

# Coronavirus Update

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education trade union



## **Coronavirus (COVID-19): EIS Advice for Educational Psychologists on safe work practices during the pandemic.**

### **1. Introduction**

The British Psychological Society<sup>1</sup> recently reported that many psychologists were concerned about the return to face-to-face work in some services owing to lack of space to maintain social distancing in offices and in classrooms with large numbers of students and greater risk. In addition, psychologists who were shielding or caring for vulnerable people at home felt especially anxious about safety at work.

This EIS advice note aims to update EIS Educational Psychologist members on the provision of educational psychology services in local authorities and schools in the context of COVID-19.

It is designed to provide additional guidance to reflect the distinct nature of the delivery of educational psychology services and ensure that EIS Reps and Educational Psychologists are aware of their entitlements under Health and Safety legislation and of the specific considerations which should be assessed

### **2. Existing EIS advice and resources**

The EIS understands this is a very emotionally stressful, worrying and isolating time for many of our members. The mental health impacts of Covid-19 should not be underestimated.

Throughout this pandemic, the EIS has produced a wide range of advice and resources on COVID-19 and the mitigations to be put in place to limit the spread of the virus in schools and other workplaces. Details of EIS advice can be found via the following weblink.

<https://www.eis.org.uk/Health-And-Safety/COVID19>

In addition to this, the EIS has collated advice and resources on mental health and well-being. These highlight resources to access with young people and can be found via this weblink.

<https://www.eis.org.uk/Teacher-Health-And-Wellbeing-Resource/Youngpeople>

The EIS has, also, produced comprehensive Advice to School Reps and Members on revised Risk Assessments.

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<sup>1</sup> The impact of Covid-19 on the wellbeing of psychologists November 2020

<https://www.bps.org.uk/coronavirus-resources/professional/impact-wellbeing-psychologists>

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

Members should refer to this generic advice in addition to the specific advice contained in this guidance.

[The EIS checklist](#) should be used as a guide when considering Health and Safety issues and CERG (COVID-19 Education Recovery Group) [Guidelines](#) on issues relating to the control of Covid-19 within the workplace.

### **3. The current context**

The [Scottish Government's Strategic Framework](#) is now operational. The document sets out the Scottish Government's strategic approach to suppress the virus to the lowest possible level. You can find out exactly which coronavirus lockdown restrictions apply to you by using the [Scottish Government's postcode checker](#).

The Scottish Government made changes to the local COVID protection levels in some local authority areas, placing 11 into Level 4 at 6pm on Friday 20 November. This is the highest level of restriction. The areas are listed [here](#) along with details of the restrictions at each level.

The EIS has published an additional FAQ update for vulnerable members working in level 4 local authority areas. It can be [found on the EIS website](#).

### **4. Travel arrangements and homeworking**

Scottish Government's Strategic Framework makes it clear that, until it is deemed safe for workplaces to reopen, working from home and working flexibly will remain the default. Visits to bases and/or offices should only be for essential purposes, such as photocopying resources, and should be the exception rather than the rule. Otherwise, working from home is to continue, when not in a school. Where homeworking is not possible, employers are encouraged to manage travel demand through staggered start times and flexible working patterns. The practice of using rotas to confirm attendance at bases and/or offices to perform tasks which could be done elsewhere should be actively discouraged.

It remains the case that [essential travel](#) is still allowed, and this includes for work and education, when it cannot be done from home - for example, to support student safety and wellbeing and to provide support services. However, there should not be a presumption to a 'near normal' practice expectation in terms of physical school visits. Consideration should be given to using digital technology alternatives: activities which can be completed remotely, such as teacher consultations, child planning meetings and/or support and advisory work to staff and parents, should be done off-site in line with Scottish Government guidance to work from home where possible.

In addition to the above, educational psychologists should refer to operational arrangements agreed with the trade unions within each Council. This should include reference to the new Tier System currently in operation which may reflect any additional local restrictions in particular Councils.

## **5. Risk assessments**

In terms of risk assessments, the Scottish Government advice is that they need to be conducted by employers in conjunction with trade unions and LNCTs.

The Health and Safety at Work Act 1974, and associated Regulations, state that your employer is obliged to provide you with a safe place of work. A risk assessment will allow the employer to identify hazards and risk factors that have the potential to cause harm. There are five steps in a risk assessment:

- Identify the hazards
- Decide who might be harmed and how
- Evaluate the risks and decide on precautions
- Record the significant findings
- Review the assessment and update if necessary

It is of vital importance that you are consulted as to the robustness and effectiveness of the updated risk assessment and ensuing plan. Your EIS rep must be consulted on the updated risk assessment prior to implementation.

Reps and members should:

- Ensure that there is consultation on the updated risk assessment.
- Familiarise yourself with your establishment's updated risk assessment.
- Reach collective agreement on a satisfactory risk assessment.
- If there is not an updated risk assessment in place, or it does not adequately address the concerns of members, or is not followed, then your local association secretary, should be informed by the EIS rep or nominated individual.
- If you reasonably believe that the arrangements in your establishment would put you at personal risk, seek advice from your local association secretary.

There should be additional risk assessments for vulnerable groups, e.g. older staff, disabled staff, pregnant women, new mothers, and BAME staff.

Risk assessments should be kept under review as circumstances change.

## **6. Considerations prior to establishment visits**

All direct contact should be risk assessed and planned, taking account of local guidance and the public health guidance.

Best practice would suggest no more than one establishment visit per day (this is in some of the LNCT agreements which have been made).

Movement between schools should be kept to a minimum.

Where adults cannot keep 2m distance and are interacting face-to-face with other adults and/or children and young people for more than 15 minutes, face coverings should always be worn.

A definition of face coverings (which should not be confused with PPE) can be found in [Covid19: staying safe and protecting others](#)

## **7. Planning direct contact**

When planning direct contact with establishments, children or families, members are advised to:

- make clear the purpose of the visit.
- include transport arrangements that minimise health risk.
- have the agreement of your line manager.
- minimise the number of contacts to those that are essential only.
- check the availability of adequate space within the setting or establishment environment to allow for physical distancing.
- checking that the school can safely accommodate your visit.
- discuss the desirability of the visit if there are already several other services or agencies visiting the establishment that day.

## **8. Arriving at the establishment**

Check on arrival if there is any new information that suggests anyone has symptoms.

Risk assessments need to be in place for the safe delivery of all activities and the school risk assessments should consider safety precautions are in place for all "visitors" to the school.

Adequate facilities should be available for hand hygiene, including handwashing facilities that are adequately stocked or have alcohol-based hand rub at key areas.

Outdoor hand basins or hand sanitisers should be available at entry/exit points, to allow all building users to wash/sanitise their hands as they enter/leave the building.

Practitioners should avoid touching surfaces, avoid touching their own face, and keep two metres away from other people.

## **9. The EIS**

If you have concerns about any of the above, or are looking for support in keeping yourself safe, contact your EIS Rep in the first instance. If you do not have a Rep, or if you are unable to reach them, your Local Association Secretary will be able to help you.

All details and further advice can be found on the EIS website.