of concern. These are summarised below.

Schools

- Mental and physical health and wellbeing of pupils emerge consistently and clearly as significant issues resulting from the pandemic.
- Lockdown and school closures have exacerbated existing disadvantage, vulnerability and inequalities.
- There may be ways in which Covid-19 has created 'new disadvantage' in addition to the known exacerbation of existing vulnerabilities and disadvantage.
- The move to online teaching for most pupils during lockdown ensured some continuity but also raised issues around digital capacity, digital literacy, infrastructure, connectivity and access to technological devices for schools, young people and their families.
- There is a strong imperative for the focus on recovery to be understood in the broadest terms and for that recovery to be adequately resourced in schools.
- Some new targeted support for school leaders and staff has been put in place but further analysis is needed to understand whether this is sufficient and effective.

Colleges and Universities

- Mental health and wellbeing emerge consistently and clearly in colleges and universities as a significant issue both precipitated by, and exacerbated by, the pandemic.
- A majority of college and university students report that the pandemic has had a negative impact on their academic experience.
- Covid-19 has exacerbated the financial difficulties of those college and university students already facing financial hardship.
- Many of the most serious impacts of Covid-19, experienced by college and university students in general, have further exacerbated existing barriers for students from minority and disadvantaged groups and communities.

- Impacts on achievements at college and university are not yet clear, but early indications suggest close monitoring will be needed to address medium to longer term effects.
- Staff in colleges and universities report negative impact on their teaching and research and early indications suggest this has further exacerbated existing barriers for staff from minority and disadvantaged groups and communities.

Youth Work

- The restrictions on the youth work sector have had a negative impact on the mental health and wellbeing of young people who rely on their services, particularly those most marginalised and vulnerable.
- The switch to online provision in youth work has ensured some continuity but also raised issues around digital capacity, digital literacy, infrastructure, connectivity and access to technological devices for practitioners, young people and their families.
- An ongoing lack of access to facilities and educational establishments continues to present a major barrier to the effective recovery of youth work across Scotland.
- Whilst additional funds have been made available to support the youth work sector, there remains concern about the future sustainability of essential services as the sector continues to move towards recovery and effectively meet the changing educational and development needs of young people.

Areas Particularly Indicated for Further Investigation of Lessons to be Learned about Education and Certification

- The impact of anxiety and uncertainty surrounding exam cancellations and impact of high stakes assessment on mental health and wellbeing of young people.
- Patterns and trends in school attendance and engagement.
- The impact of the pandemic on pupils who require additional support to flourish.
- The direct involvement of young people in decision making processes during the pandemic and as Scotland emerges from it.
- The planned approach for 2022 assessments and the extent to which it sufficiently recognises and addresses the significant and sustained impact on young people and their learning since March 2020.
- The current system and relevance of curriculum, assessments, qualification and accreditation overall.
- Medium- and longer-term impacts on the engagement and learning of the generality of children and young people across all stages of education.
- Access to, experiences in, and outcomes across all stages of education, for children and young people from minority and disadvantaged groups and communities with pre-existing and intersecting vulnerabilities.
- The extent to which Covid-19 may have created 'new disadvantage' in addition to the known exacerbation of existing vulnerabilities and disadvantage.
- Staff wellbeing overall, and differential impacts on some groups of staff working across education, including women.
- The potential role for the youth work sector as an educational partner in meeting the learning and development needs of young people in a post-Covid Scotland.

- Routes to ensure Government and stakeholders can fully involve young people in mapping future plans for recovery of the youth work sector.
- Assessment of the implications of rolling out digital youth work in terms of resources, skills development and technological infrastructure.

Introduction

Education across the world has been profoundly affected by the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic. UNESCO estimates that nearly 16 billion (91.3%) learners in 194 countries have experienced national closures of schools and universities. In response, education practitioners at all levels have adapted to an ever-changing context through utilising technology and finding new and creative ways to meet the needs of learners.

For many children and young people, schools, colleges, universities and community-based youth work services are crucial in providing an environment in which to learn, build relationships and stay active. For some, this access is a lifeline of support, providing a physical space for learning, and importantly, for safety, emotional connection, and routine. Schools in particular, have become a central focus for the Scottish Government's roadmap to recovery, with the health, safety and learning needs of students being uppermost in planning the return to in-person teaching. Similar steps have been undertaken in colleges, universities and youth work settings; the primary purpose being a risk-informed recovery for the sector as a whole.

We know that children and young people living in the most disadvantaged circumstances have experienced the most significant impact. Inequalities have been exacerbated and amplified by Covid-19, and responses to it; creating periods of uncertainty, pressure and instability for those families already living with the trappings of poverty. The loss of contact due to Covid-19 restrictions and periods of isolation, has increased vulnerability for some children and in the most serious of cases, led to direct harm. Concerns about the mental health of children and young people have been a constant focus for our collective attention as a nation. As a cohort, they have been less likely to become seriously ill following infection. However, the evidence confirms the deep impact of changes to the education landscape on their wellbeing more generally.

Across the broad education sector, we have also witnessed increasing pressure on the respective branches of the workforce; with practitioners having to pivot to online teaching and learning. This situation has highlighted gaps in skills and a lack of capacity and resources to meet the demands of a rapidly changing context. In many workplaces, we have seen increasing staff absence due to self-isolation, Covid-19 infections and long Covid, placing further burden on practitioners as they strive to meet the educational needs of learners at all levels.

The pandemic has highlighted a number of key gaps in knowledge and understanding of the education sector; including around risk, resilience, and digital technologies. It has also demonstrated the need for better understanding of the long-term impact of Covid-19 across different geographies and communities.

Against this backdrop, we present our submission which aims to provide the Scottish Covid-19 Inquiry with an introduction to the areas of investigation within Portfolio 4; *The Delivery of Education and Certification*. We have set out to examine the impact of Covid-19 on:

1. The delivery of education and certification for all children and young people at all stages of education in Scotland, and
2. Identified groups of children and young people known to face particular disadvantage within education for reasons associated with, for example, poverty, mental health, trauma, learning difficulties or disabilities, rurality, digital exclusion.

The report is structured into six discrete sections including the executive summary and this introduction. Section 1 focuses on the evidence related to schools and certification. The following section shifts attention to issues pertaining to the respective college and university sectors. Youth work is the area of practice examined in section 3, which is followed by concluding remarks.

Methodology

We have undertaken a comprehensive desk-based analysis of relevant national and international literature reporting on issues relating to education and certification in the context of the pandemic.

Key Questions

1. What has been the impact of Covid-19 on the delivery of education and certification for *all* children and young people at all stages of education in Scotland, and:
2. What has been the impact of Covid-19 on identified groups of children and young people known to face particular disadvantage within education for reasons associated with, for example, poverty, mental health, trauma, learning difficulties or disabilities, rurality, digital exclusion.

Inclusion Criteria

The search included:

- Literature published in English since 1st January 2020, relevant to Scotland.
- Literature focused on children and young people between ages 5 to age 24.
- Literature focused on the delivery of education and certification, including achievement (attainment and accreditation), attendance, exclusion, school closure.
- Literature focused on experiences and outcomes of identified groups of children and young people known to face particular disadvantage within education for reasons associated with, for example, poverty, mental health, trauma, learning difficulties, disabilities, rurality, digital exclusion.
- Literature included national surveys and statistical datasets, empirical research (qualitative and quantitative), meta-analyses, relevant legislation, policy guidance and briefings, trades unions and professional association documents.

The following were excluded from the search:

- Literature not published in English.
- Literature related to pre-school education.
- Literature with a clinical focus.

Search Strategy

The search strategy involved a comprehensive desk-based analysis of relevant national and international, qualitative and quantitative empirical research, legislation, policy and grey literature, reporting on issues relating to education and certification in the context of the pandemic in Scotland, taking full account of the methodological rigour, reliability and generalisability of each source.

Search terms included; Scotland, children, young people, school, Covid-19/pandemic, education 5 to 18 years, community, family, key worker, youth work, disadvantage, vulnerability, disruption, attendance, exclusion, attainment, achievement, accreditation, online/remote/home learning, isolation, lockdown, recovery, school/college/university building closure, digital access/exclusion, additional support needs/special needs/disability, wellbeing/health/mental health, teacher, education workforce.

Ethical Considerations

The study involved no primary data collection. The data under analysis contained no personal or identifiable information about any individual or group. Ethical considerations, therefore, focused on ensuring that the greatest possible good comes from the study. Following the guidelines of the British Educational Research Association¹, our duty was to be transparent in our methodology and findings, and to protect but also extend understanding of existing research related to education and certification in Scotland during the pandemic.

Method of Analysis

Coding and thematic analysis adopted approaches from Braun and Clarke (2019)². A coding frame was developed based on a review of all the data, all data then entered and coded, then initial categorisations decided and from there preliminary themes identified. These emerging themes and any sub-themes were then cross-checked against search criteria and through team discussion, to create thematic summaries.

Quality Assurance

Professor McCluskey was responsible for all aspects of quality assurance in data management, including responsibility for data collection, quality and management and the overall data management plan as well as data storage, security and back up requirements. Professor McCluskey was also responsible for ensuring all ethical approvals.

Limitations

It is important to recognise that desk-based research in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic draws on preliminary or early findings because the pandemic itself is so recent and, at the time of writing, still a major global emergency. There is as yet little robust longitudinal research. There is little reliable cross-national and international comparative data, and much of what is available relies on quantitative research, mainly surveys. Surveys are vital but they are not, in and of themselves, sufficient. They can only offer a partial insight into such a complex set of events. It is important to note that there was a pre-existing paucity of largescale qualitative research generally in the field of education and this is also the case in relation to the delivery of education and certification. Furthermore, our analysis has revealed how quickly some of the available data has become obsolete and how quickly assumptions made, for example, about school closures, financial and resource costs, have been overtaken by the rapidly changing shape and impact of the pandemic. These limitations notwithstanding, the study provides a valuable oversight of evidence available to date.

¹ https://study.sagepub.com/sites/default/files/bera_ethical_guidelines_2018_4th_ed.pdf

² <https://doi.org/10.1080/2159676X.2019.1628806>

Section 1: Schools and Certification

Introduction

The Scottish Government is responsible for the broad policy agenda across educational sectors, with statutory agencies responsible for implementing and further developing specific policies. Education Scotland is the executive body with responsibility for school quality and improvement. The Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) has responsibility for accrediting and awarding of assessment and certification. Responsibility for the school system is decentralised and each of the 32 local authorities is responsible for the staffing, operating and financing schools to implement Government policy. An additional layer of governance, introduced in 2017, is the 7 Regional Improvement Collaboratives, providing a supportive role to schools.

Key Events and Related Changes to Relevant Educational Legislation, Policy and Guidelines

When lockdown was imposed in March 2020, Scottish Government required local authorities to move most teaching online but maintain face-to-face teaching for the children of key workers and vulnerable children³ via a system of local 'Hub' schools. Education Scotland moved to redeploy resources and staff to provide support and advice and suspended many regular activities including the statutory requirement for school inspections⁴. The Covid Education Recovery Group⁵ (CERG) was established by Scottish Government in April 2020, with 11 separate workstreams, and is chaired by the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills. It has supported development of a raft of guidance over the last two years⁶, including the key document '*Coronavirus (Covid-19): guidance on reducing risks in schools*'⁷ published in 17 versions between July 2020 and February 2022. The key areas of change and impact on schools are detailed below.

Impact on School Leaders and Leadership

There is as yet little research on school leaders and leadership in Scotland *per se*, but Hulme *et al.*'s helpful study⁸ aligns closely with evidence from international and UK wide studies⁹ and the many strengths identified in Education Scotland's, 'What Scotland Learned: 100 Stories of Lockdown Learning'¹⁰. Harris's reflection that, '*kindness, gratitude and empathy are now the leadership currency to get things done*'¹¹ and Hulme *et al.*'s finding about the centrality of '*bridging, brokering and buffering, to recalibrate provision*' appear to summarise approaches overall.

³ <https://research.brighton.ac.uk/en/publications/children-and-covid-19-in-the-uk>

⁴ [https://education.gov.scot/education-scotland/news-and-events/news/inspection-activity/#:~:text=Under%20the%20plans%20announced%20today%20%28Tuesday%20%20June%29,approach%20to%20learning%20for%20children%20and%20young%20people.](https://education.gov.scot/education-scotland/news-and-events/news/inspection-activity/#:~:text=Under%20the%20plans%20announced%20today%20%28Tuesday%20%20June%29,approach%20to%20learning%20for%20children%20and%20young%20people.;); <https://policyscotland.gla.ac.uk/covid-19-do-we-need-to-redefine-practices-for-school-inspections/>

⁵ <https://www.gov.scot/groups/covid-19-education-recovery-group/>; <https://education.gov.scot/improvement/covid-19-education-recovery/cerg-guidance/>

⁶ See list here: <https://education.gov.scot/improvement/covid-19-education-recovery/cerg-guidance/>

⁷ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-on-reducing-the-risks-in-schools/>

⁸ <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/15700763.2021.1917623>

⁹ <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/1741143220987841>

¹⁰ [what-scotland-learned_100stories.pdf](https://www.education.gov.scot/publications/what-scotland-learned_100stories.pdf)

¹¹ <https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/JPC-06-2020-0045/full/html>

The role of the school leader is always complex and multi-faceted but this was further amplified in the response to the pandemic, with new additional responsibilities and increasing workload burden¹², including liaison with local authorities to manage the closure of school buildings and subsequent move to Hubs, workforce planning and staff welfare, orchestrating and delivering food packages, negotiating and collaborating with partner agencies and external bodies to ensure the welfare and safeguarding for vulnerable families. All this was managed alongside the negotiation, interpretation and communication of frequently changing policy advice and protocols from Scottish Government, national professional bodies, local authorities and teaching unions, and under intense media pressure and public scrutiny.

When schools re-opened, school leaders then had further new and additional responsibilities including new risk assessments, managing requirements for physical distancing and creation of 'bubbles', structural changes to school buildings, staggered starts and finishes to the school day, one-way systems, ventilation requirements and enhanced cleaning and hygiene protocols¹³; management of contact tracing, managing the logistics of increased staff absence, and responding to feelings of anxiety and uncertainty among staff¹⁴. These issues were also exacerbated by the need at points to manage policy tensions in relation to variation in restrictions on adults/young people mixing in education environments and greater freedom of mixing permitted in social spaces in the community.

In recognition of these impacts, additional support and resource has been made available to school leaders through 1-1 coaching¹⁵ and group therapeutic reflective supervisions¹⁶ though it is not yet clear whether and to what extent this has been sufficiently taken up and seen as effective.

Impact on Staff

It is evident from a range of studies, both within Scotland and internationally, that school staff worked far beyond their already heavy workloads to support teaching and learning from March 2020^{17, 18, 19, 20}. Their work was often characterised by innovation, creativity and new collaborations, underpinned by a strong commitment to a duty of care. However, the move to online teaching and learning created additional workload in terms of the need for rapid upskilling of digital skills for some; access to appropriate digital resources and infrastructure more generally; relevant support and professional learning relating to effective digital pedagogy²¹; managing expectations of parents, pupils and local authorities of what could reasonably be delivered²², shifting expectations with the introduction of 'hybrid' approaches²³; and navigating the proliferation of resources and offers available²⁴ alongside often variable guidance on use of digital

¹² [EIS Member Survey 2021: Workload findings](#)

¹³ [Reopening Schools in Scotland \(eis.org.uk\)](#)

¹⁴ (<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13632434.2020.1811479>)

¹⁵ See <https://education.gov.scot/improvement/learning-resources/ceig-workforce-support-package/>

¹⁶ Provided by Place2Be, leading Children's Mental Health Charity in 2021; Barnardo's Scotland 2022

¹⁷ [Teaching During the Covid-19 Shutdown \(eis.org.uk\)](#)

¹⁸ [Reopening Schools in Scotland \(eis.org.uk\)](#)

¹⁹ [EIS Member Survey 2021: Health and Wellbeing findings](#)

²⁰ [EIS Member Survey 2021: Workload findings](#)

²¹ [Teaching During the Covid-19 Shutdown \(eis.org.uk\)](#)

²² [Teaching During the Covid-19 Shutdown \(eis.org.uk\)](#)

²³ [EIS Member Survey 2021: Health and Wellbeing findings](#)

²⁴ see for example West OS; e-sgoil; https://education.gov.scot/media/525drxw2/remote-learning-december-2021.pdf?dm_t=0,0,0,0,0; [Educating 21st Century Children : Emotional Wellbeing in the Digital Age | Educational Research and Innovation | OECD iLibrary \(oecd-ilibrary.org\)](#); <https://education.gov.scot/improvement/learning-resources/global-responses-to-learning-at-home/>

resources. Perhaps unsurprisingly then, concerns about teacher wellbeing surfaced early²⁵, compounded by staff shortages and lack of support²⁶, the rise in need to support pupils and families experiencing increased anxiety²⁷, and increased referrals for additional support needs, behavioural support and mental health support.

When schools re-opened, teachers faced new pressures to return to 'business as usual', with a shift in emphasis away from the primacy of wellbeing and recovery and back to a narrower focus on raising attainment and closing gaps widened by the pandemic in light of concerns about 'lost learning'²⁸. Inspections also restarted and local authority tracking and attainment data monitoring resumed²⁹. Some have questioned whether local authorities and school have struck the best balance in priorities, amid concern about a renewed focus on accountability measures in the interests of raising attainment, to the potential detriment of progress on tackling inequalities³⁰.

Finally, in terms of the pandemic's impact on staff, it important to note that the burden has not fallen equally on all. In 2020, 89% of all primary teachers and 64% of all secondary teachers were women³¹. Although Scottish Government does not collate statistics in the same way for support staff in schools, the majority of pupil support assistants/additional support needs assistants are also women. It is now widely accepted that the burden of care has fallen more heavily on women in the pandemic³², with increased blurring of boundaries between work and home. The longer-term effects of this will need careful examination and directed response.

Impact on Teaching and Learning

There have been far reaching impacts on key aspects of teaching and learning since March 2020, leading the Children and Young People's Commissioner in Scotland to state that the right to education itself, enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, has been 'severely limited'³³ by the pandemic. Others have pointed to unexpected benefits, noting that,

some children have actually made gains in learning by having more opportunities to learn and play outside, being relieved of the replacement of learning time with standardized test and high school examination preparation, and by being shielded from threats and harms such as in-person bullying or classroom disruptions that distract from academic learning³⁴.

During the initial closure of schools, much of the focus within teaching was on consolidation of prior learning and ensuring a continuity of provision³⁵, in recognition of the variable learning situations for pupils, whether at home or in hub schools. Local Hub schools varied and there are some indications of inconsistency across local authorities in terms of which pupils counted as 'vulnerable'. The Hubs often had to provide learning in mixed-age groupings and questions arose

²⁵ [EIS Member Survey 2021: Health and Wellbeing findings](#); [EIS Member Survey 2021: Workload findings](#);

²⁶ [EIS Member Survey 2021: Health and Wellbeing findings](#)

²⁷ See also <https://www.childrensmentalhealthweek.org.uk/news/school-staff-witness-an-increase-in-pupil-anxiety-low-self-esteem-and-depression/>

²⁸ <https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007/s11125-021-09544-y.pdf> ; [Playing Catch-Up - Reform Scotland](#)

²⁹ See also [Stobart Review](#)

³⁰ Hulme et al 2021

³¹ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/teacher-census-supplementary-statistics/>

³² <https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/caregiving-in-crisis-gender-inequality-in-paid-and-unpaid-work-during-covid-19-3555d164/>

³³ <https://www.cypcs.org.uk/news-and-stories/statement-exam-results-and-return-to-school/>

³⁴ <https://www.facetsjournal.com/doi/pdf/10.1139/facets-2021-0084>

³⁵ <https://education.gov.scot/media/nwibvl2q/what-scotland-learned-building-back-better.pdf>

about variability in learning experiences³⁶ and educational practices³⁷. Take up of places in Hubs by children and their families was variable and lower than expected, amid questions about pupil transport, stigmatisation, and fears of Covid-19 transmission³⁸.

For those studying at home, resources were provided online to support independent engagement, though here too, there was impact on the ability to create key teaching interactions to help progress learning³⁹. We know that those who fared better at this time were those young people who already had the skills and confidence to be self-directed learners, working autonomously and independently to complete assigned work. Added to this were issues related to physical learning and study space available at home and parental support and engagement which varied considerably as many parents/carers were themselves juggling work demands whilst supporting their children's learning⁴⁰. These challenges are clearly outlined in the report from the Independent Children's Rights Impact Assessment on the response to Covid-19 in Scotland (2020)⁴¹ and the review undertaken by The Poverty Alliance⁴².

Further significant challenges arose in relation to equality of digital provision, access, infrastructure and connectivity, individual teacher skill levels and home availability of digital resources where multiple family use was required. This has had disruptive effects on teaching and learning for all pupils but a heightened impact on the educational experiences and engagement of some children and young people, particularly those in Scotland's rural communities and those from the most disadvantaged backgrounds, who were twice as likely to have few resources to support home learning resulting in loss of learning and inequality⁴³. More detail on the specific effects of the pandemic on pupils living with disadvantage is offered in the relevant section below.

Children experiencing educational transitions during the pandemic, such as children moving from nursery to P1 or from P7 to secondary stages and then onward from school, were all severely disrupted, again affecting most keenly those living with disadvantage⁴⁴. When schools re-opened to all pupils, physical restrictions still severely limited and/or prevented group work, some practical and experiential learning, the sharing of manipulatives and resources including books, with teachers advised to create physical boundaries and 'taping off' a 2m zone in classrooms⁴⁵. Pupils who are deaf and hard of hearing have talked about the problems facemasks caused and

³⁶ www.cypcs.org

³⁷ <https://www.eis.org.uk/Content/images/corona/SurveyResults.pdf>

³⁸ <https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/sg.eas.learninganalysis/viz/Covid19ELCandHubs/Introduction>

³⁹ <https://www.facetsjournal.com/doi/10.1139/facets-2021-0084>

⁴⁰ <https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/impact-assessment/2021/01/equity-audit-deepening-understanding-impact-covid-19-school-building-closures-children-socio-economically-disadvantaged-backgrounds-setting-clear-areas-focus-accelerating-recovery/documents/equity-audit/equity-audit/govscot%3Adocument/equity-audit.pdf> Page 16-18

⁴¹ <https://www.cypcs.org.uk/resources/independent-childrens-rights-impact-assessment-on-the-response-to-covid-19-in-scotland/>

⁴² <https://www.povertyalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/The-Poverty-related-Attainment-Gap-A-Review-of-the-Evidence-2.pdf>

⁴³ <https://cpag.org.uk/policy-and-campaigns/report/cost-learning-lockdown-family-experiences-school-closures;> <https://www.eis.org.uk/Content/images/corona/SurveyResults.pdf>

⁴⁴ <https://discovery.dundee.ac.uk/en/publications/compassionate-transitions-reconnecting-school-communities-post-co/fingerprints/?sortBy=alphabetically>

⁴⁵ <https://www.eis.org.uk/Content/images/education/Pedagogical%20Guidance/211222%20Updated%20Curriculum%20and%20Pedagogy%20Primary%20FINAL%20-%20Copy%201.pdf>

the anxiety they felt if they asked people to remove them to help understanding. Transparent masks for lipreading have been in very short supply, but are now available⁴⁶.

Impact on Assessment, Certification and Accreditation

The pandemic caused significant disruption and re-shaping of national exams and assessments in 2020 and 2021 with the exam diet being replaced by an 'Alternative Certification Model'. Scottish Government recently announced that the 2022 examination diet will go ahead, with contingency measures in place⁴⁷. Whilst the contingency measures acknowledge the significant disruption this academic year due to staff and pupil absences and include mitigating measures such as revision support and modified grading⁴⁸ it is unclear whether and to what extent these measures sufficiently recognise the impact of disruption to education over the last three academic years. Young people currently in 4th year of secondary schooling, due to sit exams in 2022, last experienced a full year of uninterrupted education in their first year of secondary education.

The decision to cancel exams in 2020 and 2021 is generally agreed to have been necessary⁴⁹. However, the decision-making process⁵⁰, transparency and communications following it, has garnered much attention⁵¹ and perhaps highlighted issues in a system already under strain. An Independent Report on changes to qualifications processes in 2020, the OECD's curriculum report in 2021 and the Working Paper on Upper Secondary Education and Student Assessment in Scotland (the Stobart Review)⁵² which responded to the challenges set out in the OECD's report, have all provided evidence of the need for a new system of assessment, qualification and accreditation⁵³. The Inquiry may also wish to consider the forthcoming Independent Review on replacement of the Scottish Qualifications Authority and the reform of Education Scotland, currently being conducted by Prof Ken Muir and due to report shortly.

Disproportionate Impact on Particular Groups of Pupils

According to the International Council of Education Advisers to Scotland's First Minister, '*the pandemic reinforces the issue of equity as the defining agenda of our time*'⁵⁴. It is clear that the pandemic has accentuated and deepened vulnerabilities and the pre-existing disadvantage that creates inequality of experience, learning and outcomes for some particular groups of children and

⁴⁶ <https://www.ndcs.org.uk/blog/survey-results-face-masks-deaf-children-young-people/>

⁴⁷ (see for example <https://www.gov.scot/news/exams-on-track/>)

⁴⁸ https://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/100313.html?utm_source=sqa-news&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=nq2022&utm_content=NQ2022&mkt_tok=NTA1LVICSC0zMDAAAAGB8yPHSogettimYSmt8wcMTqp6uBJW-H5XE4W1s9JgPrzt5Zn1EAy6CJM8wTps5XM0QEHylTCbPdBB1a79z49IBt51YcfE5-ZQUk4&dm_i=LQE,7PFGX,1XDMEY,VEPME,1

⁴⁹ Rapid Review

⁵⁰ <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1057/s41293-021-00162-y>

⁵¹ <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1057/s41293-021-00162-y>;

<https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/JPCC-07-2020-0055/full/html>

⁵² See <https://www.gov.scot/publications/rapid-review-national-qualifications-experience-2020/>;
<https://www.oecd.org/education/scotland-s-curriculum-for-excellence-bf624417-en.htm>; <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/d8785ddf-en.pdf?expires=1644522001&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=20843403A8A7D73D8E5ED199C2D5F46C>;
<https://www.gov.scot/publications/independent-review-education-scotland-scottish-qualification-authority-professor-kenneth-muir/>

⁵³ <https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/JPCC-07-2020-0055/full/html>; Stobart Review

⁵⁴ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/international-council-education-advisers-report-2018-2020/documents/> page

young people^{55, 56} with additional support needs (arising from issues such as being a young carer, being looked after or accommodated, poverty, disability, difficult family circumstances, trauma, bereavement and loss, learning difficulties). Additional support needs can vary. They can be short term or longer term. More research will be needed to understand the duration and severity of impacts associated with the pandemic but there is already evidence that pupils from low income and disadvantaged backgrounds experienced disproportionate impact⁵⁷, often affected by losing the security of a routine and access to physical, social and emotional support in schools. The online environment significantly challenged teachers' ability to sustain relationships with many such young people, ascertain their wellbeing and provide the levels of support normally available⁵⁸.

There is particular concern about young people's mental and physical health and wellbeing. Already acknowledged as increasingly significant within schools pre-pandemic, there is strong evidence that Covid-19 has further exacerbated the problem⁵⁹. The pandemic and the move to home learning contributed to high prevalence of mental health difficulties experienced by young people with many expressing concerns about anxiety, poor concentration⁶⁰, PTSD symptoms and feelings of isolation⁶¹, low mood and challenges relating to family and social situations⁶². This was often compounded in low-income families and communities, with continued impact of money worries and health concerns relating to the virus⁶³. A further issue arose around access to support services. Those who had not previously sought mental health support prior to the pandemic found it a challenge to access support during the period of lockdown⁶⁴. More detail on this key set of impacts is provided in Annex 2: Joint response to The Health, Social Care and Sport Committee in the Scottish Parliament inquiry into the health and wellbeing of children and young people in Scotland.

For pupils with physical health difficulties, there was often disruption and reduced access to agencies and vital services, including physiotherapy, speech and language therapy and psychotherapy. Particular challenges for the deaf and visually impaired learners, and their families also arose, due to a lack of targeted support and appropriate information and advice⁶⁵. Learners with visual impairment, for example, do not have the same opportunities for incidental learning as sighted children, and have been disadvantaged by the emphasis on online/virtual methods of learning rather than practical, hands-on experience. Many of those who would benefit from online learning were prevented from doing so because it was not possible for the specialist equipment (such as computers with specific software or functionality) that they use at school to be provided for them at home⁶⁶.

⁵⁵ <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14733285.2021.1921699>

⁵⁶ <https://education.gov.scot/improvement/scotland-learns/resources-for-practitioners/scottish-attainment-challenge-2020-21-equity-in-education/equity-audit/>

⁵⁷ <https://education.gov.scot/media/2ygfjxhd/equityaudit.pdf>

⁵⁸ Colville T, Hulme S, Kerr C, Mercieca D, and Mercieca D P) <https://www.readcube.com/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.733633>

⁵⁹ <https://policyscotland.gla.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/PSAchievingEquityPostCovid19.pdf>

⁶⁰ <https://education.gov.scot/media/2ygfjxhd/equityaudit.pdf>

⁶¹ However, the findings of the University of Edinburgh Joint response to the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee in the Scottish Parliament inquiry into the health and wellbeing of children and young people in Scotland points to COVID-19.

⁶² <https://www.cso.scot.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/COVEDI2016-1.pdf>

⁶³ <https://education.gov.scot/media/2ygfjxhd/equityaudit.pdf>

⁶⁴ <https://www.cso.scot.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/COVEDI2016-1.pdf>

⁶⁵ <https://cypcs.org.uk/wpcypcs/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/CRIA-appendix-disability-asns.pdf>

⁶⁶ <https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/6203/pdf/>

School attendance is crucial for all children and young people's engagement with learning and attainment but particularly so for those pupils living in poverty. The National Improvement Interactive Evidence Report provides data on attendance for pupils and staff linked to Covid and non-Covid absences for primary and secondary sectors and pupil characteristics such as SIMD (Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation) and ethnic minorities^{67, 68}. Sosu and Klein's⁶⁹ examination of attendance and absence in the first wave of lockdown, alerts us to the need to understand attendance as a key to tackling inequalities, pointing out that,

Children from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are... likely to be at a higher risk of infection, self-isolating from school and missing a greater proportion of school because of Covid-19-related reasons. This, in addition to pre-existing socioeconomic gaps in school absenteeism (Klein, Sosu & Dare, 2020; Klein, Goodfellow, Dare & Sosu, 2020), will exacerbate socioeconomic inequalities in educational achievement (Sosu & Ellis, 2014).

It is also important to recognise the effect of the pandemic on black and minority ethnic children and young people. Evidence suggests that in addition to the kinds of impacts noted above for many pupils living with disadvantage, black and minority ethnic pupils were more likely to face increased social isolation, greater risks of poverty and financial and food insecurity and overcrowding⁷⁰. For pupils and parent/carers for whom English is an additional language there were also potential additional communication and language barriers which impacted on learning at home as well as parents' abilities to understand information and guidance and support available. One study noted black and minority ethnic young people's concerns that their colour would impact on their teachers estimated/predicted grades and because the SQA's moderation of teacher estimates relied solely on the historic performance of schools⁷¹.

Concerns have also been raised about the experiences of LGBTQ+ young people. A Scottish survey reported that LGBTQ+ young people experienced more online bullying and noticed more online prejudice during lockdown, and that they registered poorer emotional wellbeing both before and during lockdown than heterosexual respondents in the same survey, noting, for example, that, *'During lockdown, 69% of LGBT+ young people described their emotional wellbeing as being negative – a 43% increase compared to before lockdown'*⁷².

There is also evidence of issues for children and young people from Gypsy/Traveller communities, who faced additional problems where accommodation limited their space to learn, and digital access and literacy issues amongst parents and carers may have resulted in greater exclusion from educational services and support. This is in addition to reports of increased risk of 'interpersonal

⁶⁷ <https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/sg.eas.learninganalysis/viz/COVID19-SchoolsandChildcareInformationJanuary-March2021Archive/Introduction>

⁶⁸ <https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/transparency-data/2020/09/covid-19-education-recovery-group-children-and-young-people-infographic/documents/children-and-young-people-infographic-4-february-2022/children-and-young-people-infographic-4-february-2022/govscot%3Adocument/CERG%2BInfographic%2B-%2B0202022.pdf>

⁶⁹ https://strathprints.strath.ac.uk/75286/1/Sosu_Klein_2021_Socioeconomic_disparities_in_school_absenteeism_after.pdf

⁷⁰ www.cypcs.org

⁷¹ <https://www.togetherscotland.org.uk/news-and-events/news/2020/10/covid-in-colour-the-experiences-of-young-black-and-people-of-colour-scots-during-the-covid-19-pandemic/>

⁷² <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/60609ee47b1b6f5999103b43/t/606592177d934a712ba02200/1617269304488/TIE-ONLINE+IN+LOCKDOWN-REPORT.pdf>

racist violence⁷³, hate crime and disproportionate cultural impact⁷⁴. Evidence here, as in many cases, is sparse and can only offer indications of avenues for follow up. There is a lack of evidence overall on marginalised groups of children and young people in Scotland, including refugee and asylum seekers, Gypsy/ Traveller and black and minority ethnic pupils, and specific data relating to disadvantage within these groups⁷⁵. The ‘Lockdown Lowdown: The Voice of Seldom Heard Groups During Covid-19 Pandemic Report’⁷⁶ has provided a useful point of reference but given the rapidly changing nature of the pandemic, the important issues it raises would benefit from revisiting to better understand the nature and extent of more recent impacts.

In coming to an understanding of disproportionate impacts on particular groups of pupils, it is necessary to bear in mind that these are not mutually exclusive categories and that a young person can experience a layering of disadvantage where, for example, poverty and disability, or refugee status and mental ill health may intersect.

Summary

The summary below sets out a table of key events followed by a list of key impacts on Schools.

Key Events

Key events that affected Schools are outlined in the table below.

Table 1: Key events that affected Schools

19 th March 2020	Schools , colleges and universities, withdraw face-to-face teaching and move to online teaching where possible. Creation of hubs for children of key workers and vulnerable children to be established. Cancellation of national exam diet and an alternative certification model to be developed.
30 th March 2020	Scottish Government produces advice for schools and childcare settings who are providing care to children including information on social distancing.
31 st March 2020	Scottish Government produces guidance setting out the childcare and learning provision for key workers and vulnerable children.
20 th April 2020	Scottish Government publishes guidance on home learning.
1 st May 2020	The Scottish Government announces that more than £250 million of funding to close the poverty-related attainment gap and aid learning during the pandemic has been allocated to schools
21 st May 2020	Scottish Government announces that pupils will return to schools in August subject to scientific advice, and one week earlier than planned (thus reducing leave period for staff)

⁷³ <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fsoc.2021.730313/full>

⁷⁴ <https://raceequalityfoundation.org.uk/health-care/lockdown-2-briefing/>

⁷⁵ <https://www.povertyalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/The-Poverty-related-Attainment-Gap-A-Review-of-the-Evidence-2.pdf>

⁷⁶ <https://syp.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Dec2020-LockdownLowdown-Voice-Seldom-Heard-Groups-COVID19-Pandemic-Updated-December-2020.pdf>

5 th June 2020	<p>Scottish Government publish <u>guidance to help local authorities, early learning centres and schools continue to support children and young people's learning during the coronavirus outbreak.</u></p> <p>Scottish Government publish <u>guidance to support teachers and other professional practitioners in preparing their curriculum offer for and during the Recovery Phase.</u></p> <p>Scottish Government publish <u>new guidance for teachers and councils to prepare for the 'blended model' of both classroom and home learning when schools re-open in August.</u></p>
23 rd June 2020	Deputy First Minister John Swinney updates Parliament on plans to <u>reopen schools in August. Schools are now to return full time in-person with the 'blended' approach as a contingency plan. This change in approach was announced 3 days before end of term for many LAs, giving very little time for schools to adjust plans.</u>
30 th July 2020	Scottish Government confirm that <u>schools will re-open full-time from 11 August</u> , following scientific evidence and advice that it is safe to do so. This announcement was made during the school holiday period.
11 th August 2020	Deputy First Minister John Swinney announces the u-turn decision to withdraw all downgraded awards from SQA https://www.gov.scot/publications/deputy-first-minister-sqa-2020-results/
8 th December 2020	Scottish Government announce <u>Higher and Advanced Higher exams will not go ahead</u> and will be replaced with awards based on teacher judgement of evidence of pupils' attainment.
19 th December 2020	First Minister announces delayed reopening of schools in January 2021
4 th January 2021	First Minister Nicola Sturgeon announces legal requirement to stay at home and remote learning for majority of pupils until February 1 st . https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-update-first-ministers-statement-monday-4-january-2021/
31 st January 2021	Scottish Government announce <u>coaching and mentoring support for teachers who are new in post, or working in pastoral or child protection roles.</u>
2 nd February 2021	<u>Children in early learning and childcare and in primaries 1-3 are scheduled to make a full return to nurseries and schools from 22 February.</u>
22 nd February 2021	Children in early learning and childcare, and primaries 1 to 3, return full-time to classrooms https://www.gov.scot/news/remote-learning-to-continue-for-majority/ (announced Feb 16 th)
2 nd March 2021	Scottish Government announce <u>Phase 2 of schools return.</u> All remaining primary school children are set to return to school full-time from 15 March, with all secondary pupils returning on a part-time basis from that date.
6 th April 2021	Scottish Government announce Nearly all <u>pupils will return to full-time school</u> after the Easter holidays, with children on the shielding list advised to stay at home until 26 April.

3 rd June 2021	Scottish Government announce Education Scotland and the SQA will be reformed as part of Scotland's education recovery plans.
5 th October 2021	Scottish Government publish Coronavirus (COVID-19) education recovery: key actions and next steps .
10 th December 2021	Scottish Government announce changes regarding requirements to isolate resulting from Omicron variant. https://www.gov.scot/news/evidence-paper-on-rapid-rise-of-omicron-cases/ The changes introduced here impact significantly on staff and pupil absence in schools
14 th December 2021	Scottish Government publish Achievement of Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) Level statistics . The statistics show reductions in the proportions of primary school pupils achieving the expected CfR levels in literacy and numeracy over the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic period, between 2018/19 and 2020/21.
17 th December 2021	Scottish Government publish updated guidance to reduce the risks of Covid-19 in schools, ELC services, school age childcare services and childminder services . Safety mitigations that were already in place must continue to be strictly followed and some measures that were previously relaxed are being reintroduced.
1 st February 2022	Scottish Government confirms its 'firm intention' to hold National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher exams in Spring.

Key Impacts

Key impacts included:

- Pupil attendance and engagement in learning overall were highly variable
- Mental and physical health and wellbeing of pupils were significantly affected by lockdown, and associated isolation, school closures and exam cancellations
- Pupils who had not previously sought mental health support found it difficult to access support
- Pupils with physical health difficulties often experienced disruption and reduced access to agencies and vital services
- Take-up of places in Hubs was variable and lower than expected
- Children and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds often had fewer resources to support home learning
- In school referrals for support for pupils with additional needs (e.g. behavioural support, mental health support) have seen a marked increase
- Black and minority ethnic pupils were more likely to face increased social isolation, greater risks of poverty and financial and food insecurity and overcrowding
- LGBTQ+ young people experienced more online bullying and noticed more online prejudice during lockdown.
- Digital provision, access, infrastructure and connectivity, and study space available at home were all variable, despite intensive efforts by many schools
- Inconsistency arose across local authorities in terms of which pupils counted as 'vulnerable' and challenges in identifying those who were previously not identified as vulnerable
- Increased staff workload, staff absences leading to staff shortages, with associated impacts on staff wellbeing and morale

There is a strong imperative for the focus on recovery to be understood in the broadest terms and for that recovery to be adequately resourced in schools.

Areas Particularly Indicated for Further Investigation

- The anxiety caused by uncertainty surrounding exam cancellations and impact of high stakes assessment on mental health and wellbeing of young people.
- Patterns and trends in school absence, attendance and engagement.
- The impact of the pandemic on pupils who require additional support in school.
- The direct involvement of young people in decision making processes during the pandemic and as Scotland emerges from it.
- Staff wellbeing overall, and differential impacts on some groups of staff, including women.
- Workload for secondary teachers and school leaders in creation and interpretation of the Alternative Certification Model adopted in 2020 and 2021.
- Plans for reform of current systems and relevance of current assessments, qualifications and curriculum.
- Whether the planned approach for 2022 assessments sufficiently recognises and addresses the significant and sustained impact on young people and their learning since March 2020.

Section 2: Further and Higher Education

Key Events and Related Changes to Relevant Educational Legislation, Policy and Guidelines

Scotland's 19 universities and 26 colleges were instructed to withdraw all face-to-face teaching on 19th March 2020 and move to online teaching where possible. In the period since then, the sector has seen major innovation but also unprecedented change and disruption, as colleges and universities developed and adapted to remote teaching, online communication and pastoral support for around 307,000 students in Scottish universities⁷⁷ and 117,000 FTE (239,000 headcount) students in Scottish colleges⁷⁸.

The sector's annual budget of £1.8 billion total has since been supplemented by Scottish Government through a further £60m for further and higher education in 2021/22, and £3.4m of Barnett consequentials funding to colleges and a further £27m to universities in March 2021⁷⁹. Since the start of the pandemic, Scottish Government has also dedicated additional funds to students facing financial hardship through a variety of schemes⁸⁰.

Since May 2021, a Scottish Government convened 'Covid-19 Advisory sub-group on Universities and Colleges' has provided advice on policy to ensure that full consideration is given to the distinctive features of tertiary education, including the potential impacts of new variants and risks associated with travel for home domiciled and international students, the diversity of Scotland's further and higher education sector in terms of size of institutions, the diversity of the student population itself, the balance of part-time and full-time students; considerations about placements beyond campus (including overseas) and the differing issues for students living in halls of residence/ private rented sector/family home⁸¹. Detail is offered below on areas indicated for further investigation of lessons learned.

Impact on the Generality of Students

The entire population of students across Scotland was affected by the impacts of the pandemic, losing access to peer support and in person, face-to-face lecturer support. Some students left university accommodation and returned to family homes. Many who remained in student accommodation found themselves confined in households with people they did not know well. All institutions sought to address digital access issues as a priority, supported by additional funding from Scottish Funding Council or Scottish Government, but in the first few weeks of lockdown not all students had access to the necessary equipment or suitable safe spaces to enable them to start learning online immediately⁸². Research since March 2020 has reported challenges for the generality of students in terms of lack of social interaction, accommodation situations unfit for homeworking (including poor data bandwidth), difficulties adapting to new needs of their families as a result of Covid-19, lack of direct interaction with academic staff⁸³, and a general lowering of

⁷⁷ http://www.sfc.ac.uk/web/FILES/statisticalpublications_sfcst032021/HE_Students_and_Qualifiers_2019-20.pdf

⁷⁸ http://www.sfc.ac.uk/web/FILES/statisticalpublications_sfcst012021/College_Statistics_2019-20.pdf

⁷⁹ <https://digitalpublications.parliament.scot/ResearchBriefings/Report/2021/7/27/748aa666-cc88-4f53-8b0c-36b6dfbc54e0>

⁸⁰ <https://www.gov.scot/news/support-for-students-impacted-by-covid-19/>

⁸¹ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-advisory-sub-group-on-universities-and-colleges-minutes-may-2021/>

⁸² http://www.sfc.ac.uk/web/FILES/statisticalpublications_sfcst032021/HE_Students_and_Qualifiers_2019-20.pdf

⁸³ <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0251580>

motivation and concentration⁸⁴. However, many studies also note that most students were able to adapt quickly despite these significant challenges.

While it is now clear that the age range of most college and university students places them at low risk of complications arising from Covid-19 infection, a number of studies have pointed to negative impacts of the pandemic on students' mental health and sense of wellbeing. This should be understood within the context of the large body of existing research which indicates that students in general are likely to experience high levels of stress and distress associated with studying.

Disproportionate Impact on Particular Groups of Students

As noted above, all students were directly affected by the impact of Covid-19 and the concomitant changes to legislation, educational policy and guidelines. It is also clear that particular groups of students experienced more severe direct impact. Peter Scott, Scotland's Commissioner for Fair Access, has drawn attention to a helpful distinction between those for whom the pandemic has deepened or exacerbated pre-existing vulnerability, and those who have been 'newly impoverished'⁸⁵ or disadvantaged by it. The key concerns about these different sets of impacts are set out below.

High levels of stress and distress generally associated with studying were worsened by Covid-19 for the majority; a situation further exacerbated for those students with pre-existing mental health difficulties⁸⁶. The largest study of student mental health and wellbeing undertaken to date in Scotland reported that *'more than one-third of university students surveyed (36%) reported moderately severe or severe symptoms of depression. Furthermore, nearly half of respondents (45%) reported that they had experienced a serious psychological issue that they felt needed professional help'*⁸⁷. Another recent UK-wide study notes that poor mental health is given as the main reason students would give up their studies altogether⁸⁸.

Digital exclusion was a particular issue for students in economically disadvantaged households, where access to the internet, to digital devices and technology in general was often limited⁸⁹.

Financial impacts of Covid-19 were widespread for the many students whose actual or planned employment in hospitality and retail was affected by enforced closures in these sectors; and/or whose family members usually provided financial support but who saw their own income reduce as a result of lockdowns and restrictions⁹⁰.

Students with disabilities experienced a range of impacts. One UK-wide study⁹¹ reported that nearly 75% of students felt that their transition into further and higher education was negatively impacted by the pandemic. The same study reveals that a large number of students with

⁸⁴ <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0250378>

⁸⁵ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/impact-covid-19-fair-access-higher-education/>

⁸⁶ <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0239696>

⁸⁷ <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/news/nearly-three-quarters-university-students-surveyed-scotland-have-low-wellbeing>

⁸⁸ https://www.hepi.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/SAES_2021_FINAL.pdf

⁸⁹ <https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/progress-report/2020/12/impact-covid-19-fair-access-higher-education2/documents/impact-covid-19-fair-access-higher-education/impact-covid-19-fair-access-higher-education/govscot%3Adocument/impact-covid-19-fair-access-higher-education.pdf>

⁹⁰ <https://www.studentminds.org.uk/lifeinapandemic.html#report>

⁹¹ <https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/news-and-views/disabled-students-have-their-say-impact-covid-19-and-their-experience-higher>

disabilities were positive about the flexibility of learning online and remote assessment, whilst also noting that barriers to blended or hybrid learning varied by the type of impairment. The pandemic also had a negative effect on mental health and wellbeing for students with disabilities, leading to feelings of isolation and loneliness, a lack of motivation and increased stress, including worries about future employment. These students were however generally positive about communications between themselves and their place of study and also about ways in which many tutors and lecturers had thought through how best to adapt support requirements.

High levels of Covid-19 infection and illness affected students from black and minority ethnic backgrounds, reflecting the higher levels of Covid-19 in UK minority ethnic communities at large⁹². Black and minority ethnic students were also more likely than other students to be living at home with their families, and to report difficulties with appropriate study spaces, and negative financial impacts. Increased levels of racism, especially anti-Asian racism, including anti-Chinese racism, and xenophobia were experienced by students from ethnic minority backgrounds⁹³.

Access to support services, health care and safe accommodation was a particular issue for many LGBTQ+, and trans students. Evidence suggests that levels of emotional distress for LGBTQ+, and trans students has been greater since the start of the pandemic than for their older counterparts and higher than for their non-LGBTQ+ and trans peers⁹⁴.

Students who were medically affected by Covid-19 either directly, or in their families and/or dependants also saw their capacity to study affected, especially where long Covid is an issue.

Childcare or caring responsibilities affected capacity to study for some, due, for example, to flux in national guidance on opening of daycare, nursery provision and in-person schooling. For some students this may have led them to be 'newly impoverished'. It is well established that the burden of care has fallen most on women, and parents already living on low incomes⁹⁵ and more work is needed to understand these impacts.

Students on courses with a strong practical element (e.g. hairdressing, construction), or which require a professional practice placement (e.g. initial teacher education) were also directly affected. Some students unable to complete coursework, placements or practical work due to the pandemic may be entitled to additional funding to repeat a year of learning⁹⁶. It is also worth noting the particular situation for medical and nursing students, many of whom responded to calls to assist the NHS in the pandemic. It will be important to understand the longer-term impact for these students taking on additional roles⁹⁷ and the views of professional regulatory bodies such as the General Teaching Council for Scotland.

Impact on Applications and Attainment Outcomes

In 2020/21 applications for college and university places increased, and offers made also increased. This may relate partly to the decision of the Scottish Qualifications Agency (SQA)

⁹² <https://www.studentminds.org.uk/lifeinapandemic.html#report>

⁹³ <https://www.studentminds.org.uk/lifeinapandemic.html#report>

⁹⁴ <https://www.studentminds.org.uk/lifeinapandemic.html#report>

⁹⁵ <https://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=45ec92d1-dd52-4502-a7ba-a4100aff2d94>

⁹⁶ <https://digitalpublications.parliament.scot/ResearchBriefings/Report/2021/7/27/748aa666-cc88-4f53-8b0c-36b6dfbc54e0>

⁹⁷ <https://www.bma.org.uk/advice-and-support/covid-19/returning-to-the-nhs-or-starting-a-new-role/covid-19-medical-students-who-are-requested-to-work-in-the-nhs>

revision of grades based on teacher estimates in 2020, when national exams were cancelled due to the pandemic. Around 75,000 school pupils saw their grades adjusted up. In consequence, the Scottish Government funded an additional 1,290 FTE student places in 2020/21 and 2,500 additional places in 2021/22 in order to provide additional student places⁹⁸.

Although undergraduate entry rates for the most disadvantaged students rose in Scotland in 2020⁹⁹, there are also early indications that applicants to some degree programmes such as medicine, from lower socio-economic backgrounds, are likely to be adversely impacted¹⁰⁰. The Commission on Widening Access has called for additional resource to address this¹⁰¹.

In terms of impact on attainment, there have been some early signs of positive effects of ‘confinement’ on student learning and achievement¹⁰², though the UK’s Higher Education Statistics Authority (HESA), has reported a decrease in the number of qualifications achieved in 2019/20 compared with the previous year, and that this has disproportionately affected part-time students. HESA also note the increase in the proportion of first- class degrees awarded in 2019/20 as a result of the decision by many institutions to implement a ‘no detriment’ approach to recognise these unprecedented extenuating circumstances, and ensure that no student would be awarded a final grade lower than their most recent assessment of attainment¹⁰³.

Impact on Staff

There is as yet little research which examines the impact of the pandemic on professional and technical staff working in further and higher education. Most research so far focuses on academic staff, though little of this has a specific focus on Scotland. International studies suggest that, ‘Emergency remote teaching’¹⁰⁴ created opportunities for innovation and experimentation but also placed considerable strain on online teaching infrastructure, staff skills and competencies in relation to digital pedagogies¹⁰⁵. A UK survey also reported that a *‘pre-existing crisis of mental health and universities may worsen and not just for students but academics too – struggling to manage increase pastoral demands with the needs of home, and forfeiting the right to work-life balance’*¹⁰⁶ These impacts were often compounded for academics on precarious contracts, for women (often bearing additional burdens of care during the pandemic), and staff from black and minority ethnic backgrounds. These groups already faced significant disadvantage within further and higher education before the pandemic.¹⁰⁷ It is worth noting that immediately prior to the pandemic there was industrial action in universities and that at the time of writing, strike action is again under way.

⁹⁸ <https://digitalpublications.parliament.scot/ResearchBriefings/Report/2021/7/27/748aa666-cc88-4f53-8b0c-36b6dfbc54e0>

⁹⁹ <https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/what-we-do/policy-and-research/publications/higher-education-facts-and-figures-2021>

¹⁰⁰ <https://bmcmdeeduc.biomedcentral.com/track/pdf/10.1186/s12909-021-02770-0.pdf>

¹⁰¹ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/re-committing-fair-access-plan-recovery-annual-report-2021/>

¹⁰² <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0239490>

¹⁰³ <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/students/whos-in-he>

¹⁰⁴ <https://doi.org/10.1080/02619768.2020.1821184>

¹⁰⁵ <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42438-020-00155-y>

¹⁰⁶ <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-020-00561-y>

¹⁰⁷ https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/11732/UCU-Scotland-report-of-Covid-19-survey-of-members/pdf/UCUS-Covid-survey-report_Aug21.pdf

Summary

The summary below sets out a table of key events followed by a list of key impacts on Further and Higher Education.

Key events

Key events that affected further and higher education are outlined in the table below:

Table 2: Key events that affected Further and Higher Education.

Date	Event
19 th March 2020	Schools, colleges and universities, withdraw face-to-face teaching and move to online teaching where possible.
29 th June 2020	Scottish Government publish guidance to help Scotland's colleges and universities prepare for a safe and phased return to campus .
27 th September 2020	Scottish Government publish guidance for those living in student accommodation, following the restrictions announced on 25 September . The guidance outlines what students can and cannot do and what they need to think about if they are considering a return home on a permanent basis.
30 th September 2020	Universities Scotland announce a package of ten measures designed to support student wellbeing .
11 th November 2020	Scottish Government announce plans for a COVID-19 student testing scheme , which aims to support the safe return of up to 80,000 students ahead of the winter break.
8 th January 2021	Scottish Government announce university students will be taught online throughout January and February .
5 th October 2021	Scottish Government publish Coronavirus (COVID-19) education recovery: key actions and next steps .
17 th December 2021	Letter from the Minister for Higher Education, Further Education, Youth Employment and Training on measures to reduce transmission of Omicron variant in the college and university sectors .

Key impacts

- The entire population of students across Scotland was affected by the impacts of the pandemic, losing access to peer support and in person, face-to-face lecturer support
- There were challenges for the generality of students in terms of a general lowering of motivation and concentration, though many students adapted quickly despite the challenges
- High levels of stress and distress generally associated with studying were worsened for the majority; a situation further exacerbated for those students with pre-existing mental health difficulties

- Digital exclusion was a particular issue for students in economically disadvantaged households
- Financial impacts were widespread for the many students whose actual or planned employment was affected by enforced closures in e.g. hospitality
- The pandemic had a negative effect on the health and wellbeing of students with disabilities, students from black and minority ethnic backgrounds, LGBTQ+, and trans students
- Childcare or caring responsibilities affected capacity to study for some, due, for example, to flux in national guidance on opening of daycare, nursery provision and in-person schooling
- Students medically affected by Covid-19 either directly, or in their families and/or dependants saw their capacity to study affected, especially where long Covid is an issue
- Students on courses with a strong practical element (e.g. hairdressing, construction), or which require a professional practice placement (e.g. initial teacher education) were directly affected
- Negative impacts on academic staff were often compounded for those on precarious contracts, for women (often bearing additional burdens of care during the pandemic), and staff from black and minority ethnic backgrounds

Areas Particularly Indicated for Further Investigation

- Medium- and longer-term impacts on the health and wellbeing, and on the learning and attainment of the generality of students.
- Access to, experiences in, and outcomes for, students from minority and disadvantaged groups and communities with pre-existing and intersecting vulnerabilities.
- Ways in which Covid-19 may have created 'new disadvantage' in addition to the exacerbation of existing vulnerabilities and disadvantage.

Section 3: Youth Work Sector in Scotland

Introduction

Youth work is a key partner within the wider education system in Scotland. Community-based youth work provides young people with a range of learning and development opportunities that normally take place outside of school and during their leisure time. The focus is on the 11- to 25-year-old age group with particular emphasis on 11- to 18-year-olds. The sector plays a crucial role in closing the poverty-related attainment gap through engaging those young people on the margins of our society. Youth work outcomes are aligned with the goals of Curriculum for Excellence¹⁰⁸ and the sector provides an array of opportunities for young people to engage in accredited learning¹⁰⁹. Youth work is part of the broader Community Learning and Development field in Scotland and brings together a range of partners from across local authorities and the third sector, including uniformed and faith-based youth organisations. Responsibility for the strategic planning and management of youth work sits with Education Scotland.

Key Events and Related Changes to Relevant Educational Legislation, Policy and Guidelines

During the pandemic the delivery of youth work services has been informed by discrete guidelines¹¹⁰. The key events are summarised in Table 3 below. The sector is supported directly by YouthLink Scotland, Youth Scotland and Young Scot who have collectively provided invaluable support, guidance, training and information for youth work practitioners and young people¹¹¹. The practitioners have also been steered through the varied changes over the past few months by the CLD [Community Learning and Development] Standards Council, which is the professional body that supports the sector. (See Annex 1: Governance and National Bodies Informing the Youth Work Sector Education Recovery for a fuller description of these organisations.)

At the time of the first lockdown in March 2020, face-to-face youth work services stopped. The safety restrictions that have subsequently been introduced dramatically affected the youth work sector, and resultantly, the lives of many young people across Scotland. Young people's learning and development through youth work activities has been interrupted. Despite the challenges faced, youth workers have adapted and responded through innovative, creative, risk-informed practice.

A review of the key events, respective policy changes, emergent guidelines and relevant research evidence highlights a range of issues for the youth work sector and education practitioners to consider as they navigate forward towards a post Covid-19 society.

Impact on Young People

The closure of schools, youth groups and restriction of movement in our neighbourhoods and communities have been essential measures to protect public health. As a result, young people

¹⁰⁸ [outcomes-january-2016.pdf \(youthlinkscotland.org\)](#)

¹⁰⁹ [Youth Work | Awards Network](#)

¹¹⁰ <https://www.youthlinkscotland.org/media/5974/youth-work-covid-19-guidance-framework.pdf>

¹¹¹ <https://www.youthscotland.org.uk/covid-19/>
<https://www.youthlinkscotland.org/covid-19/>
<https://cldstandardscouncil.org.uk/?s=covid+19>
<https://young.scot/campaigns/national/coronavirus>

have become disconnected from their peers, their families, their teachers and youth work practitioners, prompting social isolation and loneliness. Youth work plays an essential role in keeping young people connected to schooling. Evidence was presented to the recent Scottish Parliament Health, Social Care and Sport Committee¹¹² that highlighted:

not every young person's experience of school takes place in a classroom or even a school building. Without youth workers, far too many young people would not be in school.

Research has uncovered the complex impact of the pandemic on young people's mental health¹¹³. Whilst many have travelled successfully over recent months, for some, the experience has been profoundly negative¹¹⁴. A report by Youthlink Scotland¹¹⁵ on the youth work response to the pandemic, identified that for those young people living in poverty, the impact of covid on their mental health and wellbeing was exacerbated. Such concerns are reflected internationally. A study conducted by the OECD¹¹⁶ concluded that some young people will disproportionately experience the impact of the pandemic. They concluded:

Intersecting identity factors, such as sex, gender, race, ethnicity, and intellectual or physical disability, and socio-economic disadvantage may exacerbate the vulnerability of young people.

The report points to the essential role of youth work organisations in supporting young people through the post-covid rebuild, and importantly engaging them as active partners in mapping out the future priorities.

Implications for Practice

Youth Work: Going Digital

Prior to the pandemic, the majority of youth work was delivered in-person. Like most education providers, the youth work sector, where possible, moved the bulk of their services online during the first lockdown period. Many organisations have creatively adapted their practice to stay connected with young people and their families. The shift to online engagement has been unavoidable, with practitioners having to upskill quickly and creatively adapt¹¹⁷. Youth work online is not new, there is a growing body of literature that records the evolution of digital youth work¹¹⁸. Despite these developments, the impact of Covid-19 has catapulted practitioners to embrace technology as their primary mode of practice. The operation of the sector has been transformed with practitioners utilising an array of online platforms to ensure that young people stay or

¹¹² <https://www.youthlinkscotland.org/news/february-2022/health-social-care-sport-committee-jan-2022/>

¹¹³ <https://www.youthscotland.org.uk/programmes/y2bee-young-people-s-mental-health-programme/>
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13632752.2021.1903182>

¹¹⁴ <https://www.togetherscotland.org.uk/news-and-events/news/2021/04/lockdownlowdown-second-report-published/>

¹¹⁵ <https://www.youthlinkscotland.org/news/june-2021/youth-work-closing-the-poverty-related-attainment-gap-during-the-pandemic/>

¹¹⁶ <https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/youth-and-covid-19-response-recovery-and-resilience-c40e61c6/>

¹¹⁷ <https://www.youthlinkscotland.org/media/5975/supporting-young-people-through-lockdown.pdf>
<https://www.youthlinkscotland.org/media/5251/learning-through-lockdown.pdf>

¹¹⁸ [digitally-agile-national-principles-web.pdf \(youthlinkscotland.org\)](https://www.youthlinkscotland.org/develop/digitally-agile-national-principles-web.pdf)
<https://www.youthlinkscotland.org/develop/developing-knowledge/digital-youth-work/digital-youth-work-project/>
<https://www.digitalyouthwork.eu/guidelines/>

become engaged with local services. This significant change has not been without challenges for practitioners and young people alike. It is also apparent that while youth groups adapted their services, not all young people were in a position to access the online support available to them. A survey by Youth Scotland¹¹⁹ identified a range of barriers. These included a lack of digital equipment and software and poor connectivity to Wi-Fi.

Young people are often portrayed as ‘digital natives’ for whom using technology is ubiquitous and central to their everyday lives and lifestyles. However, for those who do not own smartphones or have access to Wi-Fi, online youth work services became completely inaccessible¹²⁰. This is not a phenomenon exclusive to Scotland. A study by UK Youth¹²¹ uncovered similar difficulties. The shift to online practice highlighted a lack of digital capacity, inadequate resources and emergent training needs in some organisations. The findings reported that 65% of respondents identified an urgent need for digital infrastructure and support. A Europe-wide survey¹²² of the youth work sector identified a digital gap, caused by a lack of equipment or digital competence, for youth workers and young people, especially those with fewer opportunities. The evidence confirms that this period of rapid change has brought attention to issues around digital literacy, infrastructure, connectivity and access to technological devices for practitioners, young people and their families.

This key concern notwithstanding, the pivot of youth work to online delivery has gone some way to keep young people engaged with informal learning and development opportunities. However, it is evident young people still missed in-person activities due to the limitations of online services, particularly in sustaining relationships with practitioners¹²³.

Access to Facilities

Many youth work projects rely on access to local community facilities and educational establishments as their practice base. Youthlink Scotland have undertaken a longitudinal national study¹²⁴ to examine access to facilities. The findings confirm that the closure of spaces for youth work had a negative impact on young people. Despite significant investment in keeping schools open and safe, many young people remain disconnected from youth work. This has interrupted important relationships, making it more difficult to access support, and opportunities for social interaction and learning.

Over the past year there has been a marked improvement in access. However, the most recent findings¹²⁵ confirm a concerning situation. From the sample of 329 organisations, only 54% have access to the facilities they need. Data confirms that third sector organisations have been affected disproportionately, compared to local authority service providers. This study points to a range of difficulties around access to facilities. These include; a lack of local council lets, prioritisation being given to paid rather than free lets, long-term building closures due to the impact of guidance, prohibitive cleaning and maintenance costs, competition for venues, lack of staff and community buildings being utilised as vaccination centres. Practitioners have faced ever-changing and at times

¹¹⁹ <https://www.youthscotland.org.uk/media/1869/rising-to-the-challenge-findings-from-the-youth-scotland-action-fund-web.pdf>

¹²⁰ <https://www.therobertsontrust.org.uk/news-and-blogs/implications-of-covid-19-for-youth-work/>
<https://www.ukyouth.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/UK-Youth-Covid-19-Impact-Report-.pdf>

¹²² <https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/latest-update-and-analysis>
<https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/latest-update-and-analysis>

¹²³ <http://concept.lib.ed.ac.uk/article/view/5778/7635>

¹²⁴ <https://www.youthlinkscotland.org/news/june-2021/access-to-facilities-report-june-2021/>

¹²⁵ <https://www.youthlinkscotland.org/media/6884/access-to-facilities-headline-survey-nov-2021.pdf>

complex guidelines around risk assessment, social distancing and PPE. The restricted access has stalled the reopening and wider recovery of youth work services across the country. The *Pandemic Impact Survey*¹²⁶, undertaken by the Scottish Parliament's Cross-Party Group on Children and Young People, found that 90% of organisations are facing 'some' or 'significant' barriers to delivering their services, with the future for some youth work organisations now precarious. The committee concluded:

What is striking from the results is the continued inequality around parity of value between formal education providers and third sector support services, including youth work. While schools have resumed, other vital support services that children and young people rely on in the community have faced barriers to access.

Almost two years on from the first lockdown period, the youth work sector in Scotland still faces major barriers in terms of accessing facilities, with just over half of in-person services having been re-established. This ongoing lack of access combined with issues around online practice will impact on the recovery of the youth work sector, and points to the need to examine longer term challenges related to hybrid approaches to service delivery.

Additional Resources for Youth Work Education Recovery

The Scottish Government Youth Work Education Recovery Fund was set up to enable the sector to support young people in some of the country's most vulnerable communities to engage with vital learning opportunities, and designed to support partnership working between youth work organisations and formal education. The youth work response has included: helping to build and maintain social connections; providing safe space for emotional support; helping young people return to school; and enabling early intervention with mental health issues¹²⁷.

The fund has been administered by YouthLink Scotland who have made 64 awards to organisations across Scotland working with young people impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic¹²⁸. Over 13,000 young people will benefit directly from the Fund. The outcomes demonstrate the importance of collaboration between teachers and youth work in responding to the educational and support needs of young Scots.

In response to the emergent challenges faced by the sector through the period of restrictions, Youth Scotland repurposed existing funds to create an Action Fund for youth work¹²⁹. A total amount of £32,973 was distributed to 68 youth groups, with awards ranging from £299 to £500.

The fund has enabled youth groups to support young people in three key ways:

1. Adapting delivery to support the sector to move their practice online
2. Removing barriers to ensure young people can access their youth groups' activities
3. Caring for wellbeing, addressing mental and physical health needs

¹²⁶ <https://childrenscotland.org.uk/covid-impact-risking-future-of-vital-services-for-young-people-across-scotland-survey-finds/>

¹²⁷ <https://www.youthlinkscotland.org/media/5251/learning-through-lockdown.pdf>
<https://www.youthlinkscotland.org/news/june-2021/youth-work-closing-the-poverty-related-attainment-gap-during-the-pandemic/>

¹²⁸ <https://www.youthlinkscotland.org/funding/youth-work-education-recovery-fund/>

¹²⁹ <https://www.youthscotland.org.uk/media/1869/rising-to-the-challenge-findings-from-the-youth-scotland-action-fund-web.pdf>

The evidence reviewed confirms the effective use of the additional funds made available and the invaluable contribution that youth work has made to support some of Scotland’s most vulnerable young people. The wider situation captured in a range of available reports confirms the ongoing need for resources to sustain services as the sector continues to move towards recovery and effectively meet the changing educational and development needs of the young people.

Summary

The summary below sets out a table of key events followed by a list of key impacts on Youth Work.

Key Events

Key events that affected Youth Work are outlined in the table below.

Table 3: Key events that affected Youth Work

Date	Event
19 th March 2020	Youth Work sector across Scotland withdraws in-person services and moves to online provision where possible.
June 2020	Youthlink Scotland publish Covid-19 Education Recovery: Youth Work which sets out the role that youth work can play to support the wider education recovery.
9 th July 2020	Scottish Government publish Guidelines for CLD Sector following earlier publication (May 2020) of the Route Map to recovery.
31 st July 2020	Scottish Government publish updated Guidelines for CLD sector with advice on indoor and outdoor contact for youth work settings across the 5 levels of protection.
31 st August 2020	In-person Youth Work services restarted in line with guidelines on restrictions and health protective measures.
16 th September 2020	Scottish Government announce £3m Youth Work Education Recovery Fund
21 st December 2020	Scottish Government publish guidance for access and management of multi-purpose community facilities . This report informed youth work organisations who access community facilities.
12 th March 2021	Youth Scotland publish Post Lockdown Readiness Guide for the youth work sector. This document interprets the changing context and provides specific guidelines and advice. Document was updated on 17th June 2021 as restrictive measures changed.
19 th July 2021	Scottish Government and Youthlink Scotland publish COVID-19: Guiding Framework to support the delivery of youth work services . This key document details the requirements of the youth work sector to support the ongoing education recovery.

Key Impacts

- The restrictions on the youth work sector have had a negative impact on the mental health and wellbeing of young people, particularly those most marginalised and vulnerable.
- Youth work has played a crucial role in supporting young people to return to and stay in school.
- The switch to online provision in youth work has ensured some continuity of provision.

- Delivering online services raised issues around digital capacity, digital literacy, infrastructure, connectivity and access to technological devices for practitioners, young people and their families.
- A lack of access to facilities and educational establishments continues to present a major barrier to the effective recovery of youth work across Scotland.
- There is disparity of value between formal education providers and third sector support services, including youth work.
- Additional funds have been made available to support the youth work sector, this has supported important work in supporting young people and local communities.
- There remains concern about the future sustainability of essential services as the sector moves towards recovery.

Areas Particularly Indicated for Further Investigation

- Investigate the essential role the youth work sector plays as an educational partner in meeting the learning and development needs of young people in a post-covid Scotland.
- Explore how the Government and stakeholders can involve young people in mapping the future plans for recovery of the youth work sector.
- Assess the implications of rolling out digital youth work in terms of resources, skills development and technological infrastructure.

Conclusion

The evidence reviewed in this study indicates that the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and consequent institutional restrictions, represent a setback for children and young people in Scotland. We know that the most vulnerable and disadvantaged members of our society bear the heaviest burdens of Covid-19, in terms of infection, illness and death, economic dislocation and school disruption. It is likely that some impacts, not yet visible, may be far reaching and long term. However, we also know that education, as a universal service, remains the most effective means available to improve life chances for children and young people.

Like so many other education systems across the world, Scotland responded rapidly to the emergency in March 2020, to ensure continuity of learning as an immediate priority. The two years since then have been marked by significant innovation, creativity and collaboration in the face of unprecedented adversity. This oversight study offers a summary of emerging key themes; inequalities, health and wellbeing, digital access and infrastructure, the quality of teaching and learning, support for teachers, the wider education workforce and systems of support and accountabilities at all levels of the sector. These key issues offer both a challenge and an opportunity; a challenge to well known, tried and tested national approaches, but also an opportunity for change and renewal, from an experience that none sought but from which lessons must be learned if we are to hold to our commitment to see all Scotland's children and young people thrive.

Annex 1: Governance and National Bodies Informing the Youth Work Sector Education Recovery

Youthlink Scotland is the national agency for youth work. They are a membership organisation representing more than 100 youth organisation members across Scotland, including national voluntary organisations and all 32 local authorities. Throughout the pandemic Youthlink Scotland have been at the forefront of campaigning and advocating for the youth work sector as well as providing valuable research evidence on different aspects of the impact of Covid-19 for young people and practitioners. Through their web site and published materials they have informed the sector on the changing landscape as we have moved through the stages of the pandemic. Youthlink has been responsible for the management, distribution and administration of the Youth Work Education Recovery Fund.

Youth Scotland is the largest national youth work organisation in Scotland, supporting 74,860 young people, 1,617 youth groups and over 8,868 youth workers. Youth Scotland has a membership network made up of a diversity of local youth groups. Since the first lockdown in 2020, Youth Scotland have regularly published a wide range of guidance and toolkits for practitioners that have responded to the ongoing restrictions and planned recovery of the youth work sector. They also administer funds to support youth work.

The **CLD Standards Council Scotland** is the professional body for people who work or volunteer in community learning and development in Scotland, including youth work. The Standards Council have distributed periodic guidance from the Scottish Government and NHS interpreting key implications for the sector and students studying on CLD approved college and university programmes.

Young Scot is the national youth information and citizenship charity for 11-26-year-olds in Scotland. They have been updating their dedicated website and social media channels seven days a week with the latest information for young people on Covid-19. This is helping to ensure that young people have quality-assured information on what's happening, the simple steps to take to help prevent catching Covid-19, and how to avoid spreading it to others.

Annex 2: Joint response to The Health, Social Care and Sport Committee in the Scottish Parliament inquiry into the health and wellbeing of children and young people in Scotland

Authors and expertise: Mental health and wellbeing of children and young people in Scotland is at the forefront of research conducted at Moray House School of Education and Sport, University of Edinburgh. This joint response from research leaders in this area summarises some of the evidenced based approaches urgently needed. This submission was co-ordinated by Dr Josie Booth and Dr Tracy Stewart, with key contributions from Dr Shirley Gray, Stephanie Hardley, Dr Deb Holt, Dr Ruth McQuillan, and Prof Dave Collins. You can read more about our research and find copies of publications here: <https://www.ed.ac.uk/education/rke>.

Summary

- Latest evidence shows that the health and wellbeing of children and young people in Scotland is amongst some of the lowest in Europe.
- Physical health issues contribute to high prevalence of mental health difficulties experienced by young people.
- The COVID-19 pandemic has contributed to mental health difficulties experienced, and mitigations that followed may have exacerbated already increasing trends in poor physical health and mental ill-health.
- Current challenges include a lack of national, representative data; knowledge of which groups of children and young people are at highest risk since the pandemic; lengthy waiting times for CAMHS assessments; lack of training, resources and support in schools for HWB.
- Addressing poverty can therefore have a positive impact on the health and wellbeing of children and young people and can support academic and economic prosperity.

Top level recommendations to consider

- There is an urgent need for the Scottish Government to consider the *intertwined* factors of physical health and mental health issues within the HWB of children and young people and consider ways in which we can support change. Schools are one context where we can access and support pupils from diverse backgrounds and help develop the health behaviours which pupils will carry with them into adulthood.
- Schools are in need of resources to support staff in promoting positive HWB and providing support in conjunction with other services.
- Bringing together the key partners identified and working together to understand and develop strategies to support positive mental HWB and support difficulties is urgently needed. Whole systems approaches and bringing together services are key to support young people's mental health and wellbeing.

Key contact

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1) What are the key issues around health and wellbeing for children and young people in Scotland?

Severe and wide ranging physical health issues:

- The health and wellbeing (HWB) of children and young people in Scotland is amongst some of the lowest in Europe [1]. This highlighted that only 20% of 11 year old girls and 22% of 11 year old boys met the physical activity guidelines in 2018, with levels getting lower as pupils get older (only 10% and 16% respectively by age 15). This is in the context of high rates of sleep difficulties with 41% of 15 year old girls and 28% of boys reporting regular difficulties with sleep.
- The Active Healthy Kids report card for Scotland [2] also evidenced high levels of sedentary behaviour. Importantly it identified a lack of rigorous data in Scotland for key health behaviours such as fitness, diet and obesity, meaning we do not have a meaningful understanding of many of our current health issues.
- Reports from elsewhere in Europe show that COVID-19 restrictions have led to reduced physical activity in adolescents though [3].

Exacerbated mental health difficulties:

- The physical health issues currently faced by Scotland's young people no doubt contribute to a high prevalence of mental health difficulties. At age 15, 37% of females and 15% of males reported feeling low more than once a week prior to the COVID-19 pandemic [1].
- To our knowledge, there is no current nationally representative published information about the mental health difficulties of young people in Scotland. A recent report by the Scottish Youth Parliament, YouthLink Scotland and Young Scot [4] found that almost two-fifths (39%) of adolescents said they were moderately or extremely concerned about their mental wellbeing and almost half (46%) worried about other people's mental health.
- The COVID-19 pandemic has contributed to the mental health difficulties experienced by young people. A recent study which included Scottish adolescents [5] found that 9% -13% of their sample met/were at borderline for clinical threshold levels for depression and 7%-13% for anxiety. They also found rates of 28% of PTSD-like symptoms. Epidemiological studies in the UK show depression rates of 2.1% and anxiety rates of 7.2% pre-pandemic [6] therefore showing a marked increase during the COVID pandemic. Furthermore, Scottish adolescents reported a loss of social contact with peers during lockdown and that this had a negative impact on their mental health [7].
- In England, mental health difficulties in children and young people aged 5–16 years, rose from 10.8% in 2017 to 16% in 2021 [8]. Wright and colleagues [9] reported a 44% increase of depression symptoms and 26% for PTSD symptoms in 11-12 year olds pre-Covid-19 to post the first lockdown. One study including participants from

Scotland, reported that older adolescents (aged 18-24 years) showed increased mental distress during Covid-19, greater than expected from pre-pandemic trends [10]. This is similar to results from a recent rapid review [11] which identified high rates of depression in post-school young people.

- Future research, particularly epidemiological studies with representative samples, are needed to determine changes in the mental health of young people. Work is also needed to better understand risk and resilience, and in what ages and populations. In doing so, this will inform national policy in supporting young people's mental health and the recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic.

Physical health contributes to mental health and wellbeing and vice versa:

- Physical activity is one aspect of our physical health which plays a vital role in our mental HWB. There is strong evidence that children and young people who meet the physical activity guidelines of an average of 60 mins of moderate to vigorous intensity activity each day, have lower risk of developing depression, lower anxiety, greater self-esteem, and indeed have better cognitive skills and academic attainment [12-14]. There is strong evidence of a bi-directional relationship whereby physical health impacts mental HWB, but also that our mental health impacts on our physical health [15].
- One concern identified in research [11] was whether the negative lifestyle behaviours reported (lower physical activity, weight increases, excessive food and alcohol intake, increase screen time) would reduce post COVID-19 or whether they were too embedded in everyday health behaviour to change easily. This will without doubt have an impact on mental health.
- There is an urgent need for the Scottish Government to consider these intertwined factors in the HWB of children and young people and consider ways in which we can support change. Schools are one context where we can access and support pupils from diverse backgrounds and help develop the health behaviours which pupils will carry with them into adulthood. This will ultimately lead to increases in the health of the nation and long term social and economic advantage [16].

A multifaceted problem in need of multifaceted solutions:

- There are wide ranging factors which contribute to these multifaceted health issues. For example, as acknowledged in the literature on universal positive mental health promotion, poverty, inequalities and adverse childhood experiences, exam stress, bullying, negative pressure and unrealistic expectations from social media all interplay and impact on the HWB of young people [16-19].
- Some of the factors which underpin positive mental health promotion in education and support the development of health skills are supportive, safe environments, both physical and social and emotional environment, positive school ethos, positive relationships with teachers, school staff and other pupils [20-22].
- It is key that we bring together those in education, health, policy makers, parents, and young people themselves when we consider the HWB of young people in Scotland.

2) What are the current challenges with improving the health and wellbeing of children and young people over the next 5 years

[Lack of up to date nationally representative data on health and wellbeing in Scotland:](#)

- It is possible that the Covid-19 pandemic and mitigations have exacerbated already increasing trends in poor physical health and mental ill-health. Epidemiological studies with a representative Scottish sample are needed to determine changes in the health and wellbeing of children and young people to allow for targeted intervention programmes.
- We also need to know for whom risk has increased. Stewart et al [5] found that adolescents who were receiving additional support in school prior to Covid-19 had almost 4 times the odds of meeting clinical cut-off thresholds for depression and almost two times the odds of reporting elevated avoidance and intrusive thoughts about Covid-19. Unsurprisingly, they found that adolescents who were currently or previously receiving mental health support had almost four times the odds of reaching clinical cut-off threshold for depression and anxiety. These findings add to the literature suggesting those with pre-existing symptoms have been uniquely, and negatively, impacted by the pandemic.
- We therefore urgently need complete and representative data from across Scotland to be able to understand who, and how, to support Scotland's young people.

[Lengthy waiting times for CAMHS assessment:](#)

- The Scottish Government aspires to 90% of children and young people who are referred for Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) assessment starting treatment within 18 weeks of referral.
- A recent report by Public Health Scotland [23] showed that only 72.6% were actually seen by CAMHS teams within this time frame. We also know that young people face long waits between initial assessment and receiving treatment.
- There is an urgent need to support children and young people not only in preventing mental health difficulties, but also in supporting those who experience them beyond reliance on CAMHS teams. It is unrealistic to consider the promotion, prevention, early identification and treatment the responsibility of mental health professionals alone; multi-disciplinary and multi-industry collaboration is key here.

[Lack of resource, training and support for schools:](#)

- Teachers and school staff are at the forefront of health promotion in education and in supporting those young people who experience mental health difficulties. Schools that support teacher wellbeing are also promoting student wellbeing as a result [22]. Positive relationships between pupils and teachers are significant contributors to the wellbeing of both students and teachers [21, 24].
- Teachers identify their poor emotional and mental health as a barrier to their work to support the mental health of their students [20]. It is essential to positive relationships and environments conducive to wellbeing, yet teacher wellbeing is at

threat and school staff themselves have high levels of mental health difficulties [22, 25]. This is reflected in the high numbers of teachers leaving the profession within a few years of qualification as a result of stress and poor mental health [22].

- Teachers lack training in supporting health and wellbeing (both in and pre-service) which may contribute to their lack of confidence to support pupils' mental health [26]. The University of Edinburgh go some way to addressing this by our partnership approach with mental health charity Place2be, however sustained, cost-effective and specialist training for teachers is essential.
- Barriers to health promotion in schools can also be due to lack of resources and physical space. The will of teachers to engage in health promotion activities and whole school strategies, as well as their knowledge and skills, can act as barriers to successful implementation [27]. Holt and colleagues [28] explored how schools support pupils' health and wellbeing as they transition from primary to secondary school. Teachers reported that they lacked both quiet space for pupils, and access to specialist support (e.g. lack of Educational Psychology expertise).
- Schools are in need of resources to support staff in promoting positive HWB and providing support in conjunction with other services.

3) What offers the best opportunity for improving the health and wellbeing of children and young people over the next 5 years

Bringing together health, education, CAMHS, parents, and young people themselves to address barriers:

- The James Lind Alliance priority setting exercise for mental health [29] involved young people, parents, teachers and other stakeholders, to identify top priorities, including:
 - Priority 3) How can Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), education providers and health and social care departments work together in a more effective manner in order to improve the mental health outcomes of children and young people?
- It is vital that the stakeholders who developed these priorities are listened to and action is taken to address their priorities.
- The Mental Health Strategy for Scotland also recommends bringing together key partners to work together to understand and develop strategies to support positive mental HWB.
- New models of working and supporting young people with difficulties are urgently needed.

Increasing understanding of the broader impact of our physical health:

- Priority 11 from the James Lind Alliance report is: What role does having a healthy lifestyle (e.g. sleep, diet, and exercise) play in the prevention of mental health problems in children and young people.

- The bidirectional relationship between physical health and mental health and wellbeing and school attainment [12-15] needs to be given due consideration. For example, research findings show:
 - increasing evidence that physical activity is particularly beneficial for neurodiverse young people [e.g. 30] who may be at increased risk of mental health difficulties.
 - Importance of developing physical literacy [31, 32]. The role of schools in developing these characteristics has been demonstrated [33, 34]. Past projects have established an effective model to develop these factors [35-37].
 - The Psychological Characteristics of Developing Excellence [PCDE; 38, 39] includes other important educational outcomes, e.g. the pursuit of excellence and a proactive approach to mental health. These are established in research and ongoing longitudinal work is demonstrating their utility in helping support young people's mental health.
- While schools are key, it is important to consider additional ways to support young people to lead active healthy lifestyles outwith this. For example, environmental and safety factors play a significant role in the number of young people who actively travel to school. Addressing these barriers is therefore required.

Support for teachers and schools:

- Teachers are at the forefront of developing positive mental HWB and supporting difficulties. Prioritising teacher learning and embedding health and wellbeing into day-to-day practice of teachers and schools is vital.
- Increased consideration of the impact of social-emotional learning, positive relationships between teachers-pupils, and sense of school belonging on feelings of wellbeing and educational attainment is needed [40, 41].
- How teachers understand HWB is important as this impacts their practice and how they support the HWB of their pupils. The HWB curriculum in Scotland refers to health in a holistic sense building social, emotional, mental as well as physical competencies, but research suggests that teachers interpret this in different ways [42]
- Many teachers focus on developing physical health, teaching pupils what they *must do* to have a healthy body. This fails to take account of the social determinants of health and can lead to feelings of shame, stigma and in some cases, unhealthy practices such as disordered eating and over exercise [43, 44].
- Teachers require support to develop a shared broader, strengths-based understanding of HWB. This will contribute to pupils' wider wellbeing and personal growth (beyond physical health and academic achievement) [45, 46].
- Holt et al [28] found that strong leadership in schools was important to develop a shared understanding of HWB and that this could be extended across schools and support HWBH during transition from primary to secondary school.
- Leadership plays a crucial role in fostering a shared, whole school ethos to support pupil (and staff) engagement and sense of belonging at school [47, 48]. Supporting

schools to achieve this is vital and the curriculum for excellence review provides one opportunity to address this.

Cross-diagnostic approach to health and wellbeing:

- Recent research has reconceptualised mental health difficulties and treatment approaches [e.g. 49]. There are high rates of co-occurrence across many mental health difficulties with shared cognitive difficulties and clusters of symptoms. It is important to consider moving beyond categorical views of mental health difficulties and taking cross-diagnostic approaches to understanding and supporting young people.
- This may be more cost-effective due to targeting overlapping risk factors and difficulties, and may be more suitable for scaling up. If applied in a school-setting, in a partnership approach with schools and teachers, it may also decrease pressure on mental health services.
- The measurement of mental health difficulties, especially for neurodiverse young people is challenging. Rates of depression in autistic young people vary considerably (0–83.3%) demonstrating that rates may be a product of measurement [50]. The development of new measures will facilitate assessment and treatment plans.
- Evidence based approaches looking beyond diagnosis offer one avenue for exploration. Programmes which provide support for teachers, parents and young people outwith CAMHS, such as our Edinburgh Psychoeducation for Children and Young People (EPIC; <https://www.ed.ac.uk/clinical-brain-sciences/research/epic-edinburgh-psychoeducation-intervention>) may be particularly beneficial for neurodiverse young people.

Support to deliver the mental health and wellbeing framework:

- The recently developed Mental Health and Wellbeing framework for Scotland (available [here](#)) which Dr Stewart contributed to, sets out the levels of knowledge and skills required by staff, across agencies, to deliver wellbeing and mental health support and interventions within the framework of Getting It Right For Every Child (GIRFEC).
- This aim is to improve whole system working in order to deliver better mental health outcomes for children, young people, and their families. Now that this framework exists, it is vital that we consider ways to ensure this knowledge and training is delivered across the whole Scottish workforce.

4) How does addressing poverty lead to improved health and social care outcomes?

- The intricate relationship between poverty and health, educational, and social outcomes are eloquently discussed in the recent Marmot report [16]. Social inequalities were identified in a range of areas of young people's health in the recent Active Healthy Kids Scotland report card [2] with evidence showing the adverse impact of living in poverty on the health of young people. Addressing poverty can therefore have a positive impact on the health and wellbeing of children and young people and can support academic and economic prosperity.

- Recently, work by Mowat [51] argued that the COVID pandemic has had a more pronounced detrimental impact on young people living in poverty and that, as in other areas discussed, bringing together partners and creating strong “networks” across communities is required to provide maximal support for young people.
- The TRIUMPH report on Priority Areas for Research to Improve Youth Public Mental Health [52] includes particular consideration of care-experienced young people in setting priorities. This co-produced report includes voices of key stakeholders and young people themselves and again highlights that whole systems approaches and bringing together services are key to support young people’s mental health and wellbeing.

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