Arrangements for the phased reopening of schools in February/March 2021 – supplementary guidance (updated 16 February 2021)

VERSION CONTROL

Version	Date	Summary of changes
V1.0	21/12/2020	First version of document
V2.0	21/01/2021	Update to supplementary guidance following the decision to delay the reopening of schools, originally planned for 18 January. Updates effective from 21 January 2021.
V3.0	16/02/2021	Significant updates to reflect new arrangements for a phased return to school as announced on 2 February and confirmed on 16 February. Key changes include: • Revised Purpose and Background sections to reflect the changed circumstances and plans for a phased return to school (paras 1-9). • An expanded Arrangements for school opening section which includes references to P1-3 and senior phase learners returning to school, an update on out of school childcare and senior phase learners at college (para 10) • Detailed new sections setting out plans for P1-P3 and senior phase learners returning to school (paras 11-23) • Vulnerable children – revised text reflecting the intention to bring more children with ASN back into school (para 26) • Revised and expanded text on enhanced mitigations, in keeping with advice from the Advisory Sub-group on Education and Children's issues (paras 50-55) • Updated guidance on physical distancing (paras 56-59) • Updated guidance on school transport for senior learners (para 60-63) • Updated guidance on face coverings (paras 64-67) • A reminder of existing guidance on ventilation (paras 68-69) • Updated guidance on outbreak management (para 70) • A new section on the asymptomatic testing programme (paras 71-77) • Updated guidance on support for shielding individuals (para 78) • A new section on vaccination for school staff (paras 82-85) • Updated guidance on remote learning (paras 86-88 and a new summary table on e-Sgoil) • A new section on wellbeing support (para 92) • Updated guidance on national qualifications (paras 94-96) • A new para on free school meals for those in school (para 102) • A new section on school trips (para 105) • An additional on communications (para 107) • A revised and updated Annex A

Purpose of this guidance

1. This guidance has been issued in response to the First Minster's statement to Parliament on 2 February announcing a phased return to in-person learning in schools from 22 February which was confirmed on 16 February. It is intended to provide clarity on arrangements for school education in February/March 2021 and to help schools to plan for the full-time return of children in P1-P3, for the part-time return of some young people in the senior phase and a small increase in existing provision for children and young people with significant additional support needs. Early learning and childcare will also return on 22 February – separate guidance has been prepared on this.

2. Plans for potential return of children and young people in other year groups will also be kept under regular review – Ministers are clear that further changes should be driven by the data and not by dates.

3. This guidance, therefore, supplements the existing Coronavirus: reducing risks in schools guidance specifically to support schools and local authorities during February/March 2021. With a small number of exceptions (for example, the need for 2m distancing between young people in secondary school) all aspects of the existing guidance and accompanying mitigations continue to apply while schools are open.

Background

4. These exceptional arrangements are being put in place in light of the latest developments in the path of the virus, following the emergence of new variants. As set out in the Advice From The Covid-19 Advisory Sub-Group On Education And Children's Issues published on 3 February 2021, case numbers, levels of community transmission and test positivity rates are still high but are generally decreasing.

5. There is understandable anxiety among staff about a return to school given these rates of transmission. As part of the process of phased return, every possible step should therefore be taken by local authorities and schools to ensure the safety and wellbeing of children, young people and staff in schools. The mitigations set out in ***Coronavirus: reducing risks in schools*** guidance and the additional measures set out in this guidance should be strictly adhered to.

6. In recognition that progress in suppressing the virus to previous low levels will likely take some more weeks, it has been decided to return to in-school learning in a staged/progressive way. This approach will enable time for planning each step change and for monitoring its impacts and the need for stability and sustainability of approach.

7. A range of previously published evidence has made clear that schools are low risk environments when the appropriate mitigations and safety measures outlined in the *Coronavirus: reducing risks in schools* guidance are implemented, and this remains our judgement – there is to date no evidence that in-school transmission is a significant driver of increasing infection levels. There is also evidence about the impacts of loss of access to in-person provision on educational and developmental outcomes and the need to consider the impacts of remote learning and a phased return to in-person learning on children's rights and wellbeing.

8. However, the emergence of the new variants of COVID-19 (particularly B.1.1.17) means that fully reopening schools at this time would not be consistent with a safety-first approach for children, young people and school staff. This is due to a combination of:

   - overall levels of community transmission. Controlling levels of community transmission plays an important role in ensuring that our schools can stay open and welcoming – this approach is reflected in the Scottish Government's COVID-19 strategic framework protection levels;

   - the need to monitor carefully the impact of any reopening before expanding more widely, especially as a result of higher uncertainty regarding the trajectory of the virus as a result of the new variants; and

   - the status of evidence regarding the health impact of the new variants and their impact on transmission amongst children and young people and transmission from children and young people to adults.

9. The effects of these initial steps will be carefully monitored before any further decisions are made about future phases of return and a return to in-school learning for other children and young people. This will include the impact on community transmission and further assessment of the implications of the new variant of the virus.

Arrangements for school opening from 22 February

10. Schools have been open since early January to provide learning and support for vulnerable children and children of key workers only. From 22 February children in P1-P3 and a small number of young people in the senior phase will also return to school. This includes children and young people in special schools/units. Educational Continuity Direction have previously been given to provide the legal basis for key aspects of the approach since January, and will be updated in due course.

    - Until schools can reopen more fully, which will be at the earliest date possible, attendance in schools should be restricted to:

        - Children in P1, P2 and P3;

        - A very small cohort of senior phase learners on a limited basis to carry out practical tasks for the alternative certification model for national qualifications. No more than 5 – 8% of the secondary school roll should be in school at any time for this purpose, specifically to support learning in practical subjects that cannot be delivered remotely. Education Scotland has published technical guidance on this.

        - Vulnerable children, including a small increase in provision for children and young people with significant additional support needs where there is a clear and demonstrable necessity. A definition is provided later in this supplementary guidance;

        - Children of key workers. A definition is provided later in this supplementary guidance; and

- Staff who, in the judgement of the local authority and schools, are required to attend in person to give effect to these revised school reopening arrangements.

  This may, for example, include: staff needed to ensure the safe opening and operation of the school, including senior leadership teams; facilities management staff, caterers, cleaners, etc; teaching and support staff required to attend to teach P1-P3 classes or senior phase practical activities or deliver in-person support to vulnerable children and children of key workers, or to deliver remote learning if they cannot do so from home. In light of the strict lockdown conditions in place at the current exceptional time, local authorities and schools should ensure that only those staff who are required to support these essential activities are requested to attend in person, and ensure that updated guidance on individuals on the shielding list is followed.

- Local authorities and schools may wish to draw on lessons learnt from running childcare hubs earlier in the pandemic when putting in place the local arrangements in schools to meet the needs of vulnerable children and the children of key workers.

- The role of certain in-class roles (e.g. pupil support staff) and the part they may play in supporting remote learning should be discussed locally with staff and unions.

- Appropriate provision of school transport for children and young people attending school should continue. Advice on safe school travel remains in place.

- Senior phase learners in school to carry out practical activities related to national qualifications should be provided with an appropriate timetable of remote learning for when they are not in school.

- All learners not attending school should be provided with an appropriate timetable of remote learning until schools can reopen more fully, which will be at the earliest date possible.

- Regular reviews of these arrangements will be undertaken, taking into account the latest evidence about the new variant and progress in reducing community transmission levels. Arrangements following these reviews will be communicated at the earliest opportunity.

- Local authorities and schools should, in consultation with trade unions and employees, ensure that local risk assessments and individual risk assessments for clinically vulnerable children, young people and staff are up to date, to ensure the safe running of schools and school transport under these arrangements. Consideration may, for example, be given to any additional mitigations that could be put in place due to fewer numbers of people being in school buildings. Local decisions should be made about whether specific staff may work from home where their attendance is not required to give effect to these and how this can be facilitated.

- Out of school childcare settings, including breakfast and after school clubs, have been asked to only remain open for children who may be considered vulnerable, and for the children of key workers. This could include teachers and other school staff who will

be back in school to support the phased return from 22 February. Individual childcare providers have been asked to consider which children and families will benefit most from continued attendance at their usual setting, and to prioritise places accordingly. It remains important that childcare providers reduce the number of children, young people and staff who need to attend in person as far as possible and minimise any mixing of children and young people from different schools.

- Temporary lockdown guidance for colleges has also been published. This makes clear that senior phase school learners should not attend college while schools are only providing in-person learning for a very limited number of learners. Colleges should explore whether arrangements can be made for this learning to take place online. Further discussions will take place urgently to explore any potential changes to the guidance around senior phase learners attending college for essential practical work necessary to complete courses for certification purposes. Visiting college lecturers and other staff who deliver courses within schools should follow the school guidance and any sectoral guidance. For example, guidance from colleges and universities that applies to on-campus and off-campus activity.

P1-P3 return to school

11. The First Minister announced on 2 February that children in P1-P3 should return to full-time in-person schooling from 22 February, and this was confirmed on 16 February. In its report published on 3 February, the COVID-19 Advisory Sub-Group on Education and Children's Issues advised that on the current balance of evidence, the reopening could take place subject to a continued decrease in the levels of community transmission and in the prevalence of the virus. This advice reflects the key developmental stage of this age-group, for socialisation as well as learning and development; the evidence that young children are less likely to transmit the virus and to have serious health effects from it; recognition that these children are less likely to successfully engage with remote learning than are older children; and that vulnerable children at this stage are less able to access other resources for their protection and wellbeing than are many older children.

12. While bringing back to school children in P1-P3 will be relatively straightforward in many schools, it will be less straightforward in those that have composite classes. P3/P4 classes are fairly commonplace, some smaller schools run P3/P4/P5 classes, while the smallest schools have the entire primary cohort in a single class.

13. Where P3/P4 composite classes are in place, it is expected that the class teacher continues to plan for both groups as they are at the moment. P3 children should be taught in school and remote learning should continue for P4. Local operational decisions will be key; it will be for the school (and local authority) to consider how best to organise staff to enable elements of live learning to continue when appropriate for the P4 group. Having P4 children in composite classes in school would increase the number of children in school and would also send mixed messages about which children are returning to school.

14. P3 children in P3/P4/P5 classes should also be taught in school and similar arrangements to provide remote support should be put in place for P4 and P5 children in those schools.

15. Schools and local authorities will need to consider the workload implications for staff in providing learning to both learners onsite and for those learners who continue to learn at home. This is an area in which local authorities could prioritise the use of additional teachers to provide support.

16. For very small schools (those with 25 children or fewer on their school roll), where the entire primary cohort is taught in a single class, there may be insufficient staff to teach P1-P3 in school and P4-P7 remotely. These schools often have a single teacher for the whole class and it would not therefore be possible to teach the class and provide remote learning at the same time. In those circumstances, where it is not possible to provide remote learning for P4-P7, the Advisory Subgroup has advised that the school/local authority can decide to bring the entire cohort back into school from 22 February, given the very small number of P4-P7 children that would involve. Where it is possible to provide both in-school (P1-P3) and remote learning (P4-P7) at the same time, that is how these schools should operate.

17. In exceptional circumstances schools may consider providing in-person learning for all children within P3/4 composite classes. Before doing so, they should consider reconfiguring existing staff where possible, as well as exploring avenues to bring in additional staff if necessary. Only as a last resort, and in an event where they could demonstrate it was impossible to maintain in-person and remote learning in parallel, should they look to use this provision.

Senior phase – practical tasks

18. Senior phase learners will return part-time from 22 February, albeit on a limited basis, for the purpose of completing the learning and teaching of critical practical work in relation to qualifications in 2021 (for example NQs, NPAs, SfWs, FAs and others) that can only be carried out in school.

19. Schools must ensure that the number of senior phase learners timetabled in school to undertake practical work at any one time does not exceed 5-8% of the secondary school roll. This number is a cap, and not an indication of the number of learners that schools are expected to have in the building at all times. This number does not include the provision for keyworker and vulnerable children. Schools should consider the arrangements they have in place to keep these two groups separate wherever possible.

20. If those young people who attend school go offsite for lunch, they should follow the rules in place for wider society, for example wearing a face covering when entering a shop. Risk assessments should consider procedures for when children and young people leave and return to school premises, including hand hygiene. Schools may wish to contact local shops in advance to alert them to plans.

21. Remote learning should be the main delivery model in use, schools should only consider in-school learning where it is absolutely necessary.

22. Education Scotland and the Scottish Government have worked with partners to produce detailed technical guidance intended to provide clarity and support for local authorities

and secondary schools on providing arrangements for these small groups of senior phase learners carrying out practical work in-school.

School transport for the senior phase

23. Arrangements should be made between schools, local authority transport teams and transport operators to ensure that appropriate school transport provision is in place to support senior phase learners' return to school for the purpose of the critical practical work described above. Such arrangements will need to take account of the fact that learners may attend for only part of the school day or for designated sessions and ensure that learners' time in school is minimised. Consideration should be taken of issues, such as, timetabling of lesson/sessions to align with transport services and the need to enable learners to access school meals, particularly those eligible for free school meals. It may also be necessary to make learners that are eligible for free school transport aware they may travel on registered (public) bus services if that is a more convenient option for their journey home after their session has finished.

Support for vulnerable children and young people

24. Some children and young people rely upon the care and protection provided by schools and other agencies in relation to a range of specific circumstances.

25. Local authorities (including through joint working between Chief Social Work Officers and Directors of Education) should ensure and prioritise continued care and support for these learners during the period until schools reopen more fully. In doing so, they should consider how best to apply the definitions below whilst balancing the overarching policy aims of reducing the number of children, young people and staff who need to attend school in person as far as possible.

26. That remains the case. In addition to the broader return to school, the First Minister's statement of 2 February indicated that a small number of further children and young people with additional support needs should be considered for return to school on 22 February. This should include those across any stages of learning within special schools and enhanced provision for whom there is a clear and demonstrable necessity for the provision of learning and support from in-person provision that cannot otherwise be provided at home. However, these decisions require to be taken within the context of the continued need to manage the number of children and young people attending in-person provision. Therefore the considerations set out below, in relation to the management of provision continue to apply, ie if they can continue to learn at home then they should do so. Further guidance on supporting children and young people with complex additional support needs has been provided.

Vulnerable children and young people – definition

27. The definition in place since the start of January continues to apply. Children and young people may be vulnerable because of factors related to their personal development, features of their family life, or because of wider influences that impact on them within their community.

28. Those children who were considered to be vulnerable prior to the pandemic should have been known to services, and are likely to have had a child's plan. The pandemic has brought others into this category, for example through loss of family income.

29. Where a child requires co-ordinated support from more than one agency, this is likely to suggest greater vulnerability, and the plan would be co-ordinated by a lead professional. This would include a range of children and young people, such as those:

- at risk of significant harm, with a child protection plan;
- looked after at home, or away from home;
- 'on the edge of care', where families would benefit from additional support;
- with additional support needs, where there are one or more factors which require significant or co-ordinated support;
- affected by disability;
- where they and/or their parents are experiencing poor physical or mental health;
- experiencing adversities including domestic abuse and bereavement; and those
- requiring support when they are involved in making transitions at critical stages in their lives.

30. Children and families may also experience adversity because of the impact of poverty and disadvantage (including entitlement to free school meals), and many will be facing this because of the necessary measures to respond to the pandemic. This will include families with loss of income, experiencing social isolation, or otherwise struggling because of the lockdown.

Decision making for this group

31. Local authorities and health boards, working with partners including third sector organisations, will either know or be able to identify the children and families within their areas who are potentially at risk and therefore need additional support. The need for additional support can be identified prior to birth, so this should include help for pregnant women.

32. Crucially, vulnerability is not an exclusive concept, but should take account of all of these factors and others, that means that a child and family may need additional support. The judgement of the children's sector professionals – critically those working most closely with the family – will be paramount in assessing vulnerability.

33. Those who work directly with children and young people are best placed to identify children and young people who will require support in order to ensure their wellbeing, as a result of these exceptional phased opening arrangements.

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

Named Person (key point of contact) service

35. Named persons as key points of contact are a very important first response for vulnerable children (as defined above).

36. Local authorities will consider how best to continue to provide key points of contact during this period until schools can reopen more fully.

Support for children of keyworkers

37. The definitions of key workers agreed with local authorities previously during the pandemic will continue to apply. The need for local flexibility to suit local circumstances is acknowledged. The definition of key workers sets out that:

- There should be a particular focus on key workers in posts which ensure that essential services can be delivered and cover tasks within the local community which support the vulnerable and aid community resilience. This may be slightly different in each community to allow the country to address local priorities. Whilst decisions will be taken at the local level, we would expect this to include consideration of:

    - Category 1 – Health and Care workers directly supporting COVID-19 response, and associated staff; Health and Care workers supporting life threatening emergency work, as well as critical primary and community care provision; energy suppliers (small numbers identified as top priority already); staff providing childcare/learning for other category 1 staff. This will now include staff who, in the judgement of the local authority and schools, are required to attend in person to give effect to these revised school reopening arrangements.

    - Category 2 – All other Health and Care workers, and wider public sector workers providing emergency/critical welfare services (for example: fire, police, prisons, social workers), as well as those supporting our Critical National Infrastructure, without whom serious damage to the welfare of the people of Scotland could be caused.

    - Category 3 – All workers (private, public or third sector) without whom there could be a significant impact on Scotland (but where the response to COVID-19, or the ability to perform essential tasks to keep the country running, would not be severely compromised).

These categories are relevant only to consideration of the allocation of exceptional places for children and young people for in-person learning. They are not intended to inform decisions about which staff should be asked to attend work in person (employers

should refer to Coronavirus: Guidance on working from home for further information on this). As noted earlier in this guidance, only school staff who, in the judgement of the local authority and schools, are required to attend in person to give effect to these revised school reopening arrangements should do so.

These categories are intended to support prioritisation of the allocation of places which are limited. For example, Category 1 and 2 workers would take precedence over Category 3 workers if schools do not have sufficient capacity to safely accommodate all requests. Not everyone who is eligible to apply will therefore be guaranteed a place.

38. For the avoidance of doubt, during these exceptional arrangements we would expect that all school staff and staff providing daycare of children's services, including early learning and childcare, who are required to attend their work in person, or who cannot otherwise provide essential support for remote learning while working from home, would qualify as category 1 or 2 key workers. Wider groups of healthcare and other workers who have been brought in to support vaccination rollout and Test and Protect would also be expected to qualify under category 1.

39. While there are differences between the current situation and the previous strict lockdown (from March 2020), the gravity of the situation and the overarching aims of the exceptional school closures are judged to be sufficiently similar to support a similar approach as previously to the application of the definition of key workers and the provision of in-person schooling. The following key principles should be applied by local authorities and schools, and communicated clearly to school communities and local employers:

- There should be clarity on the way in which key workers or their employers can apply for places in schools.
- The number of children taking up these places in schools during the strict lockdown period should be kept to the absolute minimum necessary.
- Only key workers who are physically attending their workplace or who cannot fulfil their critical functions when they are working remotely from home while supporting their children's remote learning may qualify for places.
- Where alternative options are available – e.g. where childcare/remote learning can be provided or supported by one non-key-worker parent or carer who is able to work from home – these should be used instead of children attending school in person. Consideration should be given to ensuring application of this approach does not limit the ability of health and care staff (in category 1) to support the Covid-19 response during this period of acute pressure.
- If it is possible for children to be at home during this exceptional period, until schools reopen to them, then they should be. Whole workforces or entire groups of staff should not be designated as key workers. Doing so would undermine the collective effort we must all make to stay at home, protect the NHS and save lives during this period of strict lockdown.

Advice for employees

40. The following advice is for employees who are considering requesting a space in school for their child during this exceptional period on the basis that they are key workers.

41. During this period of strict lockdown, employees should first talk to their employer if they are an employee and they believe:

- they are a key worker undertaking critical work as outlined in this guidance;
- it is absolutely necessary for them to attend their place of work to fulfil their critical functions; and
- they have no access to appropriate alternative childcare/remote learning arrangements. Alternative childcare arrangements may include informal childcare or accessing a childminding service (which remain open to all children at present). See Your guide to childcare | Parent Club for further information.

42. Together with your employer, you can then make appropriate decisions about whether and how to apply for a place, drawing on local authority guidance.

43. Employees may also seek advice and support from their trade unions in these matters.

Advice for employers

44. The following advice is for employers who believe their employees may be key workers and are considering supporting them to request a space in school for their child during this exceptional period on that basis.

45. During this period of strict lockdown, employers should:

- only contact the relevant local authority to make the case for key worker designation for employees if it is a measure of last resort.
- please contact their local authority for information about the arrangements they have in place.
- think critically about what staff they consider to be key workers, to ruthlessly prioritise those providing absolutely essential services to the public in these emergency times.
- revisit work with unions and workers to identify only the absolute minimum number of staff performing essential roles to deliver the Covid-19 response and provide basic, safe services.
- reduce in-person staffing levels to the lowest possible number required to maintain the production of essential goods.
- have discussions with staff to identify if they can access any appropriate alternative childcare or remote learning arrangements. This may include another parent/carer who is not a key worker and is able to provide such support effectively from home. Alternative childcare arrangements may also include informal childcare or accessing a childminding service (which remain open to all children at present).

46. You can then support your employee to make appropriate decisions about whether and how to apply for a place, drawing on local authority guidance.

47. Please contact your local authority for information about the arrangements they have in place. Further information: contact details for your local authority.

Complex queries and issues regarding key worker access to in-person learning

48. The main port of call to resolve any issues or challenges over key worker status or access to in-person learning in school should always be the local authority or school concerned.

49. To provide advice on issues relating to this guidance and to raise complex queries related to key worker status which cannot be addressed locally, the Scottish Government has re-established the Key Worker Hub. This option is intended as a last resort, and contact with the Hub should only be made following the exhaustion of all discussions with the relevant local authority. Enquiries should be sent to keyworkers@gov.scot.

Implementation of reducing risks guidance and enhanced mitigations (including approach to groupings)

50. The COVID-19 Advisory Sub-group on Education and Children's Issues met on 9 February to consider its existing advice on the mitigations required to ensure a safe return to in-person learning for children, young people and staff. It recommended some key areas where its advice should be strengthened, for example the need for 2m distancing between senior learners in school and on school transport. In other areas its existing advice still stands.

51. There are already a number of mitigations in place to reduce transmission of COVID-19 in schools and ELC settings in Scotland, and these all continue to apply to the new variants. The NERVTAG advice on Mitigations to Reduce Transmission of the New Variant SARS-CoV-2 Virus concluded that a step change in the rigour of application of mitigations is required, given the increased transmission risk associated with the new variant.

52. Schools and ELC settings should therefore place a high priority on reinforcing the current mitigations designed to reduce the risk for children, young people and staff as set out in the existing guidance on reducing the risks from COVID-19 in schools and the equivalent guidance on ELC settings. All staff (including student teachers on placements) and learners attending schools on an exceptional basis for in-person learning should continue to implement and strictly observe these mitigations. This includes with regard to face coverings and existing requirements on distancing between secondary learners (and any additional mitigations that may be identified within updated risk assessments; for example, additional mitigations that are appropriate as a result of fewer people being in schools).

53. To help ensure a safe return to school, every possible step should be taken to ensure the safety and wellbeing of children, young people and staff in schools. The Scottish Government is working with partners on the COVID-19 Education Recovery Group and more widely to develop key messaging for staff, parents and others about that return. From an adherence and compliance perspective, it is extremely important that schools remind staff, learners and parents of the need to follow all the relevant guidance, for example 2m distancing, face coverings, hand hygiene etc.

54. No other restrictions are being eased in order to provide the headroom to support an initial return of some learners and therefore ensuring the right behaviours. For example, parents should avoid contacts with other parents, children and young people at the school gates, on the way to school and after school in order to try and reduce community spread/outbreaks. Schools can assist with this by, for example, having staggered start/finish times.

55. More detailed advice is available in paragraph 104 of the reducing risks guidance.

Physical distancing

56. The existing ***Coronavirus: reducing risks in schools*** guidance provides detailed advice on physical distancing in schools. The COVID-19 Advisory Sub-Group on Education and Children's Issues advice published on 3 February reiterated the importance of maintaining appropriate physical distancing in school given the new variants and the high current prevalence of COVID-19.

57. It has therefore been decided that, as an additional protective measure, 2m distancing should be put in place at the current time between secondary-aged learners, in addition to continuing to be in place for staff in secondary schools. This applies to all learners in secondary schools including vulnerable children and the children of key workers. Physical distancing requirements in primary schools remain unchanged, eg 2m distancing between adults not from the same household should be maintained. There should also be 2m distancing between adults and children whenever possible.

58. As part of the process of a phased return, every possible step should be taken to ensure the safety and wellbeing of children, young people and staff in schools. This includes mitigations such as enhanced cleaning, and the use of PPE for staff who are in close contact with learners in order to provide intimate care and personal support. Please refer to ***Coronavirus: reducing risks in schools*** guidance for further information.

59. It has been agreed with clinicians that schools may, if absolutely necessary, re-group vulnerable children and children of key workers (i.e. move them into different groups to those they were in prior to the festive break). This should be kept to the minimum necessary to ensure effective, safe learning and teaching arrangements are in place. It should be done in a way which meets children's needs and enables them to engage in learning and teaching which is age and stage appropriate. Schools should consider the arrangements they have in place to keep these children separate from those senior phase learners carrying out practical tasks wherever possible. Upon a full return to school, children and young people may return to their original groupings.

School transport

60. Following its meeting on 9 February the Advisory Sub-group recommended that 2m distancing should also apply on school transport for secondary schools. This is in keeping with current advice that dedicated school transport should be regarded as an extension of the school estate. This is a precautionary approach, which will be reviewed as the phased return to in-person learning proceeds, and as more evidence becomes available on transmission of the new virus and its prevalence in the community. This includes services used for key worker or vulnerable children.

61. This requirement also applies to secondary age learners who are transported to school via taxi or private hire vehicle. In this case we recommend that learners from only one household travel in a taxi/private hire vehicle. Where dedicated transport is provided for secondary age learners with additional support needs there is a requirement to balance the wellbeing needs of the learner. Local authorities should consider the support available for secondary age learners with additional support needs who are using school transport. They should take appropriate actions to reduce risk where adherence to strict physical distancing may not be possible. School and local authority transport teams may wish to work together to identify whether it is appropriate to transport learners from the same class grouping 'bubble' in the same vehicle, subject to an assessment of the specific needs of the learners involved and with the use of appropriate mitigations.

62. Local authority transport teams will need to work closely with operators to ensure that arrangements are in place to support the introduction of 2m physical distancing such as, the use of signage and seat covers to encourage passengers to sit apart. Schools should ensure it is made clear to their learners the importance of observing the 2m physical distancing requirement during this time. It is important to note that the 2m physical distancing requirement does not apply to school transport services (including taxis and private hire vehicles) that are used to transport primary age learners to school.

63. The advice remains that face coverings should be worn by children aged 5 years and over on dedicated school transport (unless exemptions apply) in line with the position on public transport.

Face coverings

64. At its meeting on 9 February, the Advisory Sub-group specifically considered whether advice on face coverings should be strengthened in order to require medical grade face masks to be worn in secondary schools. However the clinical view was that such a requirement was not commensurate with the risk in school settings, and that cloth face coverings, when combined with the other, more important, mitigations of physical distancing and hand hygiene, were considered appropriate in schools. This is in line with the current World Health Organisation (WHO) checklist to support schools re-opening which suggests that medical masks are only required under certain conditions (e.g. for immunocompromised children or those with other diseases, in consultation with the child's medical provider).

65. For these reasons, the sub-group has concluded that its previous advice on face coverings in schools and ELC settings must be maintained. However, the sub-group did advise that schools and ELC settings should consider whether additional guidance, practical demonstrations, or communications for children, young people and staff to support the correct wearing, storage and disposal of face coverings, including the use of hygiene products when doing so, would support better efficacy of face coverings.

66. The Scottish Government will regularly review the policy position on face coverings in light of emerging scientific evidence and advice. It remains our judgement that face coverings provide adequate protection for use in the community and in most workplaces because they are worn in addition to taking other measures, such as physical

distancing, hand hygiene, cleaning and symptom vigilance. The current face covering guidance on the Scottish Government website recommends:

- that face coverings are made of cloth or other textiles and should be two, and preferably three, layers thick and fit snugly while allowing you to breathe easily;
- that schools follow and endorse best practice on how to wash, store, wear and dispose of face coverings; and
- workplaces endorse and support staff to follow the best practice in the use of face coverings.

67. Any decision to use medical grade masks or PPE in schools (or any specific workplace settings) would need to be informed by an organisation risk assessment, undertaken with health and safety experts and public health advisers.

Ventilation

68. The existing heating and ventilation sections within the *Coronavirus: Reducing risks in schools* guidance is still considered to be robust and appropriate.

69. Council teams are meeting regularly to discuss issues relating to heating and ventilation in schools and share expertise to optimise their individual strategies. The period of school closure is being utilised to carry out the assessments and practical mitigations in accord with the current guidance, and this is being done in collaboration with local education and union colleagues. Examples of typical mitigations being carried out in this period are:

- accelerated repair and maintenance of windows and vents;
- procurement and installation of fixed and mobile C02 monitoring equipment; and
- re-allocation of existing spaces to align available ventilation with occupant numbers.

Outbreak management

70. The management of single cases, clusters and outbreaks of COVID-19 is led by local health protection teams (HPTs) alongside local partners, such as schools and local authorities through an Incident Management Team (IMT). A cluster or outbreak of COVID-19 occurs when a school has two or more confirmed cases of COVID-19 within 14 days. If a plausible transmission link between two or more cases is identified within the school setting, this is indicative of an 'outbreak'; if not, it is referred to as a 'cluster'. The previous guidance on this is unchanged.

Testing

71. Local authorities and schools should, as they return on a phased basis from 22 February, make available twice-weekly at-home testing using lateral flow devices at the earliest opportunity, to:

- all primary, secondary and special school staff attending work in local authority, independent and grant-aided schools;
- all ELC and childcare staff attending work in local authority, independent and grant-aided schools; and

- all senior phase learners attending local authority, independent and grant-aided secondary and special schools.

72. Eligible staff include teachers, classroom-based support staff, administrative staff, facilities management staff (cleaners, janitors, etc.), school transport staff and other school-based staff who are critical to the effective delivery of school education.

73. Testing is voluntary and nobody should be required to undergo testing without consent, or excluded from school or work if they do not wish to test. We would encourage school staff and senior phase learners to participate, to contribute to the wellbeing of their school communities.

74. Any person who has had a PCR-confirmed COVID diagnosis in the previous 90 days is not expected to take a further test unless they develop symptoms, in which case they should stay at home and arrange a PCR test via the usual NHS inform route.

75. If staff or learners are working/learning from home, and not attending school, they should not participate. This is because the goal of the programme is to minimise the risks of COVID-19 in the school environment.

76. Step by step guidance has been shared with schools and ELC providers via Objective Connect. This guidance was developed in collaboration with NHS Test and Protect and the UK Department for Health and Social Care to support school and ELC providers in the delivery of the Schools/ELC Asymptomatic Testing Programme. The key features of the programme are as follows:

    - Schools will be provided with packs of Lateral Flow Device (LFD) test kits for staff and senior phase learners.
    - Schools will then be asked to distribute these test kits to consenting staff and senior phase learners. Schools will be asked to keep a log of which kits have been distributed to which individuals – this is a regulatory requirement, in part to ensure that kits can be tracked if there are problems with batches, etc.
    - Staff and senior phase learners will take test kits home and, twice weekly, following clear instructions for use, perform the tests on themselves or with the support of a parent or guardian. They will then register positive, negative and void results on a web-based portal, with the results shared with NHS Test and Protect.
    - The processes that should be followed by individuals depending on a positive, negative or void result are clearly explained in supporting materials. Individuals receiving a positive result must self-isolate immediately and book a PCR test. Contact tracing should begin immediately following the positive LFD test, and may be stood down in the event of a subsequent negative PCR test.
    - Schools will be able to reorder test kits when they need to do so. The precise processes for doing so are still under development.

77. Asymptomatic testing is an additional measure and should not replace other mitigations set out in this guidance. Additionally, asymptomatic staff, student teachers and learners who are negative on LFD testing must not regard themselves or behave as if they are free from infection. Symptomatic staff, student teachers and learners should not use lateral flow tests and must not attend work or school. They must access a PCR test as per their usual symptomatic testing channel. If a symptomatic staff member, student

teacher or learner has used a LFD test and has returned a negative result, they should still self-isolate and arrange a PCR test.

Clinically vulnerable staff and learners (including individuals on the shielding list)

78. Following consideration by clinicians of the increased risks of transmission of the new strain of coronavirus, new guidance for individuals on the shielding list has been issued for the duration of the lockdown period. This now makes clear that:

- **Staff at the highest clinical risk (individuals on the shielding list) should work from home, and if they cannot do so, they should not go into work as long as the area they live or work in is under lockdown.** The Chief Medical Officer issued a letter to everyone on the shielding list on 5 January to advise that your employer cannot arrange for you to work from home, then you should not attend work. If employers cannot make it possible for employees to work from home, they can use this letter (Shielding Notification), which serves a similar purpose to a fit note, as evidence that they should not go into work. A separate GP fit note is not required. The letter is valid up to 31 March to cover any times during which the person is living or working in an area under lockdown.

- This advice remains regardless of whether people have had 1 or 2 doses of the vaccination. We will update this guidance if advice changes as evidence becomes available about the impact of the vaccination.

- If the area where someone on the shielding list is living or working in goes back down to level 4, they are advised to continue to follow the advice about going to work in level 4 areas, regardless of whether they have had 1 or 2 doses of the vaccination. This advice is that people on the shielding list can go into work if it is Covid-safe to do so. It is the employer's responsibility to make the workplace and duties safe and employees also have a responsibility to comply with safe working practices.

- The letter sent by the Chief Medical Officer on 21 December can be used as evidence not to go into work if the workplace and duties can't be made Covid-safe or if it is not possible to travel to work in a Covid-safe way (the current advice at level 4 is not to use public transport), during the times the area where they live or work is at level 4. This letter covers any times during which the area is at level 4 up to 31 March. Again, we will update this guidance if advice changes as we learn more about the impact of the vaccination.

- **Children and young people at the highest clinical risk (individuals on the shielding list) have also been advised by the Chief Medical Officer not to attend school, college or regulated childcare services such as nurseries in person in level 4 areas or during lockdown.** We will update this guidance if this advice changes. However, parents can consult with their child's secondary care (hospital) clinical team who may advise that an individualised risk assessment could be undertaken with the school, college or nursery and arrangements put in place which may allow your child to continue to attend when establishments re-open.

- Arrangements for learning from home will be put in place for children and young people who cannot attend school or college in person due to shielding requirements. The local education service will provide advice on the support available for children who are being asked not to attend school, college or childcare under additional protective measures

79. This lockdown advice does not change the existing level 4 advice, which may replace this exceptional advice following any return to school after lockdown ends.

80. The arrangements for all other clinically vulnerable children, young people and school staff as set out in the reducing risks in schools guidance should be followed. This includes the baseline advice (which applies as standard throughout all levels) and the enhanced protections at Levels 3 and 4. This guidance makes clear that individual risk assessments should be in place for clinically vulnerable staff. Local authorities should ensure that clinical advice is taken fully into account when updating these individual risk assessments and agreeing appropriate mitigations with employees. Updated guidance for pregnant employees is now available and should be followed (note that staff who are both pregnant and on the shielding list should follow the guidance for staff at the highest clinical risk above).

81. Information on shielding, including who would be considered within the highest risk group, is available at Coronavirus (COVID-19): shielding advice and support - gov.scot (www.gov.scot). Where concerns exist, guidance for people with underlying health conditions has been prepared and will continue to be updated. School staff who have underlying health conditions will wish to be aware of this advice in order to inform discussions with their employer, trade union and/or healthcare team in line with the current guidance on reducing risks in schools.

Vaccines for school staff

82. Vaccines are being provided to people on a priority basis as set out by the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) and we will work through to reach other groups as quickly as vaccine supply allows and, hopefully, other vaccines are approved. The JCVI prioritisation list clearly recognises that age presents the greatest risk of serious illness and death from COVID-19 - and therefore it is providing protection to those on that list which is the Scottish Government's priority. The JCVI priority list represents 99% of the preventable mortality from COVID-19 and throughout the delivery of the vaccination programme we will be guided by the clinical expertise of the JCVI, the Medicines and Health Products Regulatory Agency (MHRA), and our own senior clinical advisers.

83. It is hoped that all those on the JCVI prioritisation list will be vaccinated by the end of spring 2021, supplies permitting. A proportion of school staff will fall within the JCVI priority list and will be offered the vaccine in line with this. This includes specific staff working with children and young people with specific complex additional support needs.

84. It is important to note that vaccination does not change the need to continue all current COVID-19 mitigation measures (for both vaccinated and unvaccinated individuals) to protect staff and children and young people from transmission of the virus. A person's vaccine status does NOT change subsequent public health actions or interventions

(including self-isolation) at this time. Vaccinated people should continue to comply with ALL testing regimes as per unvaccinated people, until guidance on this changes. Therefore those who work in close contact with children and young people, should continue to be assessed for the use of PPE and other protection measures.

85. Consideration is underway as to whether other key worker groups, including school staff and childcare workers could be considered a priority for vaccination, once the clinically high-risk groups have been vaccinated.

Remote learning support

Curriculum, learning and teaching

86. Practitioners across Scotland have been providing remote learning of high quality for senior phase and BGE learners. Positive feedback on remote learning from parents, carers and learners provides reassurance that for many learners good progress is being made covering the required course content. Schools should continue to encourage and monitor learners' engagement in their remote learning provision.

87. The school and local authority should consider how best to organise staff to enable remote learning to continue for those learners who will not return to in-school learning during this phase. The guidance on reducing risks in schools includes guidance on contingency planning. The advice is based on the assumption that practitioners know their learners best, and can arrange learning which is appropriate to the needs and circumstances of their learners. It should also be assumed that learners and parents/carers will be involved appropriately and fully informed of the contingency plans in place. All schools and local authorities should have well-developed plans for remote learning. These should be regularly reviewed to ensure they are current and appropriate for fully remote learning, and updated as required.

88. The Education Scotland website includes a **single landing page** for all guidance and practical support on remote learning. This includes updated practice-focused guidance on remote learning prepared by Education Scotland, in partnership with the COVID-19 Education Recovery Group. The advice sets out a shared understanding and expectations of what remote learning means for schools and settings across Scotland. Practitioners should continue to apply this understanding to their own specific context and use it as a basis for professional engagement and development.

89. Resources to support remote learning in non-school settings have been developed within local authorities, through Education Scotland and Regional Improvement Collaboratives, including national initiatives and partnerships. This offer includes access to **live**, **recorded** and **supported** learning resources as part of the National e-Learning Offer.

- **Live** – e-Sgoil provides a range of live lesson programmes covering ages 3 to 18 augmenting the work of classroom.

- **Recorded** – Teachers from across Scotland have developed a series of over 1000 recorded lessons for BGE and senior phase available through Glow by local authorities signing up to ClickView, free of charge.

- **Supported** – Teachers in their subject networks have shared and developed resources for online access and use. Nearly 17,000 supported resources are available.

90. In addition, the National Improvement Hub provides learning resources, webinars and links to Glow Connect, a resource where teachers can get information, help and support for Glow. Regional Improvement Collaborative Partnerships of local authorities have further information and support on Curriculum and blended learning for teachers which can be accessed through Glow. Live and recorded webinars and blogs for practitioners with advice on learning and teaching online and on making the best use of digital platforms continue to be made available through digilearn.scot. Further innovative work is underway via the regional improvement collaboratives. As a further aspect to its national offer, Education Scotland's Scotland Learns provides additional learning at home activities.

Further information on e-Sgoil

- A Lockdown Live programme was put in place week beginning 11 January and will run until the end of this current period of restrictions.

- The Early Years (including P1) learning space is available at any time. In addition, 10 of the existing senior phase study support webinars are now available during the day and a programme for Gaelic Medium and Gaelic Learners is in place.

- E-Sgoil programmes are in place for Early Level and for First to Third/Fourth Levels BGE. The programmes are designed to complement the curriculum and remote learning being provided by schools and local authorities across Scotland. The programmes are developed iteratively, in collaboration with schools and partners, building on what works. They will adapt and change in response to need.

- Live lessons for secondary Broad General Education are delivered in a rolling series of four, two-week programmes. Details and timetables are available on the e-Sgoil website. http://www.e-sgoil.com/esgoilbgeoffer2020/.

- The Senior Phase offer is also live on the e-Sgoil website http://www.e-sgoil.com/seniorphase20/ and will include Easter study support.

Digital inclusion

91. Local authorities and schools should continue the work they have been undertaking in relation to tackling digital exclusion. This includes the provision of devices and connectivity solutions to support educational continuity when children and young people are learning outside of the school environment. This local activity is supplemented by the Scottish Government's £25m investment in digital devices and connectivity solutions designed to combat digital exclusion in school-aged children and young people.

Wellbeing support

92. The extended period of remote learning and the phased return to school present challenges for teacher, learner and parental wellbeing. Local authorities and schools have significant support in place to support children and young people's mental health and wellbeing. Education Scotland have provided complementary information on Mental health & wellbeing : supports for practitioners, parents, carers & young people to provide further sources of support whilst children and young people are learning from home. This is in addition to the earlier resources provided to support children and young people's health and wellbeing.

Assessments for senior learners being affected by these decisions

93. In acknowledgement of COVID-19 related disruption to young people's education this academic year, examinations for National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher courses in 2021 have been cancelled. On 8 December the Deputy First Minister outlined to Parliament that National Qualifications in 2020-2021 will be awarded based on teacher judgement of evidence of demonstrated attainment, supported by local and national quality assurance processes.

94. The National Qualifications 2021 Group is considering the impact that the current arrangements are having on schools delivering National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher courses under the alternative certification model. This has included delaying the submission date for provisional results to 18 June, and the group are considering what further contingencies may be needed.

95. During this period the priority for schools and colleges should be to maximise learning and teaching time. Given the move to remote learning and the challenges learners face, the assessment of learner evidence cannot be undertaken unless young people have the foundation of teaching and learning of course content. This will impact on the timing of assessment, which can take place in the later stages of the 2020-21 session.

96. The access to schools for some senior phase learners from 22 February is for the purposes of facilitating learning which cannot be completed outside of school facilities. It is not intended that learners are given access to schools solely for the purpose of undertaking assessment at this point. Technical guidance providing detail on the specific circumstances under which learners should be returning is being provided separately.

97. The latest communications from the National Qualifications 2021 Group can be found at: https://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/93778.html

School meals

98. Under the provision of section 53A of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980, local authorities must promote the availability of school lunches at all schools, and any other educational establishments under their management, and they must encourage all learners **in attendance** to consume those school lunches. In the case of free school meals, education authorities are also required to take all reasonable steps to ensure that every pupil who is entitled to free school lunches receives them.

Free school meals provision

99. The arrangements for provision of free school meals to children and young people who are learning at home should continue. Local authorities and schools should continue to provide free school meals or alternatives, for children and young people who are eligible for free school meals.

100. These can be provided using a range of methods in line with family preference including: cash payments to families of eligible children; supermarket vouchers; home deliveries or through attendance at school. These options are not exhaustive and there may be alternatives which would better suit local needs and circumstances.

101. Local authorities and schools will use different approaches depending on their individual circumstances and in response to local need. These approaches may also need to change due to health protection advice.

102. From 22 February all children in P1-P3 who are attending school should receive the universal free school meal provision. All other children and young people in P4-S6 who are eligible should continue to receive a free school meal or alternative. Local authorities should continue to enable anyone whose financial circumstances have changed and now meet the eligibility criteria to apply for free school meals.

103. Information on eligibility criteria is available from https://www.mygov.scot/school-meals/.

Provision for special diets

104. Local authorities and schools will continue to ensure that children and young people with special diets or allergies are catered for. No matter which option is chosen to provide meals to children and young people, care needs to be taken to check whether any have allergies or special diets before food is provided.

School trips

105. Guidance on school trips is available at Coronavirus (COVID-19): guidance for school visits and trips - gov.scot (www.gov.scot). This currently advises that no school trips are recommended. This will continue to be considered for day trips as schools re-open more fully, and for residential trips by the end of March 2021. Based on the advice from the Advisory Sub-group from its 9 February meeting, short local excursions which promote outdoor learning (such as a short visit to a local park or green space) will be permitted for those learners in school, as long as these are appropriately risk assessed.

Communicating with families

106. Local authorities and schools should ensure arrangements are put in place to communicate what the phased return from 22 February means for individual families as soon as is practically possible, and continue to communicate regularly thereafter. Consideration should be given to matters such as the needs of separated parents (having regard to the appropriateness of both parents being provided with information), parents for whom English is an additional language and parents/carers with disabilities.

The importance of adhering to mitigations should also be reinforced with all members of the school community.

107. Work is also underway with partners at national level to develop information for children, young people and their families about the phased return; for both families with children returning to nursery and school from 22 February and those with children continuing to learn at home. It aims to provide clarity for parents, school staff and children and young people on how the scientific evidence/clinical advice translates into Government decisions and help to reduce anxiety for children, young people, parents and school staff through positive messaging on what is in place (testing, vaccinations, other mitigations etc). The importance of compliance with all protection measures (in school and in the community) will be integral to this.

108. Guidance for early learning and childcare settings, schools and local authorities on communicating with and reporting to parents during COVID-19 and supporting parents and pupils with learning at home during COVID-19 is available on Education Scotland's National Improvement Hub.

109. Information to support parents includes:

- A Parent Club COVID-19 internet microsite, which contains advice on working from home whilst caring for children, advice on helping children with remote and blended learning as well as links to advice and support resources for parents of children with additional support needs.

- Education Scotland's Parentzone Scotland website includes advice for parents, families and practitioners on supporting children and young people's learning during COVID-19.

- The National Parent Forum Nutshell guide on blended learning, published in August 2020. This joins further Nutshells on Supporting Learning at Home during "lockdown" and on online safety.

- Education Scotland's Scotland Learns initiative provides newsletters and online resources for teachers and for parents/carers.

110. When children and young people are learning at home, schools and local authorities should ensure communication with families to maximise engagement in learning, offering any support or advice that may be needed. This may include, for example, local authorities working to ensure provision of devices and/or internet connectivity where necessary.

111. Young Scot have updated their guidance for children and young people to include information on the arrangements for the start of term from January 2021. This can be accessed through the Young Scot website: Going to School During the Coronavirus (COVID-19) Pandemic | Young Scot

Annex – Supplementary guidance for residential boarding/hostel accommodation in educational facilities

Application

1. All schools, including residential boarding/hostel accommodation in educational facilities, should have regard to the measures set out in the main school guidance and apply them as appropriate in their specific settings. This supplementary guidance is intended for school care accommodation services, provided for the purpose of learners in attendance at a public, independent or grant-aided school, and consisting of the provision of residential accommodation. For clarity, this includes residential, special and secure accommodation. These include independent boarding school facilities and residence halls provided by local authority secondary schools.

Supplementary information

2. As set out in 'Arrangements for the phased reopening of schools in February/March 2021', from 22 February children in P1-P3 will return to school full time and some young people in the senior phase will return to school to carry out critical practical tasks related to National Qualifications. Children that meet the definitions of vulnerable children (including children and young people with significant additional support needs) and children of key workers will also be in school. All other learners should continue to be provided with an appropriate timetable of remote learning until schools reopen more fully, which will be at the earliest opportunity.

3. No schools are expected to commence face-to-face teaching (other than for the children and young people described in paragraph 2) until otherwise advised, as a precautionary measure in light of the latest developments in the path of the virus.

4. Regular reviews of these arrangements will continue to be undertaken, taking into account the latest evidence about the new variant and progress in reducing community transmission levels. Arrangements following reviews will be communicated at the earliest opportunity. It is acknowledged that boarding school pupils, parents, host families and schools need to be able to plan return safely, including for those travelling from other UK nations, or from outside the UK, and further guidance on the safe return to boarding/hostel accommodation will be prepared in advance of fuller reopening and as increased numbers of pupils are expected to return.

5. This means that the majority of learners who 'board' at their school, whether independent, grant aided or local authority provision, should continue **not** to return to school. Independent schools, like those in state provision, should provide remote learning – including for boarders. Where boarders are the children of key workers, they should look to access local childcare arrangements such as childminders or informal childcare, in line with current guidance.

6. Where learners are considered to be vulnerable (in line with definitions set out earlier in this guidance), particularly those attending residential special schools, schools should assess how to effectively continue to meet their needs, including, where necessary, through provision of a residential place.

7. Senior phase learners who are normally boarders in local authority provided residence halls or hostels and who would need to return to this accommodation in order to attend school even on a limited basis for the purpose of practical assessment for the alternative certification model for national qualifications may do so. However, such learners should remain in their residential "bubbles" for the majority of the time and attend school only to support learning in practical subjects that cannot be delivered remotely (as provided for all senior phase learners).

8. It is considered that given the wider geographical spread of learners who would normally board in independent schools in Scotland, the distance that may need to be travelled, including potentially overseas travel, that this presents a higher risk. Travel to return to boarding houses for those boarders in independent schools in the senior phase for the purpose of completing the learning and teaching of critical practical work in relation to qualifications in 2021 that can only be carried out in school, should therefore be kept to the absolute minimum and only where there is no other alternative in order to achieve qualifications. Schools should firstly consider whether there are options for remote or more local provision. If a return to boarding is necessary for these purposes then schools should follow all relevant mitigations, including minimising overall time in school for this group, and bubble arrangements which are as small as practically possible and would endure through all activities to minimise mixing. Ideally these bubbles would also be with others from a similar area and age specific. Further detailed guidance will be provided on this to aid planning.

9. We are aware that the recent announcements to the extension of restrictions on travel into Scotland Coronavirus (COVID-19): international travel and quarantine - gov.scot (www.gov.scot), including the introduction of managed isolation, will need to be considered fully ahead of any international travel taking place for boarding pupils. The details of this policy are still being considered and further information will be given as soon as possible.