

Education Recovery: Key Actions and Next Steps

**The contribution of education to Scotland's
COVID Recovery**

October 2021

MINISTERIAL FOREWORD



As Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills, I am acutely conscious of the impact the pandemic has had on our education system, the communities it serves and the people who work in it.

The unavoidable closure of education settings at the height of the crisis has reinforced to all of us what a critical role our schools, early learning and childcare settings and universities and colleges play in our society.

The dedication and innovation that our education professionals have shown – and continue to so do on a daily basis - to support children and young people during the pandemic has been truly inspirational, and I thank them sincerely for their efforts.

However, we know that some learners will have suffered adverse consequences, whether in terms of their health and wellbeing or their attainment. The pandemic has continued to bring into sharp focus some of the inequalities that persist in our education system, as has been the case in countries all over the world.

I am determined that those impacts will be addressed, and that every child and young person in Scotland will have the opportunity to fulfil their potential as they progress through the education system and on to positive destinations.

We have been working to protect children and young people from the worst impacts of Covid-19, and to support them to recover where they have been affected, from the outset of the pandemic. This document sets out the action we and our partners in the education system have taken to date, and some key next steps in the coming period to support our learners to achieve their goals in life.

The Scottish Government cannot deliver on these ambitions alone. A wide range of valued partners will play critical roles in doing so at all levels of the education system. I am grateful to them for their support, and for all they are doing to understand and address the needs of each individual child and young person in Scotland.

Nor can the impacts of the pandemic on our children and young people be addressed by the education system alone. Our focus on education recovery is one part of our strategic approach to recovery from COVID, and must be closely aligned

to our work on wider issues, which are set out in the Scottish Government's 'Covid Recovery Strategy for a Fairer Scotland'. This strategy identifies three key outcomes as most likely to have the greatest impact on tackling the inequality and disadvantage highlighted by Covid: financial security for low income households; wellbeing of children and young people; and good, green jobs and fair work. Each of these is, of course, inextricably linked to our own agenda within education.

The pandemic is not over. We know how unpredictable the virus can be. As we take forward the next steps set out in this document we will continue to monitor the evidence, prepare for a range of scenarios with our partners, and adapt our approach where necessary as part of our wider strategic response to Covid recovery.

Whatever may transpire, I remain determined to maintain a focus on excellence and equity for all our children and young people, and I am confident that the actions and next steps we set out here will help us achieve that.

Shirley-Anne Somerville MSP

Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills

1. OVERVIEW AND CONTEXT

Introduction

The health harms of COVID-19 are not over, and the Scottish Government will continue to ensure that our approach to restrictions in society and in education settings is necessary and proportionate, and informed by evidence and data. However, the significant reduction in serious illness, hospitalisation and deaths that we are seeing as a result of vaccination means that we have now reached a transition point in our approach to dealing with COVID-19.

Our revised [strategic intent](#), which is "to suppress the virus to a level consistent with alleviating its harms while we recover and rebuild for a better future", provides a timely opportunity to review the focus of our education activity, and to ensure that practitioners can increasingly get back to doing what they do best - helping our children and young people to enjoy their education, and to learn and develop to the best of their abilities.

This Scottish Government document outlines to all our partners – including children and young people themselves, families, communities, and those responsible for delivering a high-quality education system – our ongoing response to the impacts of the pandemic on education in Scotland, and sets out some key next steps we will take to address them.

It summarises how we plan to build on the innovation and strengths that have emerged during the pandemic, and incorporates key principles including diversity, equality and sustainability. Critically, we must address the harms caused by the pandemic, and champion a vision that supports children and young people to continue to progress their learning and achievement.

We know that a 'one-size-fits-all' approach will not be effective, nor would it be consistent with our Getting It Right For Every Child ([GIRFEC](#)) approach. Instead, the needs of the individual learner must be at the centre of our actions. Schools, teachers and early years practitioners will know best how to help individual children, including identifying those who need extra support with specific subjects or with their health and wellbeing, and what type of support is needed. That is why we will continue to maintain empowerment as a central tenet of our response.

Work to support children and young people has been a top priority since the very start of the pandemic, and over £450m of additional funding has already been committed during 2020/21 and 2021/22 as part of education recovery. £240m of that total has already been provided for the recruitment of extra staff to ensure resilience and to provide additional support for learning and teaching. In addition a further £145.5m is being added permanently to the local government settlement from April 2022. This will allow local authorities to offer sustained employment of additional teachers and support staff.

Further significant funding is being made available for a range of initiatives that are important to education recovery, including the provision of free school breakfasts and lunches all year round for all children in P1-7, digital devices for every child, abolition

of fees for instrumental music tuition, removal of core curriculum charges, and the full rollout of 1,140 hours of high-quality Early Learning and Childcare (ELC).

This document, which focuses primarily on schools and Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) settings, sets out how that investment is delivering benefits for all our children and young people.

In all of this, the Scottish Government does not underestimate the challenges ahead. In its [report](#) published in March 2021, Audit Scotland recommended that the Scottish Government, Education Scotland and councils should “continue to ensure a coordinated policy response within and across government (for example with health and children and families services) when planning to improve longer-term outcomes for children and young people and delivering the education recovery response to the equality impacts of Covid-19” and that is what we intent to do.

We will continue to listen to, and work with, all parts of the education system and our communities in order to understand the ongoing impacts of the pandemic. Where the evidence tells us we need to amend plans or change course in order to ensure the best possible support for our children and young people, we will do so.

Our aims – a renewed focus on excellence and equity

The Scottish education system benefits from a strong and shared vision as set out in the [National Improvement Framework](#). This remains true as we work to recover from the pandemic:

- **Excellence** through raising attainment: ensuring that every child achieves the highest standards in literacy and numeracy, as well as the knowledge and skills necessary to shape their future as successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens, and effective contributors;
- Achieving **equity**: ensuring every child has the same opportunity to succeed, with a particular focus on closing the poverty related attainment gap.

This vision is underpinned by four key priorities:

- Improvement in attainment, particularly in literacy and numeracy;
- Closing the attainment gap between the most and least disadvantaged children and young people;
- Improvement in children and young people's health and wellbeing; and
- Improvement in employability skills and sustained, positive school-leaver destinations for all young people.

While the global pandemic has forced us to reflect upon learning in new and unexpected ways, our fundamental ambition around these outcomes remains undiluted. As well as the moral imperative to support our current generation of children and young people, this is also an essential investment in the future of our society. We must all invest time, hope and attention in their social development and educational achievements, and we must ensure our work is underpinned by a rights-based approach, shaped by what children, young people and their families and carers tell us.

There is a well-established and ambitious programme of work in our education settings that will help us achieve these aims, involving partners across the system. This programme of work is flexible enough to be adapted and targeted towards addressing the impacts of the pandemic on children and young people, making use of the additional resources that have been, and will be, provided to local authorities to support this approach.

First and foremost, we will maintain a focus on the health and wellbeing of children and young people. This is a fundamental underpinning for effective learning. Alongside that, our partners will ensure that work in schools and early learning and childcare settings is appropriately tailored to address any identified impacts on individual children's learning, development and attainment. The education workforce has responded incredibly to the challenges of the last 18 months, and we know that ongoing support for them as professionals will be integral to these aims.

We remain mindful of the [International Council of Education Advisors' \(ICEA\)](#) statement that a "focus on capacity building at all levels within the teaching profession must continue to be the core of the Scottish improvement agenda and its desire to secure an enduring impact on the country's future prosperity." Many of the actions, funding commitments and next steps set out in this document are aimed at ensuring we have more high quality staff in schools, with the time and resources available to them to train and plan to help secure that enduring impact.

The 2021 National Improvement Framework and Improvement Plan highlighted four key principles of our immediate response to COVID-19. As we progress from here, each of these remains equally valid:

- **Partnership and collaboration** – we are working with our partners to develop an empowered and collaborative system, where everyone's contribution is heard and valued and improving children and young people's outcomes is at the heart of everything we do.
- **Data and evidence led** – continuing to be driven by data and both qualitative and quantitative evidence (including lived experiences), recognising where we see opportunities for improvement and building on 'what works'.
- **Agility and flexibility** – our response to the pandemic has highlighted the importance of creating a more flexible and resilient system, which can operate just as well in a crisis as it does under more normal circumstances.
- **A priority on equity** – as the ICEA commented: "the pandemic reinforces the issue of equity as the defining agenda of our time." The pandemic has disproportionately impacted the poorest individuals, families and communities in our society.

The actions we are taking with our partners to achieve excellence and equity in our education system as we emerge from the pandemic include a focus on achieving outcomes in the following key areas:

- Expanding high quality **Early Learning and Childcare**, in recognition of its contribution to improved development and educational outcomes for children
- The promotion of **health and wellbeing**, including mental health

- Supporting **learning and attainment** as part of our agenda for excellence, including by listening to the voices of learners and parents and supporting school communities to engage as restrictions are eased
- Achieving **equity**, so that every child and young person can thrive and have the best opportunity to succeed
- **Additional Support for Learning**, so that children and young people with additional support needs can learn, flourish and fulfil their potential
- **National Qualifications**, ensuring our Senior Phase **awards and qualifications**, and how they are assessed, meet young peoples' needs and equip them with the skills and knowledge needed to achieve their ambitions
- Supporting **positive destinations** for young people
- **Support for the workforce**, as we know that practitioners will need support for their own wellbeing as they continue to play a crucial role in supporting children and young people.
- **Monitoring and reporting outcomes**, to ensure we maintain transparency and openness on the progress that is being made, and to identify at the earliest stage where any additional work or change of course is required.

Further detail on the actions we are taking under these headings, and some key next steps, is set out in the rest of this document.

The scale and nature of the challenge

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted upon educational delivery across the world; the impacts and experiences of children and young people in Scotland are common to those in many other countries.

During periods of lockdown, some learners will have had positive experiences, enjoying the extra time with family and developing their digital skills and independent learning. Research shows us, however, that COVID-19 has had adverse consequences on the health and wellbeing of some learners, as well as their attainment. [The Advisory Subgroup on Education and Children's Issues \('the subgroup'\)](#) reported:

- There is clear evidence that time out of school has a detrimental effect on children and young people's wellbeing, including impacts on development and mental health harms. The Sub-Group noted that evidence suggests the mental health of adolescents is particularly affected. These detrimental effects are particularly prevalent for children and young people who are vulnerable to poorer outcomes because of adverse circumstances they are experiencing;
- School closures put educational outcomes at risk, especially for vulnerable children and young people (this was a key factor in decision-making around the provision of emergency hubs and phased return to schools during and after lockdown); and
- COVID-19 increases educational and social inequities for children and young people.
- In Scotland, the report ['Lockdown Lowdown 3: What young people in Scotland think as lockdown begins to ease'](#) which is delivered by partners Young Scot, Scottish Youth Parliament and YouthLink Scotland, and published in July 2021, provides a number of rich findings, including:

- Around three quarters of respondents in primary school were happy to be back to in-person learning.
- Around three quarters of respondents in secondary school had returned to school in person (76%). When asked if they were happy with the way they were being taught, the majority of respondents who were attending in person selected 'Yes' (85%). Respondents who were undertaking blended learning were also mostly happy (60%), whereas only 38% of those who were doing distance learning stated that they were happy with this method.
- Respondents were asked if they felt prepared for the assessments towards their qualifications. More respondents disagreed than agreed that they felt prepared, with 44% selecting 'Strongly disagree' or 'Disagree'. Around a fifth (22%) selected 'Strongly agree' or 'Agree'.
- When asked if there was anything that they would like changed about their educational arrangements, most respondents described difficulties with the assessment programme that had been put in place. Other key themes included a preference for learning in school as much as possible and difficulties learning in their home environment.

Further, as cited by the subgroup, we know that these impacts will not have been felt evenly by children and young people. For example, the Education Scotland and Scottish Government [Equity Audit](#) highlights that socio-economically disadvantaged children may have been impacted disproportionately, and suggests a number of key factors behind that outcome.

We also know that many children and young people experienced greater levels of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and trauma during the pandemic (including abuse, bereavement, domestic abuse) and/or pre-existing experiences of trauma were exacerbated, for example, due to decreased access to supportive relationships and heightened anxiety and fear. For some children and young people, this will impact directly on their ability to learn and thrive at school, in some cases for the first time, and they will need additional help and support to overcome these challenges.

Partnership and collaboration

Audit Scotland recognised that “those involved in planning, delivering and supporting school education were working well together prior to the pandemic. This strong foundation helped them to collaborate to deliver a rapid response to COVID-19 in exceptionally challenging circumstances”.

The overview of action to date and key next steps set out in this document has been developed through engagement with key partners, including the COVID-19 Education Recovery Group (CERG). This approach recognises that success depends on us continuing to work collectively and collaboratively. We will continue to work in partnership with the education sector to make sure that, collectively, we are supporting positive outcomes for all children and young people.

It is crucial that children and young people themselves are given the opportunity to have a say in the decisions that affect them. Children and young people organisations have told us that, at the beginning of the pandemic, the voices of children and young people were not captured and were not responded to in an

effective way, as part of the decision-making process. We have sought to improve our approach during the course of the past 12 months. For example, in October 2020 we invited an MSYP to join the Covid Education Recovery Group (CERG), and between November 2020 and June 2021 we funded the Education Recovery Youth Panel, which has provided a number of reports to government. As we move forward, we will further strengthen this approach by appointing a Children and Young People's Education Council, and by giving that Council parity of esteem with the Scottish Education Council. In addition, we will continue to engage with children and young people organisations in order to seek their expert advice and challenge across all of our policy-making and decision-making processes.

This principle is even more important in the context of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation) (Scotland) Bill, which was unanimously passed by Parliament in March 2021. The Bill will deliver a fundamental shift in the way children's rights are respected, protected and fulfilled in Scotland; and will help to make Scotland the best place in the world to grow up. We will continue to work with public authorities, children, young people and their families and children's rights stakeholders to ensure this landmark Bill puts children's rights at the heart of public authority decision-making and service delivery.

The new Children and Young People's Education Council and the inclusion of young people as members of the Scottish Education Council, will be critical methods to facilitate this engagement, but we will take wider steps to integrate this approach right across our education policies and decision-making, outlined further in section 4.

A whole-system approach

As part of the Scottish Government's wider work on COVID recovery, led by the Deputy First Minister, work is underway to ensure that our approach to recovery maximises every possible benefit for all in Scotland. Through this work, we have a real opportunity to ensure a cohesive and cross-governmental strategic approach to COVID Recovery for Children and Young People, taking a holistic approach to supporting and getting it right for every child and young person so they can thrive.

This will span our work on, for example: Keeping the Promise to improve lives for care experienced children, young people and families; supporting children and young people's mental health and wellbeing; family support; early years investment; free school meals; attainment; positive destinations; and child poverty – all through a rights-based lens which supports Scotland's future workforce to make the most of their opportunities.

The actions on education recovery are nested within a wider set of important policy priorities that are being progressed in tandem. There are connections and interdependencies between all of these – for example, education can help lift children and young people out of poverty, and progress on child poverty can support improvements in attainment – and, together, they will help to develop a system that takes us to the next phase in our agenda for Scottish education.

Recovery, Reform and Improvement

The pandemic has created new challenges for Scotland's children and young people and brought existing challenges into even sharper relief. The recent report by the OECD "[Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence: Into the Future](#)" confirmed that Curriculum for Excellence remains the right foundation for education in Scotland. However, it also makes clear that it has not been implemented in such a way to reach its full potential, and that we need to increase the pace of improvement, tackle unwarranted variation in outcomes, and support and empower schools and teachers as the people who know their learners best.

To achieve this, now more than ever, the education system needs to be organised in the right way in order to do everything it can to provide the highest quality of support for children, schools and ELC settings.

The OECD review includes important recommendations around the clarity and coherence of the institutions that support our education system. Professor Ken Muir has been appointed as an independent advisor to advise on next steps in achieving this clarity and coherence, specifically in relation to the functions of Education Scotland and the SQA. We have already announced that the SQA will be replaced, that we will consider the creation of a new, specialist agency responsible for curriculum and assessment, that inspection will be removed from Education Scotland and that we will consider what further reform of Education Scotland is required. Professor Muir started work on this on 2 August 2021 and it is expected to take around six months to conclude. He will be supported by an Expert Panel and a Practitioner and Stakeholder Advisory Group. Further detail on this work is available here: [Scottish Government Education Reform](#)

In addition to this nationally focused work, we will also be considering what reforms need to be taken forward regionally and locally. The outcomes of research into the impact of Regional Improvement Collaboratives will be published in October, and we will continue implementing our manifesto commitment to further school empowerment by devolving more powers and financial control to schools.

Work is also well underway to refresh the Scottish Attainment Challenge (SAC) from 2022-23, drawing upon a range of evidence. We are working with stakeholders across the education sector, including seeking the views of children and young people to develop a new SAC framework to ensure a continued focus on using education to improve outcomes for children and young people most impacted by poverty. Taking account of evidence from the national Equity Audit and other sources which clearly highlight the particularly significant impact of Covid-19 on those living in poverty, the programme will remain focused on delivering additional targeted support to these learners. To support a greater focus on local approaches and address aspects of unacceptable variation we will introduce a more streamlined accountability framework across all local authorities, with clear links to the National Improvement Framework to support accelerated progress in closing the poverty related attainment gap. We aim to launch this new iteration of the SAC in Autumn 2021 to allow schools and local authorities to prepare for implementation from Spring 2022.

Education Recovery: Key actions and next steps

Further information on the work we are doing to reform and improve the education system in line with the recommendations of the OECD, Audit Scotland, and other expert bodies will be made available in due course.

2. EARLY LEARNING AND CHILDCARE (ELC)

[Evidence](#) shows that many children and families have been negatively affected by the impact of COVID-19. The pandemic has taken a toll on the mental health of parents of young children, particularly mothers who are young or who are from [BAME communities](#), in part due to the [impact](#) of social isolation resulting from reduced support from wider family and friends. For some of our youngest learners, the Covid Early Years Resilience and Impact Survey (CEYRIS) [found](#) negative [impacts](#) on their sleep, mood, behaviour and social and emotional development, and concerns have been raised about the [impact](#) on children's communication and language development. Children and families who were already facing disadvantage are likely to have suffered greater impact than their more advantaged peers.

Early learning and childcare (ELC) plays a vital role in supporting families and we know that attending high quality ELC is linked with improved outcomes for children. That is why, throughout the pandemic, we continued to provide access to ELC for those children who need it most and why we prioritised the re-opening of ELC to all children ahead of the re-opening of other sectors.

We delivered our commitment to expand the funded entitlement to ELC to all three and four year olds and eligible two year olds to **1,140 hours a year** in August 2021. This will help us to achieve our long term aims to: improve children's outcomes; help to close the poverty-related outcome gap; increase family resilience; and support parents and carers into work, study or training.

We know that local authorities and the childcare sector across Scotland have worked extremely hard to deliver this commitment in the difficult circumstances of the pandemic, with over half of local authority areas delivering 1,140 hours before the statutory duty coming into effect. As announced by the First Minister on 4 August, all eligible children are now entitled to 1140 hours of funded ELC, and all local authorities have confirmed that they have the workforce and capacity in place to deliver those hours.

Whilst the pandemic has created challenges for families, some parents also reported that they enjoyed spending more time with their children and felt that their relationships with them were [strengthened during lockdown](#). Many providers have also successfully adapted their models to offer a blended approach to in-person and digital services (e.g. by offering some classes for parents online).

We published the results of our Financial Sustainability Health Check of the childcare sector on 31 August 2021, which gathered evidence on the sustainability of all types of childcare providers, in particular in light of impact of COVID-19. The Health Check report set out the series of actions that we will take forward to support the sector to adapt and strengthen sustainability.

As we continue work to recover from the impacts of COVID-19, we will build on these new approaches. We will continue to invest in programmes to ensure a universally accessible and high quality ELC offer, which equips children to become confident individuals, responsible citizens, effective contributors and successful learners.

Next Steps

In addition to the work set out above, we will take the following key next steps to support early learning and childcare and recover from the impacts of COVID-19:

- 1) **Ensure that we have a sustainable childcare sector** by:
 - Supporting the sector to continue to operate safely by maintaining and updating COVID guidance for the ELC sector, school-age childcare and childminders. Thanks to the hard work of staff, we have generally seen low levels of COVID transmission within services, when compared to the number of operating services;
 - Monitoring carefully, in consultation with public health experts, the number of cases and outbreaks in registered childcare services; and
- 2) **Support children and families to flourish and recover from the impacts of COVID-19**, including by:
 - Working with local authorities to promote and support the uptake of the ELC offer to eligible two year olds and extending access to children with a parent with experience of care. This work will target support at those children and families who need it most and are likely to have been more disproportionately impacted by Covid;
 - Supporting local authorities, and the ELC and wider childcare sectors, to expand children's access to outdoor play and learning, which not only reduces the risk of COVID transmission but also promotes other positive developmental outcomes for children, including supporting their mental and physical health as they deal with the impacts of Covid;
 - Supporting the development of practitioner confidence and skills around the use of outdoor play and learning in ELC, for example by delivering the [outdoor learning practicum](#) from April until November 2021;
 - Supporting the development of the Equity and Excellence Lead role which puts additional staff capacity in nurseries in the most disadvantaged areas, supporting those children who stand to benefit most. These Leads can either be teachers or other graduate-level practitioners with expertise in child development and pedagogy in the early years. They work directly with children and families in every local authority area and their work during the pandemic will inform how we develop national policy;
 - Progressing our approach to embedding family wellbeing and support approaches in funded ELC through, for example, building on the Family Learning Scotland Programme. Through that programme, practitioners in all 32 local authorities have been trained to deliver intergenerational learning that supports parents to understand how best to support their children's development in the early years and to consider their own learning journey and possible next steps. Implementation support has empowered newly trained practitioners to feel confident in developing creative ways of working with families throughout the pandemic and during this recovery phase.

- 3) **Begin the early phasing-in of community level systems of school age childcare** (in 2022-23), targeted to support the six priority groups in the Tackling Child Poverty Plan.
 - This early phasing will build on learning from our Access to Childcare Fund projects and input from our People Panel to help us test and understand how we can build a system of school age childcare to support a community. They will also consider and develop the role that organised children’s activities can play in a school age childcare system alongside the regulated childcare sector to support families, provide choice and improve access to these activities for children from low income households. We will ensure that these systems meet the childcare needs of families before and after school

- 4) In this parliamentary term we will **deliver on our commitments to expand childcare further by building a system of wraparound childcare providing care before and after school, all year round**. We will also begin to expand free early years education to all 1 and 2 year olds, starting with children from low income households. Outcomes for children are linked not only to the learning that takes place during school hours but also to the range of life enhancing experiences and opportunities that are available to children outside of school hours and during holiday times. We know that for many children this range of positive experiences is often out of reach under normal circumstances and for others, access to these experiences will have been compromised during the pandemic.
 - For wraparound childcare, those on the lowest incomes will pay nothing, and others will make fair and affordable contributions. This offer will help remove the barriers that childcare costs often present to parents and carers taking up work, training or study, which can help tackle child poverty by improving household income. We want future policy on school age childcare to be shaped by those who need it, which is why we are establishing a Public Panel of parents, carers, children and young people, including those with lived experience of poverty, who will work with us to co-design a future system of school age childcare which meets the needs of children and families.

Throughout all of our work we will ensure that services have the tools and the support they need to prioritise those children and families who stand to benefit most and who are at greatest risk of suffering the negative impacts of the pandemic. Further support specifically for the ELC workforce is summarised in section 9.

3. HEALTH AND WELLBEING

The COVID-19 Advisory [Subgroup on Education and Children's Issues previously highlighted](#) that:

“School closures have an impact on the physical and mental health of children. Evidence suggests that the mental health of adolescents is particularly affected. Cognitive, social, and emotional developmental outcomes are also at risk, as is physical health.”

For that reason, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on children and young people's health and wellbeing, including mental health, has been foremost in our consideration when developing our response to the pandemic, and will continue to be a priority as we move into the renewal phase.

We are already delivering significant support and resources for children and young people and, moving forward, will continue to embed these approaches to ensure sustained support over the coming months and years. This support should be seen in the context of the Scottish Government's Mental Health Transition and Recovery Plan, published in October 2020, which outlines our response to the mental health effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, and contains over 100 actions. The plan is backed by a £120 million Recovery and Renewal fund, and brought the total anticipated spend on mental health in 2021/22 to in excess of £1.2 billion.

Specific support for children and young people already put in place includes:

- Ensuring a focus on support for those children and young people most affected by the pandemic, with a specific focus on improving mental health and wellbeing. For example, we made £15m available to local authorities and up to £5m to national organisations across Scotland to deliver the Summer Offer for children and young people, '[Get into Summer](#)', providing opportunities for children and young people – particularly those from low income households or those with the most complex needs – to socialise, play and reconnect. These activities were aimed at helping children and young people to recover from the pandemic and ultimately to be ready and able to learn in the Autumn. The invaluable contributions of our partners in local authorities, national and local third sector organisations and – crucially – the many people who work most closely with children and young people have been critical to the Programme's success
- We continue to support our local authority partners with £16 million in funding to [provide counselling through schools](#). Our local authority partners have confirmed that access to counselling support services is now in place across Scotland.
- Providing guidance which focusses on the mitigations and support for children and young people's learning, and the need to support children and young people's wellbeing, including during previous periods of school closures. This guidance includes specific consideration of measures to support [vulnerable children and young people](#), support for children and young people with complex additional support needs; and those at risk.
- Ensuring that children and young people in primary schools have free access to healthy and nutritious meals so that they are ready to learn by August 2022. This

builds on a previous investment of £51m to ensure the ongoing provision of free school meals during periods of school closures and holidays.

- Increasing Best Start Food funding to £4.50 per week, helping families with children under three to buy healthy foods. Regulations to implement this manifesto commitment came into force on 1 August and clients received their first increased payments in mid-August.
- Distributing £11.25m to local authorities specifically to support their response to the pandemic's impact on children and young people's mental health and wellbeing. Provision is flexible to local need but includes: art-based therapies targeting those not engaged in school and/or finding it hard to leave home; a hybrid online/offline youth work based approach; and digital services.
- Funding of £15m has been provided in 2021/22 to develop Children and Young People's Mental Health and Wellbeing Community Supports and Services. This funding provides new and enhanced community-based services for 5-24 year olds, their families and carers, focused on distress and supporting positive mental health and wellbeing. Examples of new and enhanced services include: closer partnership working with CAMHS to better manage the waiting list experience and to redirect children who would be better supported elsewhere; art- and music-based self-regulation therapies in primary school; and additional support for young carers.
- Funding of £3m has been provided to support targeted youth work services to support children's wellbeing and to engage with children who most need our support.
- Ensuring that sources of quality support from external organisations are available through the [Health and Wellbeing Wakelet](#). This includes materials specific to [mental health and wellbeing](#), such as the [Mind yer time](#) and [Aye Feel](#) resources which provide sources of support and information for children and young people.
- In partnership with the Mental Health in Schools Working Group, we have developed and published [Children and Young People's Mental Health and Wellbeing: A Professional Learning Resource For All School Staff](#). This resource provides essential learning required to support children and young people's mental health and wellbeing. Although aimed at school staff, the resource is free and available to anyone who wishes to access it. This work complements the earlier guidance and resources published were further enhanced through the publication of the Whole School Approach to Mental Health and Wellbeing framework in August 2021.
- Prior to the pandemic, Education Scotland developed curricular and professional resources, called the 'Compassionate and Connected Classroom and Community', to increase understanding of the impact of ACEs and trauma and help recovery and resilience. These resources and long-standing nurture approaches are crucial to helping support children and young people's recovery following the pandemic, and are linked to the Government ambition for trauma-informed workforce and services as part of the [National Trauma Training Programme](#). As part of this Programme a new training module has been launched (in July 2021) to help any member of the Scottish workforce develop trauma-skilled practice with children and young people.

Further examples of how health and wellbeing is being supported within local authorities include advice and support from [educational psychologists](#), a [freephone](#)

[helpline](#) for young people who are feeling anxious or worried, and the use of [‘nurture’ approaches](#) to COVID-19 recovery that focus on emotional wellbeing as a priority. In addition to the provision of [free school meals](#), many local authorities are also making sure that no young people have to go without access for [free period products](#) even when usual availability in schools and colleges is restricted.

Next Steps

In addition to the actions set out above, we will take the following key next steps to support health and wellbeing and recover from the impacts of COVID-19:

- (1) Continue to work with education authorities and schools to **embed counselling through schools**, as part of delivery of a guarantee of access to mental health and wellbeing support, including counselling services..
- (2) Ensure all children have **access to quality play** in their own community by refurbishing play parks in Scotland during this parliamentary term, backed by £60 million and in line with nationally agreed principles and local priorities based on engagement with children and young people.

4. SUPPORTING LEARNING AND ATTAINMENT

Keeping schools low-risk, open and welcoming environments

All the evidence tells us that children and young people benefit from learning within schools, and alongside their peers. The [UK Chief Medical Officers](#) have been clear that school attendance is very important for children and young people, and is critical to reduce inequality, improve life chances and enhance physical and mental health. That is why our primary aim has been to ensure schools have remained low-risk, open and welcoming to staff, children and young people during the pandemic. Working alongside partners on CERG, we continue to develop and regularly update [guidance](#) for schools that facilitates this and provides the required clarity regarding proportional mitigations.

As part of over £450m allocated to education recovery to date, we have provided local authorities with £90m to fund the implementation of those mitigations, including enhanced hygiene measures, ventilation solutions, and necessary changes to logistics such as transportation. This was supplemented with a further £10m for ventilation in August 2021, in support of a strengthened commitment to ensure all schools and early learning and childcare settings have access to CO2 monitoring, whether through fixed or mobile monitors.

As we begin to emerge from the pandemic, and as soon as the data and evidence support it as being safe, we will aim to ease restrictions in schools further so that school communities, including parents and carers, can begin to interact more freely than has been possible since early 2020.

Building a pandemic-proof system

In their [second formal report](#), the ICEA state that:

“It is time to look to the future to redesign Scottish education as a universally designed system for all contingencies and disruptions. This system can and should develop self-directed learners; provide access to digitally-based learning as a human right; transform assessment to be continuous, inclusive and responsive; and ensure that all students and teachers are equipped with online and outdoor capabilities that will be pandemic-proof in the future and significantly better than in the present. All of this can and should occur within a universally designed system that becomes increasingly inclusive, responsive, agile and collaborative, with changes in government resource allocations that reflect this shift.”

This advice provides us with a clear sense of direction, and we are investing heavily to make this aspiration become a reality. This includes our funding for additional education staff to support recovery and promote excellence and equity and our work to build on the digital learning and teaching initiatives that evolved during the pandemic. These initiatives will provide greater resilience as well as a wider range of opportunities for children and young people to engage in education (see “Digital” below).

Curriculum

Scotland's curriculum empowers schools to respond to the diverse needs of individual learners and to respond to the unique circumstances and challenges of the school community and, indeed, the wider community. This flexibility, as well as the curriculum's emphasis on health and wellbeing, will be vital in supporting the aims of this recovery strategy.

In 2020, we commissioned the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) to undertake a review of Curriculum for Excellence (CfE), to help us better understand how the curriculum is being designed and implemented in schools, and to identify areas for improvement. The [OECD published its findings](#) in June 2021.

The OECD report is clear that CfE is the right approach for Scotland. However, 10 years on from CfE being introduced, and with the more recent disruption from COVID-19 changing how we look at education, now is the right time to look at how it is being implemented. We have, therefore, confirmed we will [implement in full all 12 of the OECD review's recommendations](#), including those on curriculum, assessment and qualifications which will see the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) replaced and Education Scotland substantially reformed. In doing so, we will look to pandemic proof the system for the future.

Teaching and support for learning

Children and young people may not have had access to a full curriculum over the last 18 months, with some re-prioritisation of focus both inevitable and appropriate. As we move forward, schools will work to support their learning in the broadest sense – including developing skills, knowledge and understanding – to help them continue to learn and achieve.

We agree that schools, and the professionals who work in them, are best placed to identify any impacts of the pandemic on individual children and young people, and to make decisions on what additional support may be required to help individuals learn and develop. This is what schools do best – assessing the educational needs of children and young people and deciding what approach would benefit each individual most.

High-quality teaching is therefore essential to providing learners with the support they need to recover from the impacts of the pandemic.

For that reason, we have already committed £240m to support local authorities to recruit additional teachers and staff to deploy more support to their schools, children and families. This investment has supported the appointment of an additional 2,200 teachers and more than 500 support staff in schools across Scotland. These additional staff are allowing schools to intensify support for individuals or groups of pupils who may have had their progress disrupted as a result of lockdown.

Case study – additional education staff supporting recovery work

One local authority reported that, using additional funding from the Scottish Government, it had recruited further staff for a range of purposes including resilience to cope with staff absences, management of COVID-19 health and safety measures, and recovery work with targeted groups of pupils.

Feedback received from schools was that, where additional staff had been allocated to a school, these teachers and pupil support assistants mainly carried out targeted work with small groups or individual pupils. This work addressed the emotional wellbeing of pupils, e.g. to support re-engagement with school for those who were most anxious about doing so. Another focus was reinforcing and revisiting key learning in literacy and numeracy with identified pupils. Work was carried out with targeted groups and with whole classes. Additional staff either worked directly with identified groups or released permanent school staff to provide this targeted support.

Figures published on 15 December show that:

- There are now more teachers than at any time since 2008.
- The ratio of pupils to teachers is at its lowest since 2010.
- Primary schools have the lowest Pupil Teacher Ratio since records began.

We will continue to support local authorities with additional funding to further increase teacher numbers as part of our commitment to the recruitment of 3,500 additional teachers and 500 classroom assistants over the course of this parliamentary cycle. £50m was allocated to councils for the recruitment of 1,000 additional teachers and 500 additional pupil support assistants in the 2021-22 school year. In addition, a further £145.5m is being added permanently to the local government settlement from April 2022. This additional funding will allow local authorities to plan their future permanent workforce requirements, which will be vital in ensuring that learners get the support they need to recover from the impacts of the pandemic.

Over the course of this parliamentary term, expert staff in local authorities and schools will be able to make use of a range of funding and resources to tackle the poverty related attainment gap and support recovery through equitable support to improve educational outcomes for those most impacted by poverty and whom we know have been most impacted by COVID-19. They will implement the strategies and approaches they judge to be most helpful to individual children and young people, learning from a range of evidence and building upon the examples of multi-service collaboration evident in local responses to COVID-19.

They will be doing so as part of a wider education system that will offer professional support, scrutiny and challenge. For example, Education Scotland will maintain a strong focus on supporting learning and teaching, including by taking the following actions in partnership with others:

- continue to publish advice on approaches and resources that can be implemented by schools to address the impacts of the pandemic on children and young people;
- collaborating with partners to identify, develop and promote strategies for high quality learning, teaching and assessment that are aspirational and forward looking (including development of skills);
- supporting schools and local authorities to deliver on their responsibilities for a range of national improvement priorities including literacy, numeracy & mathematics, Gaelic, STEM, creativity, improving gender balance, and developing the young workforce.
- collaborating with a range of partners to ensure the benefits and opportunities provided by COP26 are used to accelerate progress in embedding Learning for Sustainability.
- providing support to local authorities, schools and partners to meet their responsibilities in relation to the new UNCRC requirements, including support for development of Children's Rights and Well-being Impact Assessments.
- working with RIC Lead Officers, Scottish Government and other partners to consider next steps for maximising the potential of regional collaboratives to support excellence and equity.
- continuing to offer a significant suite of professional learning and leadership programmes at national level, building capacity across the system and taking account of recommendations in the recent OECD report.
- collaborating with partners to provide resources and professional learning to ensure that children and young people are present, participating, supported, and achieving, and to ensure equality of opportunity for those with protected characteristics and the inclusion of marginalised and vulnerable groups.

Case study – Recovery and Improvement Professional Learning Pilot

A 'Numeracy and Mathematics Recovery and Improvement Professional Learning Pilot' was launched by Education Scotland in March 2021, to support improvement and efficiency in teaching, learning and assessment and swiftly address any learning loss that occurred in session 2020-2021 as a result of COVID-19.

This pilot, which is being delivered in partnership with over 30 primary schools from Renfrewshire, South Lanarkshire and Aberdeenshire, is being co-designed and delivered by a specialist team of officers from Education Scotland, local authority leads and Headteachers. The pilot capitalises on research from Wright et al to develop an experimental framework of pedagogical tools for intervention and draws upon external international expertise and advice from the Maths Recovery Council. Throughout session 2020-21 over 150 practitioners have engaged with the pilot programme, which is predicted to reach and track the progress of over 4000 children during the implementation support phase in 2021-22.

Feedback from the initial launch and the subsequent training sessions has been overwhelmingly positive. Local leads and headteachers have reported that the pilot links effectively to learning needs to support COVID-19 recovery and mitigate potential learning loss. Sampling of participants is already providing interesting

insights. Using appropriate benchmarking, at the initial stage of the pilot, individual teacher confidence levels in relation to the effective delivery of numeracy and mathematics has increased, as has the understanding of mathematical pedagogy to ensure coherent progression for learners. Teachers have reported that they have enhanced their skillset in identifying gaps in learning through the use of rich assessment interviews and are already providing targeted and personal learning routes as a result.

This pilot, whilst aimed at mitigating potential learning loss as a result of the pandemic, provides a new landscape to inform national policy direction in relation to improvements in numeracy and mathematics. The nature of this pilot connects and delivers improvement directly to children and young people through a joint delivery approach with school leaders, local authority improvement teams and specialist leads from Education Scotland. An initial evaluation of the pilot is expected in late 2021, and it is planned to commence phase 2 in spring 2022. Subsequent phases of implementation will take place thereafter, informed by the ongoing evaluation of impact.

Acknowledging the benefits of outdoor learning, we have provided £2m of dedicated support to residential outdoor education centres and a further £500,000 in funding for recovery activities which utilise outdoor learning over the course of the pandemic. This has safeguarded the sector for the future, as well as ensuring that high quality outdoor educational expertise is available to support young people as they recover from the pandemic. As we move through this parliamentary term, we will also remove further barriers to accessing outdoor education by ensuring young people are not excluded from taking part in such trips due to their financial circumstances.

Parental and learner engagement

Over the course of the past 18 months, pupils and parents have experienced two lengthy periods of remote learning, with further large numbers of pupils having to self-isolate and learn from home throughout that time.

Parental organisations such as the National Parent Forum of Scotland and Connect have told us that the experience over the past 18 months has brought significant challenges for families. Families' experiences of this disruption will have varied based on their circumstances and other factors. In some instances, the links between parents and their children's learning will have strengthened during this recent period. For example, for some parents, the remote learning experience, providing regular daily exposure to the learning experiences of their children, will have improved their awareness of and connection with their children's learning at school in new ways. Parent Councils, which remain a bedrock of our approach to involving parents in the life and work of schools, have often adapted well to the circumstances, developing new ways of engaging remotely.

In other respects – for instance, in relation to the necessary restrictions on parents entering school buildings – some of the established links between home and school, which had been essential to the culture of school communities right across Scotland, have been considerably affected. Online parent consultations, developed across a

number of areas, have been welcomed by many, whilst others will welcome a return to in-school consultations and meetings, once these can be reintroduced safely.

2021 is the final year of our “Learning Together” plan – the national plan on parental involvement and engagement. As we work with partners in parental organisations, local authorities and third sector organisations to refresh our policy framework on parental engagement, we will take a strengths-based approach, building on the resilience and adaptability shown by families and school practitioners. We will consult closely with national parent organisations, including the National Parent Forum of Scotland and Connect, ensuring that parents’ needs and concerns help to influence the implementation of the next steps set out in this document. Our recovery plan for parental involvement and engagement, which we will develop in the first half of the academic year, will be a vital aspect of our route map out of restrictions. The plan will aim to step up our approach to parental engagement; to “pandemic proof” our practice and approach to parental engagement; to retain the new approaches that we have learned during the pandemic, and; to re-engage with the relationship-based approach that was so important to parental engagement in Scotland prior Covid. The themes of communication and digital, equality and equity, broader family support are likely to feature prominently in this work.

Learner voice and participation

The new Children and Young People’s Education Council, and the inclusion of young people as members of the Scottish Education Council, will help to ensure that children and young people’s voice influences the implementation of the next steps set out in this document. The participation and voice of children and young people will be equally important within each and every school and early learning setting. We will continue to provide the advice and support that schools need in order to take a rights-based approach, and to adapt and improve their own recovery plans in response to children and young people’s priorities.

It is important, however, that we integrate this approach beyond the main strategic policy groups. We want to make it the norm for children and young people to be involved in decision-making across Scotland, so that they are at the heart of decisions that affect them at local and national levels in line with Article 12 (right to be heard) of the UNCRC. In relation to school education, this means that we will seek to gather and take account of children and young people’s voice right across our education portfolio, including our work on the Scottish Attainment Challenge, race equality education, senior phase and qualifications, additional support for learning, the learning estate strategy and school consultations. As we implement this approach, we need to improve the skills and awareness of policy makers and decision-makers. We will therefore seek and take account of expert advice and guidance of children’s rights organisations, children and young people organisations and children and young people themselves, monitoring how we are doing, and adjusting and improving our approach.

Digital

For some time now, schools across Scotland have successfully used digital technology in classrooms to help motivate and engage children and young people in

their learning – and during periods of lockdown, we relied heavily upon digital technology to maintain learning and crucial contact between teachers and learners.

To support continued learning during the pandemic, we provided funding of £25m for around 70,000 devices and 14,000 connectivity packages which were distributed to learners across Scotland – and we are committed to providing a device to every child in Scotland during this parliamentary term. A number of local authorities have already distributed devices to pupils on a 1-to-1 basis and others have committed to doing so in the near future. Ensuring every school-aged pupil in Scotland has a device and an internet connection will help remove technology related barriers to learning across the whole country.

We have seen numerous innovative ways in which councils have used these devices to support remote learning, including [lockdown journals, online dance instruction and art lessons, maths-based scavenger hunts and digital assemblies](#), as well as the use of [digital hubs](#) to help parents and carers support remote learning.

Over the course of 2020 and 2021, we also developed the National e-Learning Offer (NeLO) into a full scale programme which includes the following:

- Live, interactive lessons through e-Sgoil;
- Expansion of the online and remote learning options available to schools in both the Broad General Education and Senior Phase;
- Study support webinars and resources have been developed;
- Local partnership solutions were also developed, facilitated by Regional Improvement Collaboratives;
- Recorded content for learners to use as directed by their teacher (from the West Partnership); and
- Support, training materials and events for teachers to deliver remote learning (from Education Scotland)

Significant innovation and growth took place over the pandemic, building on the solid foundations of the Glow platform and the trailblazing work of e-Sgoil. By the time of the January lockdown, we saw schools, teachers and young people making much more extensive use of the resources available through the NeLO – in part enabled by the roll out of devices which reduced the number of young people who could not access remote learning because they lacked a device or internet access.

While enforced remote learning was clearly second best to in-person learning, the experience has given us evidence and understanding of how digital and remote learning platforms can enhance young people's experience of education and provide more tools for teachers and schools to engage their pupils in learning. We are already building on this learning and working to understand how this offer should be evolved into the future, including through the delivery of a National Digital Academy which will form a key part of an evolving pandemic proof education system.

At present, we are maintaining this offer so that schools can use it to support those pupils who may need to access additional resources to consolidate learning in a particular area of knowledge. Equally, it remains a valuable resource for any pupil who is required to self-isolate. The roll out of devices to all children and young

people will continue to support increased use of digital resources, as teachers and schools become more certain that these are accessible to all learners.

The Learning Estate Investment Programme

We have continued to progress work on the £2 billion Learning Estate Investment Programme (LEIP) during the course of the pandemic. This programme will replace some of Scotland's worst condition schools and/or deliver new schools to address housing growth with modern, state of the art, learning environments, thus playing an important role in supporting good quality learning and teaching.

The LEIP prioritises schools identified by local authorities as being in need of updating, to ensure rapid progress where most required and will benefit around 50,000 pupils across Scotland. Phase 1 and 2 of the LEIP will deliver 36 new schools or campuses benefitting approximately 33,500 children and young people across Scotland. We expect to make an announcement on the timescale for Phase 3 later this year.

Next Steps

In addition to the work set out above, we will take the following key next steps to support learning and attainment and recover from the impacts of COVID-19:

- (1) We will support the recruitment of at **least 3,500 additional teachers and 500 classroom assistants** over and above the 1,400 teachers recruited during the pandemic. This will mean that by the end of the parliament there will be almost 5,000 more teachers in our schools than before the pandemic.
- (2) Continue discussions, through the SNCT, on **reducing teachers' class contact time** by an hour and a half per week, with the aim of giving teachers the time they need to reflect on, plan and collaborate in the interests of good quality learning and teaching.
- (3) Continue to develop the **National e-Learning Offer**, including its support for teachers, establishing how it can support learning during the recovery period and into the future, including the development of a National Digital Academy.
- (4) **Provide every child in Scotland with a device to get online**, including a free internet connection where required and the support to use it during the life of this parliament.
- (5) Invest £19.4m to support a six year [mentoring programme](#) to help young people fulfil their potential. The Hunter Foundation has added a further £7m to the programme, which will be delivered in partnership with local authorities that wish to participate and will be part of the Scottish Government's Young Person's Guarantee, to provide long term support where it is needed most.
- (7) Publish an **implementation plan which sets out how we will work with all those involved in education in Scotland to take forward a whole system**

response to the OECD recommendations and the Stobart paper. The plan will be published in October 2021.

- (8) Actively **consider what changes may be required to our qualifications and assessment system.** This work will be informed by the OECD's comparative analysis of assessment and qualifications approaches, lessons learned during COVID and in dialogue with young people, parents, teachers and the wider education system.
- (9) Local authorities and schools will continue to **prioritise personalised support to meet the individual needs of all children and young people.** This is in line with the guidance on Curriculum for Excellence in the recovery phase, first published in June 2020.

5. ENSURING EQUITY

Over the last five years, we have put in place a comprehensive range of measures to close the attainment gap, built around the £750m Scottish Attainment Challenge programme.

In March 2021, Audit Scotland published [Improving outcomes for young people through school education](#) and in the same month the Scottish Government published the [Closing the Poverty-Related Attainment Gap – A Report on Progress 2016-2021](#) which reflected on the first five years of the Scottish Attainment Challenge. The two reports reached similar conclusions: progress has been made towards reducing the poverty-related attainment gap in a context in which attainment generally has improved.

That is why we have committed to investing a further £1bn in tackling the poverty related attainment gap and supporting education recovery over this current parliamentary cycle to further narrow the gap. The first instalment of that expanded fund was paid in June, during the first 100 days of Parliament and, at £215m, is the largest amount awarded for a single year, including a £20 million Pupil Equity Funding premium to support with immediate education recovery priorities for children and young people most impacted by poverty. The Care Experienced Children and Young People Fund with over £11.6 million being invested in 2021/22, is used to support programmes such as enhanced tutoring and mentoring, which help support vulnerable children and young people, and their families, to engage better with education.

Audit Scotland recommended that we “ensure that future methods for targeting support to address inequalities reflect broader demographic issues, which are not well reflected in the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD), and updated data on the economic impact of Covid-19 on communities.” We are committed to taking forward this recommendation and ensuring that support is targeted at those children and young people who need it most.

We have committed to introduce a Care Experience Grant to provide an annual payment of £200 to all young people with care experience aged between 16 and 26. Young people with care experience, just like everyone else, are individuals with their own needs, desires, and aspirations. In recognition of this, the Care Experience Grant can be used for whatever the young person considers appropriate for them in meeting the financial demands of life.

The disproportionate impact of the pandemic on Black and Minority Ethnic communities has been clear and has brought in to sharp focus the need to take a strategic approach to tackling race inequality in schools. The Scottish Government is clear that there is no place for racism in our schools. Diversity and equality are at the heart of policies that underpin education in Scotland.

Next Steps

In addition to the work set out above, we will take the following key next steps to ensure equity and recover from the impacts of COVID-19:

- 1) Pupils living in Scotland's most deprived communities will be among those to benefit from **£215 million of targeted funding in 2021-22 to support education recovery, and help close the poverty-related attainment gap**. This is distributed across a number of funding streams to schools, local authorities and third sector organisations as part of the Scottish Attainment Challenge.
- (2) Within that £215m investment in the Scottish Attainment Challenge is £147m of Pupil Equity Funding, which includes a **'COVID-premium' payment of £20m**, recognising the new and additional challenges schools face as a result of the pandemic.
- (3) Education Scotland Attainment Advisors will continue to work closely with school leaders, practitioners and partner organisations, local authorities and Regional Improvement Collaboratives to further **develop and adjust approaches to tackling the poverty related attainment gap**. During session 2021-22 with a continued focus on support for Covid recovery, this work will include a projects aimed to improve:
 - sustainability through improving leadership and pedagogy for equity.
 - effective use of data to understand the impact of poverty and address this to meet learners' needs.
 - collaboration for equity – improving partnership working to support families and communities.
 - equity throughout the learner journey from ELC to tertiary education and improving transitions.
 - effective use of PEF and the Care Experienced Children and Young People (CECYP) Fund to support equity for specific children and young people.
- (4) Building on existing progress, continue to work in partnership with local authorities, schools and other partners to facilitate, broker and support action. As part of this work we will **refresh and refocus the Scottish Attainment Challenge programme** from 2022/23 onwards. This will continue to empower school leaders to undertake approaches that best suit their local contexts; and develop a clear role for all local authorities to accelerate progress in tackling the poverty related attainment gap.
- (5) Providing £7m funding to allow the **provision of instrumental music tuition** in schools in the 2021/22 academic year to continue at current levels at no cost to families. Councils will also receive £6 million to **waive core curriculum charges**. This will enable children to take the subjects they want without families having to struggle to meet costs of resources and materials for practical lessons.
- (6) Keeping our Promise **to improve the lives of care experienced children, young people and their families** through delivering the actions needed to meet the [Promise Plan 21-24](#), as detailed in the [Promise Change Programme](#). This will be supported by funding of £4m each year through the Promise Partnership Fund. We are also committed to investing at least £500m over the life of this

Parliament to create a Whole Family Wellbeing Fund. This will enable the building of universal, holistic support services, available in communities across Scotland, giving families access to the help they need, where and when they need it. This will help reduce the need for crisis intervention and contribute to improving people's lives across a wide range of different areas, including but not limited to, child and adolescent mental health, child poverty, alcohol and drugs misuse and educational attainment.

- (7) New actions to address **race inequality in education** are currently being developed by education and race equality stakeholders under the newly-established Race Equality and Anti-Racism in Education Programme (REAREP), which will be supported by £300,000 in 2021-22. The Programme provides a coherent approach to the key areas identified for reform by education and race equality stakeholders. These are:
- School Leadership and Professional Learning
 - Diversity in the Teaching Profession and Education Workforce
 - Curriculum Reform (including decolonising the curriculum)
 - Racism and racist incidents

6. ADDITIONAL SUPPORT NEEDS

The pandemic has had a significant impact on children and young people with additional support needs, and our goal during these challenging times has been to maintain attendance and engagement in learning wherever possible.

Children and young people with additional support needs, and in particular those with complex additional support needs, were able to return to in-person learning and support from 5 January 2021. Their return to their own school was prioritised, in an effort to rebuild routines and access to the learning support that they need, including therapeutic and language support. This approach has been sustained throughout 2021, helping to reconnect children and young people with additional support needs with learning and support.

We also recognised that, for those schools whose learners have complex additional support needs, ensuring adherence to required mitigations can be particularly challenging. In partnership with the Additional Support for Learning Implementation Group, further guidance to aid colleagues working with [children and young people with complex additional support needs](#) was published in January 2021 to support the continued attendance and participation of all pupils.

Other support includes:

- Continued investment of £15m funding for enhanced support in schools through the provision of pupil support staff.
- Our guidance on [vulnerable children and young people](#) highlights the potential impact of the pandemic on children with complex additional support needs and the importance of continuing to providing support, initially through educational hubs.
- Education Scotland provide specific resources on [Parentzone Scotland](#), and the Wakelet [Learners with Complex Additional Support Needs: Resources and guidance for parents to support their child's learning at home](#) for parents and carers to support their children whenever they may need to learn at home.
- In line with support to education authorities, we also supported Grant-Aided Special Schools through £1m additional funding, to meet the additional costs of implementing mitigations and to support the maintenance of education provision for children and young people with complex additional support needs. [Donations from organisations such as the Scottish Book Trust](#) further helped to support the tailored care plans in place to support the most vulnerable children and families.

Next Steps

In addition to the work set out above, we will take the following key next steps to ensure support for children and young people with additional support needs and recover from the impacts of COVID-19:

- (1) Throughout 2021 our approach to maintaining children and young people's learning will continue, with any additional specific actions required being considered by the **Additional Support for Learning Implementation Group**.

- (2) We will continue our work to enhance support for learning through **the [implementation of the recommendations of the Additional Support for Learning Review.](#)**
- (3) We will **report progress on the implementation of the review to Scottish Ministers and COSLA.**

7. NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS

The last two academic sessions have been challenging ones, for learners, parents, teachers and others across our education system, particularly in relation to qualifications.

One key decision in 2020-21, reflecting disruption to learning as a result of COVID-19, was that a normal diet of examinations could not go ahead. Decisions such as this have been led, and will continue to be led, by the science, informed by the views and concerns of stakeholders.

An Alternative Certification Model (ACM) was put in place for 2020-21, taking into account the disruption to learning and providing a flexible framework for schools and colleges to draw upon a range of assessment tools in arriving at provisional results for learners based on professional judgement of demonstrated attainment.

Taking into account recommendations from the National Qualifications experience 2020 rapid review, the ACM was arrived at through a collaborative approach. The National Qualifications 2021 Group, chaired by the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA), co-created the model and continue to monitor and oversee implementation. The Group draws its membership from the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland, Colleges Scotland, Education Scotland, the Educational Institute of Scotland, School Leaders Scotland, the Scottish Council of Independent Schools, the Scottish Government, the National Parent Forum of Scotland, and the Scottish Youth Parliament.

Provisional results were shared with learners by their centres in advance of the 25 June deadline for submission to SQA. In line with the manifesto commitments for the first 100 days of the new government, SQA progressed with formal certification of these results taking place as scheduled on 10 August.

Despite the challenges of the pandemic, a very strong set of results were delivered for the 2021 National Qualifications. Almost 137,000 candidates received their formal results from the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) on 10 August – the highest number of certificates since 2017. Although down very slightly on 2020, pass rates remain very high overall. Above all, the National Qualifications were credible and valid in spite of the unique circumstances, and they are enabling learners to continue on the next steps in their learner journey.

In recognition of the ongoing disruption through May and into June in some parts of Scotland, a contingency arrangement was put in place for learners who had completed their courses but for whom, due to particularly significant disruption, the required evidence demonstrating their attainment could not be gathered within the flexibilities already provided. A later submission date for provisional results of 3 September was agreed for these candidates.

For learners unhappy with their results, the 2021 appeals process opened on 25 June allowing a direct right of appeal. From that date, learners were able to indicate an intention to appeal, with the formal appeals process commencing once

results were published on 10 August, and registration of appeals closed on Friday 27 August.

Ongoing support was available to learners throughout the summer from various agencies, including advice and guidance on onward progression routes.

It was confirmed on 18 August that the central planning assumption for session 2021-22 is that examinations will proceed in 2022 for National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher courses, with a range modifications for subjects (as previously confirmed by SQA in June).

In the event that additional disruption is experienced, additional adaptations to the exams will be considered. These may include adaptations to the content of the papers, such as the removal of certain content, or an indication to learners of the topics to be covered, through to the physical arrangements for sitting the papers, such as the use of multiple classrooms rather than assembly or gym halls, if public health advice advises certain approaches to large gatherings.

A further contingency arrangement will be in place for the possibility of more significant disruption, and with it public health advice advising against large gatherings of people, which would lead to the cancellation of exams – such as we have seen in the past two academic sessions. In this case, we will look to draw on planned assessments gathered at appropriate times throughout the year. Guidance on this arrangement will be provided at the earliest opportunity to ensure that the volume and gathering of evidence is robust, reliable and proportionate.

Next Steps

In addition to the work set out above, we will take the following key next steps to ensure our approach to national qualifications and assessment is robust and resilient, and supports recovery from the impacts of COVID-19:

- (1) Throughout the remainder of 2021 and into 2022, we will **continue to monitor the approach to National Qualifications, taking action and implementing any contingencies if necessary** to mitigate any further disruption for learners and the teaching/lecturer workforce whilst ensuring that fairness and credibility of the qualifications is maintained;
- (2) Fairness for learners sitting exams in 2022 is a central concern. **We will set out details on further support available for learners by the end of October**; and
- (3) We will **work with partners to develop the future approach to assessment beyond 2022**, informed by the OECD's report on comparative analysis of assessment and qualifications approaches published at the end of August.

8. SUPPORTING POSITIVE DESTINATIONS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Further Education, Higher Education and Community Learning & Development

The disruption caused by COVID-19 to in-person learning has been extremely challenging for students of colleges, universities and community learning settings. Learners, teachers, lecturers, support staff, parents, carers and families have made phenomenal efforts in supporting continued education for Scotland's students across two unprecedented academic years. This section sets out some of the support SG and partners have put in place to facilitate ongoing learning for these key groups as we move through and out of the pandemic.

At the heart of our work, SG has established two **new groups** to inform decision-making and take into account experience and perspectives of all relevant stakeholders and organisations. The COVID-19 Advisory Sub-Group on Universities and Colleges and the Advanced Learning COVID Recovery Group continue to provide excellent support to the SG, guiding our next steps on COVID-19 recovery and post-16 learning in the coming academic year.

SG financial support provided to students over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic has been substantial, with now over £96 million being provided via hardship funding, digital access, mental health support and for student associations. SG has also committed to review the future of summer support and the availability of funds will be monitored to ensure support remain available to students throughout summer 2021. We are continuing to work closely with the college and university sectors and NUS Scotland on the issues students are facing and on raising awareness of the support available.

Recognising the mental health and wellbeing challenges facing students, in addition to our investment through the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) of over £7 million in the last two academic years, to help colleges and universities recruit and access additional counsellors we have:

- Provided additional funding of £1.32 million last year to help students deal with the mental health impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and £750,000 to NUS Scotland and student associations for vital welfare support.
- Continued to support the NUS Think Positive Initiative which has a COVID-19 focus.

We have also committed a further £4.2 million for academic year 2021/22 to further support our counsellor commitment, and to address the issue of equity of access to counsellors for college students, and additional funding of £4.4 million for colleges to help students and staff deal with the impacts of the pandemic.

Scotland's colleges and universities play a key role in supporting the **future careers and prosperity** of our young people and our economy, and we will work in partnership with the sector to support and contribute to the development and success of the Young Person's Guarantee.

- In 2020/21, £10 million in funding was provided to colleges, to enable them to deliver shorter industry-focused opportunities for young people, including skills boost and fast track courses, to meet the needs of employers and support economic recovery.
- The college sector across Scotland engaged around 4,000 students on shorter industry-focused opportunities such as skills boost and fast track courses in 2020/21.
- A further £10 million will be provided to colleges, to continue delivering shorter industry focused opportunities in 2021/22, with a target of engaging 5,000 students across Scotland.
- An additional £3.5 million has been allocated to support recent graduates, with a target of supporting 500 individuals through providing a range of options to support their career development.

As we continue to take a more blended approach to learning, we are mindful that the cost of accessing and participating in online learning may not be affordable for all learners. We have committed £5 million per year to tackle **student digital poverty** and support those from less well-off backgrounds access devices and connectivity. This funding is to help learners facing hardship offset the equipment costs associated with accessing community, college and university learning delivered online. Through these monies we want to make sure young people facing hardship have access to the equipment they need to commence and continue their studies.

The **National Transitional Training Fund** (NTTF) was established in October 2020, as a key intervention to mitigate the projected rise in unemployment resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic and was positioned to help fill a gap in how we supported individuals, aged 25+, who had lost their job or whose jobs were at risk as a result of the pandemic. In year one of the programme the NTTF supported individuals in sectors impacted by the pandemic, such as tourism and hospitality, and in growth sectors such as aerospace and forestry.

Ongoing support for the NTTF was announced as part of the 2021/22 Scottish Budget. The continuation of NTTF in 2021/22 will have a broader role, recognising the multiple challenges facing the labour market as a result of the pandemic, EU Exit and future economic transformations including to net zero. In June 2021 SG announced the first tranche of up to £20 million will be allocated to support 25 projects across a range of sectors, and offer specific support for individuals through enhanced online learning and further and higher education provision.

Community Learning and Development (CLD) services have played a key role in supporting young people and families throughout the pandemic. CLD activities are targeted at those who need the most support due to inequality. We know that the pandemic has exacerbated existing inequalities and [impacted](#) most profoundly on those who experience poorer outcomes. The pandemic has seen CLD providers demonstrate agility and flexibility in finding ways to keep in touch with their learners and maintain services.

- Education Scotland and Scottish Government [Equity Audit](#) highlighted how CLD services have worked in partnership to support learning for those families with identified needs, and Education Scotland's [What Scotland Learned - 100 Stories](#)

[of Lockdown](#) report outlined numerous examples of CLD-school partnerships which supported and enhanced the lockdown learning experience for families and young people across Scotland.

- YouthLink Scotland's [Learning Though Lockdown](#) report demonstrated how youth workers continued to engage with young people throughout lockdown, providing crisis support for the most vulnerable families and mitigating the impact of COVID-19 on children and young people's mental health, learning and development.
- Adult learning, adult literacies, and family learning also continued in many places across Scotland, with an emphasis on supporting parents and families with learning at home, as well as addressing social isolation and health and wellbeing.
- Many English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) practitioners in the CLD sector quickly adapted to deliver services differently during lockdown. This included collaborating with teachers to support parental use of Glow or online teaching platforms, as well as providing ongoing support with written information issued by schools.
- To support remote and digital learning, the SG delivered in partnership with YouthLink Scotland, Lead Scotland and the Workers Educational Association a targeted investment of £0.25 million in digital devices, connectivity and adaptive equipment for community based learners allowed digitally excluded learners to continue their learning, supported by CLD workers, and an additional £3 million in youth work for education recovery.

Developing the Young Workforce

The Scottish Government is committed to supporting all young people to achieve their potential, and we have a strong track record of tackling youth unemployment through the Developing the Young Workforce (DYW) programme.

However, we recognise the new challenges young people may face as they transition into the labour market. Therefore, we are continuing to strengthen the partnerships within the education and skills system post COVID-19, in order to sustain and build on our current progress. For example, we are continuing to build on the success of our employer-Led DYW programme to support the implementation of the Young Person's Guarantee as per recommendations from the Advisory Group on Economic Recovery.

As part of the Young Person's Guarantee, we have invested an additional £10m in the DYW Regional Group infrastructure - primarily to place a dedicated DYW School Coordinator into each high school in Scotland. The DYW Employers' Forum have long called for this additional investment that will support young people prepare for the world of work by enhancing employer-education partnerships and provide a more focused resource to support the needs of each school and the local economy. We continue to fund third sector organisations who directly support young people most at risk of being furthest from the labour market.

We have enhanced the DYW digital offering and continue to work with partners to provide a national system that supports employer-education across the country. This build on the success of E-DYW, established as a direct of the impact of COVID-19

on the work of the network, which we will work to enhance and drive alignment to other offerings.

Young Person's Guarantee

The Young Person's Guarantee has already created around 18,000 opportunities for people aged between 16 and 24 to help them into work, education or training. It aims to give all young people the chance to succeed despite the economic impacts of coronavirus (COVID-19) while also ensuring employers continue to benefit from the fresh talent and new perspectives that young people bring to workplaces across Scotland.

We have created around 18,000 opportunities for young people from the £60m committed to support implementation of the Guarantee in 2020/21. A further £70m has been committed for 2021/22.

Employer engagement is at the heart of the Young Person's Guarantee to garner support for young people, particularly support through transitions. This work is supported by the 5 Employer Asks that encourage employers to take a holistic approach to their work with young people.

We recognise the critical role that the Careers service plays in advising young people in their next steps and welcome the Review of this service led by Grahame Smith. There will be a particular focus on those who face the greatest challenges in their journey through education and into rewarding and sustainable careers. The scope of the review also includes looking at the provision of career advice to young people in higher and further education. The Review will be published by the end of the year.

Foundation Apprenticeships

Through Developing the Young Workforce and Young Person's Guarantee, we want to see increasing numbers of young people taking up apprenticeship opportunities.

Foundation Apprenticeships support the Guarantee by creating more opportunities for young people to move on to positive destinations through apprenticeships, further learning or other jobs post-school.

These opportunities provide young people with lifelong adaptable skills, which in addition to having value in themselves with regards to personal development, respond to changing economic and employer demands, playing a crucial role in supporting young people in gaining the required occupational skills and qualifications to meet longer-term economic priorities.

It is vital that young people from a range of backgrounds and abilities experience work-based learning to give our economy a rich and diverse pool of work-ready talent to help the nation recover and thrive.

Next Steps

In addition to the work set out above, we will take the following key next steps to support positive destinations for young people and to recover from the impacts of COVID-19:

- (1) We are on course to **provide over 80 additional counsellors in Further and Higher Education by 2022**, as set out in Programme for Government 2018. The additional resource will enable institutions to access additional counselling services for students.
- (2) We will **develop with stakeholders a Student Mental Health Action Plan** which brings together our commitments on counsellors and equity of access for college students and support for the NUS Scotland Think Positive initiative.
- (3) We are **taking forward arrangements in relation to the future direction of Equally Safe in colleges and universities**, and look forward to further working with the sector on this in 2021 and beyond.
- (3) Given the significant growth of Foundation Apprenticeship and to ensure continued best outcomes for young people, the Scottish Government commissioned HM Inspectors of Education (HMIE) to **undertake a review of the delivery of FA programmes**. Engagement activity required for Phase 2 commenced in February 2021 and is complete. Phase 3 was paused in response to COVID-19, and will recommence in due course.
- (4) To **continue to support CLD learners and the CLD workforce** as we recover from the pandemic, SG will:
 - Invest £0.5 million in the workforce to support capacity to deliver digital learning.
 - Review the Requirements for Community Learning and Development (Scotland) Regulations 2013, to determine the impact of these regulations on budget decision making, and in doing so, seek to safeguard investment in CLD services.
 - Continue work, which paused during COVID-19, to develop a youth work strategy and an adult learning strategy for Scotland.
- (5) **Produce a full response to the SFC Review of Coherent Provision and Sustainability**. The outputs of the review, published on 29 June 2021, will form an important part of our thinking on the future strategy for tertiary education and university research in Scotland, as we look to our Colleges and Universities to be at the heart of recovery.

9. SUPPORTING THE WORKFORCE

We know that the education workforce has faced a number of challenges in the past year and, while teaching and support staff in schools, colleges and universities have risen admirably to every challenge they have faced, for many there will have been an impact on their own wellbeing.

The workforce will continue to play a vital role in supporting our children and young people to recover from the impacts of the pandemic, and it is essential that staff in all education settings are given the support they need to do this.

£1.5 million was allocated to a package of support for staff in schools in 2020/21, and there were a total of approximately 4,200 engagements from headteachers, teachers and other education staff across all elements of the package.

This support included:

- Communication of available professional learning and wellbeing support available from employers, professional associations and national organisations, now accessible in a single page on the ES website;
- Mental health and wellbeing support from Barnardo's Scotland and Place2Be;
- Stepping Stones: professional learning opportunities for post-probation teachers led in partnership by the General Teaching Council for Scotland and Education Scotland;
- Reflective supervision, and coaching and mentoring support from a number of partner organisations; and
- Continuation of the Scottish Government's commitment, in partnership with the Hunter Foundation, to the values-based leadership programmes delivered by Columba 1400.

In the college sector, we have allocated additional funding of £4.4 million for colleges to support both students and staff to deal with the impacts of the pandemic.

For our practitioners working in **early learning and childcare**, support has included and will continue to include:

- Ongoing delivery of a suite of free continued professional learning (CPL) modules, and a national directory of wider CPL opportunities, to ensure a high quality ELC experience delivered by a skilled and confident workforce;
- Running a series of webinars for childminders on key topics currently of greatest interest and in response to COVID-19;
- Introducing a **#TeamELC Wellbeing Hub** with partners, which hosts a wealth of information, practical advice and webinars on managing wellbeing.
- Funding a national quality improvement programme, delivered by the Care Inspectorate, to support settings which are not currently meeting the quality criteria within the National Standard of Care Inspectorate evaluations of 'good' or better.
- 'Public Health Blethers' to give the sector the opportunity to engage with and ask questions of public health experts.

Education Scotland also provide bespoke support for ELC settings, local authorities and RICs through regional improvement teams, working closely with local authority and RIC staff to develop joint plans for professional learning and quality improvement, along with a range of guidance and other professional learning initiatives.

Next Steps

In addition to the work set out above, we will take the following key next steps to support the education workforce and to recover from the impacts of COVID-19:

- 1) **A further £750,000 package of support will be offered to support the education workforce in 2021/22.** This package will build on the support offered in 2020/21, with a focus on professional learning which develops staff wellbeing. The provision of coaching, and the offers of coaching and professional learning, were highly evaluated aspects of the 2020/21 offer and will continue to be a key feature of the new package of support led by Education Scotland.

The 2021/22 package of support will include:

- The development of Staff Wellbeing Communities of Practice;
 - A Professional Learning and Leadership (PLL) coaching programme, coach professional development and a 1:1 Coach matching;
 - Building Coaching Skills capacity across Regional Improvement Collaboratives (RICs);
 - 1:1 National Coaching offer;
 - Coaching and Mentoring support for educators from minority ethnic backgrounds;
 - A 'Stepping Stones' Programme.
- 2) There has been an **ongoing and evolving programme of PLL support** via digilearn.scot for digital learning, teaching, assessment and leadership.
 - 3) We are working with the General Teaching Council for Scotland to ensure enhanced support for **probationer teachers' wellbeing, knowledge and skills development.**
 - 4) The General Teaching Council, the Scottish Council of Deans of Education, ADES and the Student Placement Management Group have also developed arrangements to **ensure that 20/21 students of Initial Teacher Education can complete their programme of study in the new session and if successful move into probation.**

10. MONITORING AND REPORTING OUTCOMES

It is clear that a significant amount of action and activity lies ahead. We will continue to progress the implementation of these policies with the urgency that is required to support positive outcomes for children and young people, and to protect against any lasting impacts from the pandemic.

In doing so, we will continue to work with our partners from across the system, and to engage widely with all stakeholders. As well as ongoing dialogue with CERG, the refreshed Scottish Education Council and the new Children and Young People's Education Council will form key pillars in our engagement.

Audit Scotland recommended that we “work with stakeholders to develop and publish consistent and robust national data that reflects the ambitions of the national curriculum, national policy priorities such as health and wellbeing and confidence, and key priorities for Covid-19 recovery and improvement” and we are committed to doing this.

We also intend to maintain transparency and openness regarding the progress that is being made, and to identify at the earliest stage where any additional work or change of course is required. HM Inspectors of Education will undertake national thematic reviews to support improvement and identify what is working well and highly effective practice. They will also highlight areas where further improvement is required. The publication of the 2022 National Improvement Framework and Improvement Plan will form a central part of that communication, and we will continue to update Parliament on progress in the meantime.

Essential to such transparency will be the monitoring and reporting of outcomes themselves. The Scottish Government has well-established monitoring and evaluation programmes designed to assess existing policies to improve attainment and wellbeing; intrinsically linked to the aims set out in this document.

The National Improvement Framework Interactive Evidence Report provides an overview of what we know about Scottish education and the context in which our children and young people learn. It brings together available current evidence on achievement, attainment, health and wellbeing, and the wider education system, with a specific focus on differences between children living in the most deprived and least deprived areas. It aims to present an objective picture of Scottish education, based on a wide range of sources. Such evidence is crucial to be able to learn from good practice and develop plans for improvement where needed. Whilst the pandemic and interruption to business as usual has caused some gaps in available evidence, additional data sources have been identified to provide further evidence on the impact of the pandemic on children young people, parents and carers and the teaching workforce. These will be reported on in the NIF 2022 in December 2021.

The Scottish Attainment Challenge is supported by an annual evaluation programme of the underlying Attainment Scotland Fund (ASF). The ASF evaluation assesses progress towards the long-term outcomes of SAC including raising attainment for all

and closing the attainment gap between the most and least disadvantaged children and young people. The annual ASF evaluation programme has been adapted – and is continuing to adapt – to include assessment of progress made during the time of school building closures due to the pandemic. The evaluation is being expanded to assess if and how approaches were modified to support pupils during periods of school building closures, how the pandemic affected collaborations across the education system (positively or negatively) and what positive/negative unintended consequences arose during the period of remote learning.

Our schedule of forthcoming data and evidence that will help us to check we remain on track includes:

- Attendance, Absence and Exclusion statistics, December 2021
- Achievement of CfE Levels data (Primary), December 2021
- Summary Statistics for School in Scotland (teacher and pupil numbers), December 2021
- School Leaver Attainment and Initial Destinations statistics, February 2022
- Follow up leaver destination statistics, June 2022
- Educational Outcomes for Looked After Children, June 2022
- Health and Wellbeing Census results, late 2022
- Regular updates to the NIFIER (approx. quarterly from December 2021)



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