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# Post Covid – Supporting Recovery

## Returning to Early Learning and Childcare settings

The decision to close school and childcare settings has had a profound impact on the lives of children and families throughout Scotland. There was little time to prepare, or scope to explain, the changes to our youngest children. Their relationships and friendships were abruptly interrupted as well as their learning.

We know there will be challenges in returning to services after a turbulent break. In line with *Realising the Ambition,* our focus must be on supporting children when they are in settings, to form a secure and emotionally resilient attachment base which will stand them in good stead as they grow and develop. **Nurturing and attached relationships are essential** to creating the conditions for children to flourish.

All children have a right to play, to learn and to access experiences that meet their physical, social, emotional and cultural needs, and they have a right to associate with their peers. In line with Scotland's commitment to Getting It Right For Every Child, children also have the right to the best possible health, with their best interests a top priority in all decisions and actions that affect them. Adults, of course, also have fundamental rights in relation to their health and wellbeing. These important rights and considerations have all been factored into the development of the Scottish Government '*A framework for reopening ELC services'.*

## Re-establishing routines and expectations

For many the re-establishment of routines will be difficult, not just for ELC based routines but also for those daily life routines, such as sleep and getting ready for the day. We know that this is difficult and a source of anxiety at the beginning of every term, but this will be on a larger scale. We will need to allow a period of adjustment and be aware of the impact of trying to re-establish these routines for staff, parents and children. We will need to re-learn the rhythm of the ELC. It will also take time to re-establish and re-learn the expectations of ELC behavior and learning. We know that much of learning is based on practice and we will all be a little out of practice in this respect.

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## Children living in poverty

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation report on closing the gap in Scottish Education highlights that children from higher-income households significantly outperform those from low income households at ages 3 and 5. By age 5, there is gap of 10 months in problem-solving development, 13 months in vocabulary.  This gap is likely to have been further affected during lockdown with children missing out on valuable ELC input.  Numerous studies show that early provision of high-quality, full-day preschool education is effective. Full-day preschool produces significantly higher literacy and numeracy for children from low-income families. However, quality of provision matters more for disadvantaged children. The report highlights, amongst other aspects, the importance of nurturing approaches, parental involvement and increasing reading engagement in closing the gap.

A more detailed summary of the findings can be found below:

https://www.jrf.org.uk/sites/default/files/jrf/migrated/files/education-attainment-scotland-summary.pdf

## Realising the Ambition

**Realising the Ambition: Being Me** (2020) is the new national practice guidance for early years in Scotland.  It builds upon the original principles and philosophy of Pre-Birth to 3 and Building the Ambition.  It covers children's learning and development from birth into the early years of primary school.  Staff should utilise this guidance to support the provision of high quality environments, experiences and interactions which will enrich the experiences of all children.

## Summary of ELC resources

This Education Scotland webpage provides a summary of key information, policy, resources, and exemplification relating to early learning and childcare (ELC). This page aims to support all ELC practitioners, leaders and policy makers with an interest in, or responsibility for, early learning and childcare.

https://education.gov.scot/improvement/practice-exemplars/a-summary-of-elc-resources

## Personal Care Plans

Staff should utilise the SAC personal plan guidance and materials with a focus on the wellbeing indicators to assess children's emotional wellbeing.  This will be particularly important as children return to their setting post lockdown and will enable staff to highlight those children who may require support.

## Assessment and Observation

Although children's progress can be assessed formally, it can also be monitored informally. **This is the most important form of assessment and for most young children it will be the only form of assessment.** Evidence will be gathered through the normal processes of on-going observation and tracking of children engaging with experiences and during their normal routines. Children with severe developmental delay, language delay or disorder, hearing problems or other restricting additional support needs should have their progress clearly tracked through their individual plans. Children can be highlighted for more focused assessment through practitioner dialogue where there is insufficient evidence to confidently state that skills are established.

Staff should utilise the SAC early years 'trackers' to establish children's progress across the curriculum and identify any areas of concern.  The trackers incorporate the developmental milestones for literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing. These trackers, in combination with the child's personal care plan, will enable staff to build up a comprehensive picture of children's successes, achievements and identify areas where more targeted support may be required.

## Involving Children and families

We must continue to challenge and extend putting children and families at the centre of our practice. Practitioners should think creatively about ways of consulting children and families and involving them every step of the way.  We should listen to what children and families say will help them most and incorporate that feedback into developing good and effective practice.  What we learn from observations is deepened and extended by working with parents, carers and families.  (GIRFEC, 2008)

## Support and Interventions for EYCs

General cross curricular interventions and strategies advocate high quality experiences, interactions and environments in line with advice from Joseph Rowntree Foundation:-
https://www.jrf.org.uk/sites/default/files/jrf/migrated/files/education-attainment-scotland-summary.pdfreport and Realising the Ambition:-
https://education.gov.scot/improvement/learning-resources/realising-the-ambition/

## Communication and Language

EEF Advice: reading aloud to children and discussing books, explicitly extending children's spoken vocabulary by introducing them to new words in context, and drawing attention to letters and sounds.  Approaches more directly aimed at developing thinking and understanding through language, such as 'sustained shared thinking' or 'guided interaction'. Storytelling and group reading; activities that aim to develop letter knowledge, knowledge of sounds and early phonics; and introductions to different kinds of writing.

I can' Talking Point: https://ican.org.uk/i-cans-talking-point/ Early TalkBoost trackers available where there are concerns about children's language and communication. Scores identify intervention required. Progress checker and poster also available for further intervention and support.

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Talking, Listening and Questions: https://education.gov.scot/improvement/practice-exemplars/elc44-talking-listening-and-questions TLQ is a targeted approach with universal application and aims to equip staff with the skills to identify children with talking and listening difficulties and to deliver differentiated support.

Learning Language and Loving it (Hanen) http://www.hanen.org/ Guidebooks---DVDs/Early-Childhood-Education-Consultants---Trainers/Learning-Language-SLPs-ECE-Consultants.aspx Learning Language and Loving It resources include provide with easy-to-use strategies for helping children interact and communicate effectively in early childhood settings. Three responsive interaction strategies known to promote children's social, language and emergent literacy development:

1. Child-oriented strategies – These strategies encourage children to initiate and engage in conversational interactions so that educators can respond in ways that encourage the child's continued engagement in the interaction.

2. Interaction-promoting strategies – These strategies encourage extended individual and group conversations between adults and children.

3. Language-modelling strategies – These strategies expand the child's oral language skills and facilitate the development of decontextualized (or abstract) language.

Early reading support – e.g. dialogic reading, '3 read approach' (Getting Ready to Read / Ready to Read)
https://www.careinspectorate.com/images/documents/3662/Ready%20to%20read%20booklet%20low%20res.pdf

Phonological awareness support– SAC 'Having fun with Language'

**<u>Numeracy and Maths</u>**

Activities in this area might be structured, for example through programmes designed to develop children's 'number sense' (their developing understanding of quantity and number), or more informal, such as using mathematical games including computer games (see also Digital technology), or pretend activities involving counting or using other mathematical language**.**

**Investigative numeracy strategies**

Early level investigative numeracy is underpinned by the number talks theories and is key to supporting staff interactions for numeracy.

**Block play**

Research looked at how block play in early years impacted on children's later mathematical achievement. Concluded that there was a statistical relationship between early block play performance and later mathematical grades. [https://education.gov.scot/improvement/learning-resources/block-play-block-building-in-the-early-years](https://education.gov.scot/improvement/learning-resources/block-play-block-building-in-the-early-years)

https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/02568540109594958

**<u>Health and Wellbeing</u>**

**Strengths & Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ)**
[https://www.sdqinfo.org/py/sdqinfo/b3.py?language=Englishqz(UK)](https://www.sdqinfo.org/py/sdqinfo/b3.py?language=Englishqz(UK))

Measures emotional symptoms, conduct problems, hyperactivity, peer relationship problems and prosocial behaviour.

**Ferre Laevers – wellbeing and involvement**

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https://www.teachertoolkit.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/LeuvenScale_tcm4-735285.pdf

Use of the The Leuven Scale for well-being focuses on the extent to which children feel at ease, act spontaneously, show vitality and self-confidence. It is a crucial component of emotional intelligence and good mental health.

**PAThS pre-screening questionnaire**

http://www.pathseducation.co.uk/

Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PAThS)

(Social and emotional and self-regulation strategies embedded) evidence based emotional literacy programme that can be used in either a targeted or universal way.

**Nurturing Approaches**

https://education.gov.scot/improvement/self-evaluation/applying-nurture-as-a-whole-school-approach-a-framework-to-support-self-evaluation/

This self-evaluation framework provides a tool to support early learning and childcare (ELC) settings who are applying a whole-centre l approach to nurture. It also provides a range of practical tools that can be used to triangulate self-evaluation information and support the implementation of nurturing approaches, along with focus group prompts, a questionnaire for staff and parents, and readiness checklists.

**EEF Early Years Toolkit**

- Communication and Language approaches
  - These approaches emphasize the high level of importance of verbal interactions & the spoken word for younger children, and that techniques which directly support communication such as talking, modelling, and reasoning support language development.
  - Examples include reading aloud to children, discussing books, explicitly introducing new words (in the correct context), drawing attention to letters etc.
  - Studies examining these approaches tend to demonstrate positive effects on language skills, on average children who participate in such an approach make an additional 6 months progress over the course of a year.
  - There is extensive and consistent evidence supporting this approach.
  - Cost estimated at £10-£20 per pupil.
- Early numeracy approaches
  - These approaches seek to expand young children's understanding of early numeracy concepts and number skills.
  - Examples might include structured activities (Inc. programmes that develop number sense), informal activities (such as maths games or digital technology) or pretend activities that incorporate maths concepts such as counting.
  - Studies examining the efficacy of early numeracy approaches indicate that they have a positive impact, with an average 6 months additional progress in early numeracy outcomes. There is extensive evidence supporting this, including several meta-analyses.
    - The type of approach chosen may affect its effectiveness.
  - Overall costs estimated to be low.
- Play-Based Learning
  - Play-based approaches should be viewed in the context that play is "an enjoyable activity that is pursued for pleasure or its own sake". These approaches may be conducted on a solitary or group basis, and they may be adult or child-led.

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- o The evidence base for these approaches is fairly weak and inconsistent, as it is based on a limited evidence base. However, some results do indicate five-month additional progress in those receiving play-based learning.
- o Costs estimated to be very low.
- Self-Regulation strategies
  - o In early years environments, improving self-regulation skills can help reduce impulsive behaviour and improve self-control, with self-regulation being viewed as the ability to manage one's own behaviour as well as mange aspects of learning. Self-regulation strategies may encourage activities which help children to explain their strategies and plans when learning, or stories/characters to promote memory of learning strategies.
    - It's noted that it may be easier to see children's self-regulation abilities when they are playing or interacting with a peer.
  - o A number of studies demonstrate that when self-regulation strategies are used to promote learning, an average additional five months progress is seen.
  - o The evidence in this area is limited, as most of the research has been carried out with older children, but the EEF considers it promising.
  - o Costs estimated as very low, with "few to no" financial costs associated.
- Digital technology
  - o These approaches use computers or other forms of technology to support learning and development in the early years environment.
  - o This would include:
    - Children using technology independently;
    - Technology (such as smart boards) being employed by early years staff to support interactions with children; and
    - Technology supporting the CLPL of early years practitioners.
  - o Studies looking at the effectiveness of digital technology found that, on average, pupils make an additional four months progress over the course of the year.

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- Technology should be a supplemental resource.
  - o The evidence is limited, as it is largely based on studies with older children or smaller research studies (rather than meta-analyses).
  - o Costs estimated at around £335 per pupil (initially).
- Early Literacy Approaches
  - o These seek to improve the reading or writing knowledge, understanding or skills of young children. Examples include:
    - Storytelling or reading as a group;
    - Activities that promote early phonics knowledge, letter knowledge and knowledge of sound;
    - Activities that introduce different types of writing.
  - o These approaches consistently demonstrate a positive impact, research has shown that an average of four months additional progress is typically seen, however in some cases as much as six months additional progress can be noted.
  - o The evidence base of these approaches is moderate, including several meta-analyses and quality studies.
  - o Costs estimated to be very low.
- Parental Engagement
  - o This approach seeks to involve parents in their child(ren)'s learning. Examples include:
    - Encouraging parents to read to their children at home;
    - Encouraging parents to talk with their children at home;
    - Encouraging parents to join in activities at their child's early years centre;
    - Programmes that support and teach parents, e.g. parenting skills, adult literacy/numeracy;
    - Intense interventions to support disadvantaged families or families experiencing an acute crisis.
  - o Parental engagement in early years is frequently associated with positive academic outcomes for children. Use of parental engagement programmes is associated with an average four months additional progress over the course of the year – as with many of the other

interventions discussed different approaches to parental engagement may have varying degrees of efficacy.

- o The evidence base in this area is moderate.
- o Costs per child are estimated as 'moderate' but can vary depending on the specific approach.

- Physical development approaches
  - o These approaches aim largely to improve young children's physical skills, as well as their health.
  - o Activities may target a specific component of a child's physical development, such as fine motor skills, or consist of more general active play (such as outdoor play).
  - o Generally the evidence in this area is positive, however there are few studies and some results are inconsistent. The general idea that physical activity supports learning has a stronger evidence base.
  - o Cost thought to be very low.
- Social and emotional learning strategies
  - o These approaches seek to positively affect children's learning and general development through supporting social and emotional skills. These strategies might seek to support children's interactions with others or may include some self-regulation strategies.
  - o There are two categories in which social and emotional learning falls:
    - Universal interventions
    - Targeted programmes for children with social, emotional and behavioural needs.
  - o The existing evidence base for these strategies is positive, with participating children making an average three months' additional progress over the course of a year. These strategies may positively affect children's interactions, their attitudes towards learning and actual learning.
  - o The research base is quite limited in this area, though there have been some meta-analyses.

o For universal approaches, costs are estimated to be quite low. The costs for targeted interventions in this area are moderate, up to £2,800 per child per year