

# Education policy responses across the UK to the pandemic

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# Contents

Executive Summary.....	6
Early years.....	6
School provision during lockdown.....	6
Lost weeks of schooling.....	7
Home-learning.....	7
Free School Meals.....	8
Digital inclusion.....	8
Special Educational Needs and Disabilities.....	9
Key Lessons.....	9
Introduction.....	11
Table 1: Policy responses during lockdown.....	14
Policy responses during lockdown.....	15
Early years support.....	15
Table 2: Financial support for early years settings and individuals during lockdown and to help with reopening.....	16
UK-wide support.....	16
Government-funded early education and care.....	18
Sector specific grants.....	20
Other forms of support.....	21
Summary.....	21
Survey evidence on the extent of pressures on early years settings during the pandemic.....	22
Table 3: Summary of surveys and studies on the extent of pressures or actual closures of early years settings.....	24
School provision during lockdown.....	27
Figure 2: School attendance rates over time during lockdown.....	28
Table 4: School attendance details during lockdown.....	29
Lost weeks of schooling.....	30
Figure 3: Lost weeks of schooling during lockdown (up to the end of July 2020).....	32
Home learning.....	33
Table 5: Summary or surveys on extent of home learning.....	35
Free school meals.....	38
Table 6: Summary of provision of Free School Meals during lockdown, by country.....	39
Digital inclusion.....	43

Table 7 – Delivery and coverage of digital devices .....	46
SEND Provision.....	47
Modification of duties on local authorities.....	47
Support provided to children with SEND .....	49
Evidence from surveys of parents of children with SEND or additional support needs.....	51
Table 8: Summary of surveys of parents of children with SEND on the impact of school closures and the support available .....	53
Policy and implementation lessons .....	55

## Executive Summary

In the face of enormous pressure posed by the ongoing pandemic for the provision of education, the four governments across the UK made different choices about how to support pupils during lockdown. They are also making different choices about how to open educational institutions, as well as how to provide additional support to children from disadvantaged and vulnerable backgrounds. Given these differences, there is now a renewed interest in devolution.

The aim of this report is to document the evolving education policy response of governments across the UK to the pandemic, and any emerging evidence on the relative effectiveness and timeliness of those choices in achieving their initial delivery aims. The focus is on schooling and early years education to make this exercise manageable. The work focuses on responses of the UK Government (England), Welsh Government, Scottish Government and Northern Ireland Executive between March and July 2020.

### Early years

In response to the Coronavirus outbreak, early years and childcare providers across England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland closed in late March for all pupils, except children of key workers and those classified as vulnerable. This put considerable pressure on providers of early education and care in the private, voluntary and independent sectors, which rely on a mix of private and public funding.

- **A significant proportion of government support was delivered via UK-wide schemes** like the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS) which covered staff costs that represent the majority of providers' costs. Other UK-wide support includes the Self-Employed Income Support Scheme which provided a relatively generous amount of support to eligible childminders.
- **Continued funding for government-funded early education and childcare via separate schemes in all four countries is likely to have been of great importance to providers.** Thus far England has committed to continue this funding for the longest period.
- **Early guidance from the Department for Education led to early years providers in England and other countries holding inaccurate expectations about the support they would receive.** Guidance failed to make it clear that funding from the CJRS and from government-funded education and care could not both be claimed to cover the same costs. While this was a sensible distinction to draw, the three-week delay in clarifying this caused significant uncertainty.
- **Other support included sector-specific grants in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, and generic business grants available to some providers in England and Northern Ireland.**

### School provision during lockdown

Schools across the UK closed to pupils in late March 2020, except for children of key workers and children classed as vulnerable. School provision during lockdown was organised on a different basis across the UK and led to differences in the share of institutions remaining open and pupils who attended.

- **Provision was mostly organised on an individual school basis in England.** This led to a large number of schools remaining open (70 per cent) and the largest shares of all pupils (1.7 per cent) and vulnerable pupils (6.7 per cent) attending during lockdown.

- **Provision was mostly based on hub or cluster schools in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.** This led to a lower share of institutions remaining open (25-30 per cent) and lower shares of pupils attending (about 1 per cent in Wales and Scotland), and lower shares of vulnerable pupils attending (4-5 per cent).
- **The share of pupils attending school during lockdown was lowest in Northern Ireland** (0.4 per cent of all pupils and 1.5 per cent of vulnerable pupils). This partly reflected a greater emphasis that school provision was a last resort.

### Lost weeks of schooling

Whilst all pupils will have missed out on significant time in school, differences in term dates, exam leave and re-opening policies will have led to differences to how many weeks of actual school time were lost by different year groups in different countries:

- **Year groups taking exams will have lost the least amount of schooling.** Year groups taking GCSE or A-level equivalent exams will have lost about 5 weeks of schooling in England, Wales and Northern Ireland as many would have been on exam leave in a normal year. Pupils taking National and Higher exams in Scotland will have lost between 3-6 weeks.
- **Differences in school holiday and terms dates has meant other pupils in Scotland and Northern Ireland have lost slightly fewer weeks of schooling than pupils in England and Wales** (11 weeks in Scotland, 12 weeks in Northern Ireland).
- **Differences in summer re-opening policies across Wales and England will have led to more heterogeneity in lost weeks of schooling.** Schools in England were encouraged to open more widely to pupils in Reception, Y1 and Y6 in England from the start of June. However, only about 30 per cent of these year groups attended on any given day. Pupils who were able to attend on a full-time basis from early June will have lost 7 weeks of schooling, whilst others could have lost up to 14 weeks. In Wales, pupils attended for about 3 days, on average, from June 28<sup>th</sup> and will probably have lost 13 weeks of schooling, on average.

### Home-learning

In order to mitigate the effects of lost schooling, parents were asked to provide home learning for their children. In the case of younger pupils, this will have required parents to be directly involved, whilst with older pupils, this will have involved more independent study and, potentially, online lessons. Schools assisted with this by providing some materials and resources, mostly through online platforms. This represented a significant challenge and a number of key findings emerge from surveys of home learning:

- **The amount of reported home learning varies by survey, but the amount of home learning is clearly a lot lower than average hours spent on educational activities each day before lockdown.** High-end estimates of 4.5 hours per day for the amount of home learning imply a 25-30 per cent reduction compared with pre-lockdown educational activities.
- **Where UK comparisons can be made, hours of home schooling were highest in London, the South-East and South West of England** (22-25 per cent doing 4 or more hours per day) and lowest in Wales, Scotland, the Midlands and Northern England (where 15 per cent or less were doing 4 or more hours per day), with Northern Ireland in between (18 per cent).
- **All studies report a significant disadvantage gap in the amount of home learning.** Differences in home learning between high- and low- income families equated to about 75 minutes per day, which would have led to about 15 days less schooling for children from

low-income families up to the end of July in England. Such disadvantage gaps were clear within individual studies for England, Northern Ireland and Scotland.

- **There is consistent evidence that children from disadvantaged backgrounds often lacked the necessary digital equipment and resources to undertake effective home learning.** About 10 per cent of pupils lacked the necessary digital equipment and/or good internet connection. About 18 per cent of parents cited a lack of quiet study space a key barrier to home learning.

## Free School Meals

School closures meant that the vast majority of the 1.7 million pupils across the UK who would usually receive free school meals during the day in term time could no longer access these. For many children, the meal that they receive at school is a key part of their diet, and its absence could put a significant strain on families' already stretched budgets.

- **Issues with the design and implementation of a national voucher scheme in England meant that many families faced considerable delays in accessing the support they needed to feed their families.**
- **In Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, families appear to have had better access to timely and appropriate support.** In Wales and Scotland, governments allowed a greater amount of local discretion in the delivery of support, relying on existing infrastructure and allowing responses to be tailored to the needs of families. In Northern Ireland, direct payments were sent to parents, granting flexibility to families.
- **Delays to the announcements to extend support into the summer holidays in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland are likely to have caused some difficulty for families trying to plan their finances ahead of the summer holiday.** The decision to extend support for children eligible for free school meals to cover the summer holiday came first in Wales (22 April), followed by Scotland and England (16 June) and Northern Ireland (18 June).
- **National funding commitments per child varied between as well as within countries, with Wales (£19.50 per week) and England (£15) providing the largest amount, Northern Ireland the least (£13.50), and Scotland the most variable by local authority (£10-20).**

## Digital inclusion

All four nations made significant efforts to provide digital devices to disadvantaged and vulnerable learners who did not have the necessary equipment at home to access online learning materials. The focus and speed of these policies differed across the UK:

- **Making use of well-established infrastructure on digital inclusion, policymakers in Wales were able to make early steps.** Policymakers and schools were able to re-purpose existing stocks of laptops and send new MiFi devices (wireless routers) to disadvantaged learners by the end of May (the latter covering 2.7 per cent of pupils).
- **Delivery of laptops and 4G routers came slightly later in England,** with all digital equipment sent out by the end of June (laptops covered 2.6 per cent of pupils, 4G routers covered 0.6 per cent of pupils).
- **In Scotland and Northern Ireland, delivery was only complete by or after the end of the school year.** This limited access to online learning materials for disadvantaged learners.



## Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

Changes to education provision due to the pandemic have led to significant changes to the day-to-day lives of many children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). Children with SEND can have significant problems accessing virtual support and resources, while the individualised nature of children's learning pathways means that tailored advice for parents on how to deliver learning activities is often required, sometimes alongside physical resources required for specific activities.

- **Governments in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland made changes to the duties on relevant bodies related to assessments of children's needs and securing provision for children with SEND or additional support needs. This is likely to have led to delays in children accessing support. The Welsh Government did not modify these duties.** It is unclear how the different approaches to modifying these duties has impacted the actual actions of relevant bodies, but the consequences for access to provision are potentially severe for a high number of children.
- **England appears to have gone furthest in supporting the learning needs of children with SEND** by announcing considerable funding to improve the support available for children with SEND, including substantial portions of the national £1bn catch-up package.
- **However, support for children with SEND appears to have been insufficient in all countries, as well as uneven,** with some children missing out depending on the support available from their school or local authority and how complex children's needs were. Local approaches to supporting children with additional learning needs or disabilities were encouraged in all countries but appear not to have been met with enough financial or other support to make up for the loss of extra support that children would usually receive in school.

## Key Lessons

Whilst the intention of this report is to document choices, rather than engage in detailed evaluation of the impact of these choices, a number of key lessons do emerge:

- **Importance of clear expectations** – Given the financial risks posed by the pandemic to early years providers, it was highly unfortunate that the UK Department for Education took until mid April to clarify the precise nature of support they could claim through the furlough scheme and thus allowed incorrect expectations of higher support to take root. Similarly, policymakers in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland announced free school meals support for school holidays relatively late. In contrast policymakers in Wales were able to announce such support and provide reassurance much earlier.
- **Reliance on existing infrastructure and relationships** – Policymakers were able to act faster and more effectively where they could rely on existing infrastructure and relationships. For example, the existence of a digital inclusion strategy in Wales allowed schools, local authorities and the Welsh Government to work together to quickly provide laptops and internet connections to disadvantaged learners in April/May 2020. Where new procurement systems had to be put in place, delivery of digital devices was much slower (end of June in England and Northern Ireland, and August 2020 in Scotland). Similarly, the creation of a new voucher and online system for free meals in England led to significant delays and gaps in provision. In contrast, reliance on local-authority based provision in Wales and Scotland led to fast and locally tailored provision.

- **Heterogeneity in lost schooling** – Not all pupils will have lost the same amount of schooling. Pupils in Scotland and Northern Ireland will have lost less schooling as term times meant pupils were due to be in school less during the period covered by lockdown. Similarly, pupils in exam years will have lost less schooling as they would have been in school less during a normal year. The re-opening of schools in Wales and England during June and July 2020 will have also lessened the loss of schooling, but there will have been significant heterogeneity in terms of how much schooling pupils actually received.
- **Common challenges on disadvantage** – All four nations faced significant challenges in aiding disadvantaged pupils. This includes areas where policymakers could provide some support, such as replacements for free meals and digital devices. But it will also include areas where there is little they could do, such as a lack of quiet study space. All the evidence suggests significant inequalities in access to home and online learning. It must therefore be a priority for all policymakers to assess just how much further disadvantaged pupils have fallen behind and to provide appropriate and targeted catch-up support.
- **Supply drives demand** – In England, where more individual schools and early years providers were open during lockdown, a much larger share of all learners and vulnerable learners attended education during lockdown. Where a hub- or cluster-based approach was employed, as in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland - fewer schools and settings were open and fewer pupils attended. This strongly suggests that supply decisions play a major role in determining attendance levels.
- **Reduced support for vulnerable learners** – It is clear that policymakers, schools and local authorities faced enormous challenges in providing appropriate educational support for learners with special educational needs or vulnerable pupils more generally. Across England, Scotland and Northern Ireland, the duties placed on local authorities to provide assessments and provision were reduced to varying degrees. Duties were, however, essentially unchanged in Wales. It will be important to understand the impact of these decisions and to prioritise restoring support to these learners.

## Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic led to the closure of many school and education institutions to most pupils during lockdown. Whilst there is likely to be a significant loss of learning for all pupils, school closures will likely have a larger impact on disadvantaged pupils and younger children, given evidence showing that education investments have a larger impact on such children.<sup>1</sup> Home and online learning will partially compensate for such losses, but evidence suggests this was socially graded and much harder for younger children. The evidence also shows that disadvantaged pupils were likely to receive less learning support from their parents, and more likely to lack the digital equipment and internet access required to access online materials.

The delivery of in-kind benefits, such as free school meals, was also complicated by school closures. In normal times, schools also play a key role in identifying children at risk of harm or neglect. During lockdown, vulnerable children were mostly expected to attend schools, but this was hard to enforce in practice. It was also extremely challenging to deliver support for children with special educational needs and disabilities, both in mainstream and specialist settings. Such children often require close contact and support from adults and are more likely to have health conditions that make them vulnerable to the effects of COVID-19 (and may themselves have been shielding as a result).

In the face of such enormous challenges, the four governments across the UK made different choices about how to support pupils during lockdown. They are also making different choices about how to open educational institutions and how to provide additional support to children from disadvantaged and vulnerable backgrounds. Given these differences, there is now a renewed interest in devolution.

The aim of this report is to document the evolving education policy response of governments across the UK to the pandemic, and any emerging evidence on the relative effectiveness and timeliness of those choices in achieving their initial delivery aims. The focus is on schooling and early years education to make this exercise manageable. The work focuses on responses of the UK Government (England), Welsh Government, Scottish Government and Northern Ireland Executive over 2020.

The differences in responses will have partly been shaped by the different emphasis and messaging on lockdown across the four countries, as well as differences in initial COVID-19 case rates during mid-March 2020. Across all four nations, schools remained open for the children of key workers and vulnerable pupils. However, in Northern Ireland, it was stressed that provision for children of key workers was a last resort and was only to be used “if no other viable option exists.”

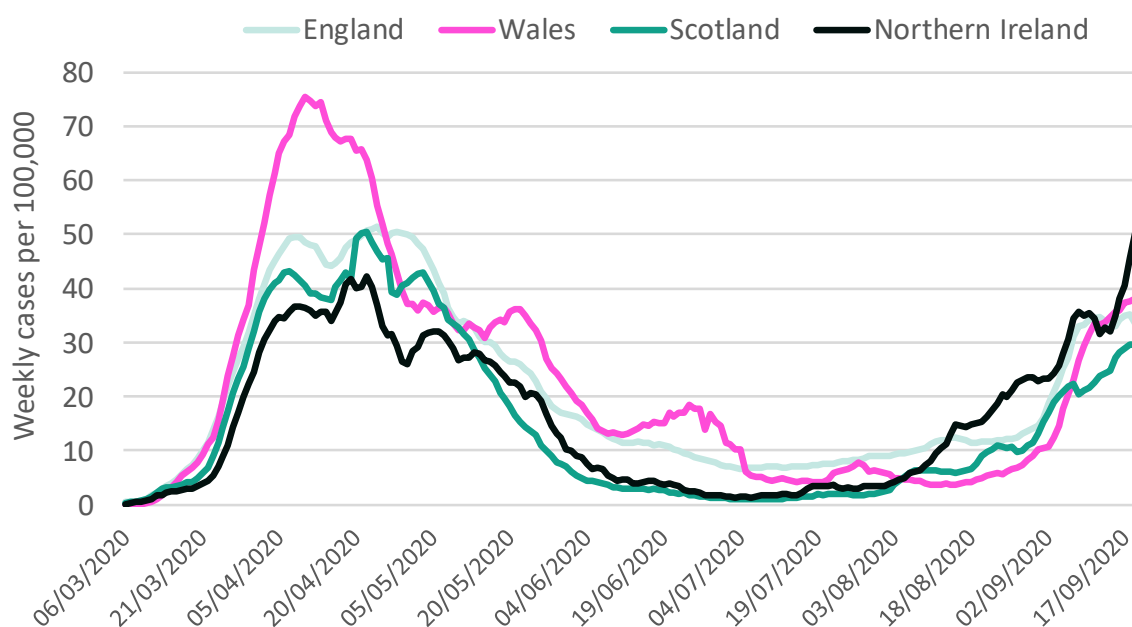
Figure 1 shows weekly COVID-19 case numbers by country from March through to September. Given the expansion of testing over time, case numbers in March are likely to be significant under-estimates of true case numbers. That being said, in the last week of March, 20,000 cases were reported in England, about 500 in Northern Ireland, about 1,750 in Scotland and about 1,500 in Wales. This represented about 30 weekly cases per 100,000 in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland, but about 50 per 100,000 in Wales. These case rates have evolved at different rates over time across each country. All countries saw peaks in mid-April, with the highest number of cases per 100,000 in Wales (over 70 per 100,000) and lowest in Northern Ireland (about 40 per 100,000). Case

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<sup>1</sup> Cunha, F., Heckman, J. J. and Schennach, S. M. (2010), ‘Estimating the technology of cognitive and noncognitive skill formation’, *Econometrica*, 78, 883–931, <https://doi.org/10.3982/ECTA6551>.  
Jackson, C. K., Johnson, R. C. and Persico, C. (2016), ‘The effects of school spending on educational and economic outcomes: evidence from school finance reforms’, *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 131, 157–218, <https://doi.org/10.1093/qje/qjv036>

numbers then declined and reached low points in late July across all countries. Since then, case numbers have begun to rise again. At the time of writing, weekly cases per 100,000 were 50 in Northern Ireland, but about 30 per 100,000 in the other three nations of the UK.

**Figure 1: Weekly COVID-19 cases by country over time**



Sources: <https://coronavirus.data.gov.uk/cases>

Policy decisions during lockdown were also shaped by the overall strategies and priorities set out in each country. The Scottish Government set out a decision framework for exiting lockdown in late April 2020<sup>2</sup> and have updated this at various stages, including plans for reopening of schools.<sup>3</sup> The UK government set out a roadmap for leaving lockdown in early May 2020<sup>4</sup> and plans for initial reopening in June 2020.<sup>5</sup> The Welsh Government set out a framework for recovery in late April 2020<sup>6</sup> and a decision framework for education and childcare in mid-May 2020<sup>7</sup>. The Northern Ireland Executive set out its approach to decision-making for exiting lockdown in mid-May 2020<sup>8</sup> and began setting out its “Education Restart” in early June 2020,<sup>9</sup> with support provided by the Education and Training Inspectorate for the “Continuity in Learning Programme.”<sup>10</sup>

This version of the report focuses on responses during lockdown, with Table 1 summarising these differences. The final section draws a number of policy and implementation lessons. An updated

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-framework-decision-making/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/news/schools-to-re-open-in-august/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/our-plan-to-rebuild-the-uk-governments-covid-19-recovery-strategy>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/actions-for-educational-and-childcare-settings-to-prepare-for-wider-opening-from-1-june-2020/actions-for-education-and-childcare-settings-to-prepare-for-wider-opening-from-1-june-2020#approach-first-phase-of-wider-opening-of-educational-and-childcare-settings>

<sup>6</sup> <https://gov.wales/leading-wales-out-coronavirus-pandemic>

<sup>7</sup> <https://gov.wales/decision-framework-next-phase-education-and-childcare>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk/publications/coronavirus-executive-approach-decision-making>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/node/44644>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.etini.gov.uk/news/eti-continuity-learning-guidance-schools>

version will additionally look at reopening and catch-up activities, and will be published in the coming months.

This report is intended to be a resource for policymakers, commentators, researchers, and schools and early years providers across the four nations of the UK. Whilst this report is mainly backward looking, the lessons learnt are still likely to be highly relevant as areas across the UK move into some version of national and local lockdowns in the coming weeks and months.

If we have missed any important data or information about the nature of the policy responses, then readers are very welcome to contact the authors of this report so that we might be able to add such detail to future versions of this report.

We would also like to thank all the policymakers and other stakeholders across all four nations who provided incredibly valuable information and data to make this report possible, as well as for their comments and feedback. From all our discussions, it was clear that policymakers and stakeholders were all doing their utmost to provide support to pupils, schools and providers during the crisis.

**Table 1: Policy responses during lockdown**

	England	Wales	Scotland	Northern Ireland
<b>Early Years Support</b>	UK-wide support plus... Continued early education and childcare (ECEC) funding until end of 2020, business rates holiday, generic business grants.	UK-wide support plus... Continued ECEC funding for three months, funded ECEC for key workers & vulnerable children, grants up to £5,000.	UK-wide support plus... Continued ECEC funding for period of closures, encouraged 'sustainable local funding models', grants worth £1,500-£8,000.	UK-wide support plus... Continued ECEC funding for three months, grants worth £1,500-£27,000, business rates holiday, generic business grants.
<b>School Provision During Lockdown</b> (Apr-Jun, or Apr-May for England)	Organised on school-by-school  <b>Settings Open:</b> 71% <b>Children attending:</b> 1.7% <b>Vulnerable children:</b> 6.7%	Organised by local authorities (mostly hub-based) <b>Settings Open:</b> 34% <b>Children attending:</b> 1.1% <b>Vulnerable children:</b> 4%	Organised by local authorities (mostly hub-based) <b>Settings Open:</b> 24% <b>Children attending:</b> 1.1% <b>Vulnerable children:</b> 4.8%	Organised school-by-school (high use of clusters) <b>Settings Open:</b> 30% <b>Children attending:</b> 0.4% <b>Vulnerable children:</b> 1.5%
<b>Lost Weeks of Schooling</b>	Most year groups: 12-14 weeks Best-case for R, Y1 & Y6: 7 weeks Exam year groups: 5 weeks	Most year groups: 13 weeks Exam year groups: 5 weeks	Most year groups: 11 weeks Exam year groups: 3-6 weeks	Most year groups: 12 weeks Exam year groups: 5 weeks
<b>Free School Meals Provision</b>	National voucher scheme worth £15 per week. Available in term time and holidays. Significant uncertainty and administrative delays.	Locally determined schemes funded at £19.50 per week. Available in term-time and holidays.	Locally determined schemes funded at £10 to £20 per week. Available in term-time and holidays (families receiving mean-tested benefits).	Direct bank payments from Education Authority of £13.50 per week. Term time and summer holiday.
<b>Digital Inclusion</b>	Laptops: 2.6% of pupils by end June 2020; 4G Routers: 0.6% of pupils by end June 2020	Mifi devices (wireless routers) cover about 2.7% of pupils by end of May 2020	Laptops/tablets with internet cover 3.6% of pupils by end August 2020	Laptops/tablets (no internet) delivered by end-June cover 1.1% of pupils
<b>SEND Provision</b>	Timescales for EHC assessments & plans changed to as soon as 'reasonably practicable' until Sept 2020; legal duties modified to use 'reasonable endeavours' to secure provision until July 2020.	No modification of legal duties on local authorities.	Legal duties modified to disregard some failures and certain timeframes, where failure attributable to pandemic, until August 2020.	Legal duties modified to use 'best endeavours', where failure to meet original duty attributable to pandemic, until August 2020.

## Policy responses during lockdown

### Early years support

In response to the Coronavirus outbreak, early years and childcare providers across England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland closed in late March for all pupils, except children of key workers and those classified as vulnerable.<sup>11</sup> While there are a variety of types of support available in each country for children's education and health in the early years, we focus here on support provided by government to providers of early education and care. In theory, the proportion of children eligible to continue attending early years education and care was as high as 40 per cent in England, mainly driven by the proportion of people who were classified as key workers.<sup>12</sup> In practice, attendance levels were much lower, equivalent to as little as five per cent of children who usually attend childcare in term time in England.<sup>13</sup>

Settings that provide early education and childcare in all four countries of the UK are split between those that are managed by the local authority or a school, and those that are managed by private, voluntary or independent sector groups.<sup>14</sup> Providers in both groups often rely on a mix of public and private funding. For the latter group, most of which are small businesses, run on tight margins, closing to all but the children of key workers and children classified as vulnerable meant a significant reduction to their revenue, while their costs – mostly accounted for by staff salaries – would have remained steady without government intervention. The primary policy aim in the early years during lockdown was therefore to provide financial support to early years settings to support them to continue to operate, or to be in a position to reopen once education settings reopened. Table 2 provides a summary of the kinds of support offered to early years settings throughout lockdown by each government of the UK.

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<sup>11</sup> The definition of 'vulnerable' varied between countries, but generally included those children who have a child in need plan, a child protection plan or who are a looked-after child, those with identified special educational needs or a disability or who have been assessed as otherwise vulnerable by educational providers or local authorities.

<sup>12</sup> Blanden, J., Crawford, C., Drayton, E., Farquharson, C., Jarvie, M., & Paull, G. (2020) Challenges for the childcare market: the implications of COVID-19 for childcare providers in England [Online] Available at: <https://www.ifs.org.uk/publications/14990>

<sup>13</sup> Author's calculations based on 65,000 children attending early years settings on 16/04/2020 ([link](#)) compared to approximately 1.3 million children attending during term time, based on figures here ([link](#))

<sup>14</sup> Throughout this section, we use the terms 'setting' and 'provider' interchangeably to mean any provider of early years education and/or childcare in the private, voluntary or independent sector, unless otherwise stated.

**Table 2: Financial support for early years settings and individuals during lockdown and to help with reopening**

Intervention	England	Wales	Scotland	NI	UK-wide scheme
Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme					
Self-employed income support scheme					
Business loans					
Deferral of VAT payments					
Mortgage payment holiday					
The Coronavirus Statutory Sick Pay Rebate Scheme					
For individuals: such as an increase in the support available under Universal Credit					
Government funded early education and childcare (ECEC): continuation of funding					
Government funded ECEC: additional funds/coverage					
Sector specific grants					
Business rates holiday		NA*	NA*		
Generic business grants					

\* Early years providers in Wales and Scotland have not had to pay business rates since April 2019 and April 2018 respectively.

### UK-wide support

Many of the systems of financial support for early years settings, such as the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS), were offered across the UK. Of these, the most significant for the early years sector is likely to have been the CJRS, which covered up to 80 per cent of the salaries of staff who had been temporarily furloughed. There was no requirement on employers to top up the other 20 per cent of staff salaries, meaning that in practice the CJRS did not cover the full amount of their staff costs unless providers opted to top up salaries. On average, 73 per cent of the costs faced by private voluntary and independent early years settings in England are accounted for by staff costs,<sup>15</sup> making this a key area of support. However, the way that the CJRS was implemented, including early guidance which was unclear about its interaction with other sources of public funds,<sup>16</sup> led to inaccurate expectations among some early years settings about the support they were eligible for, while some providers may have been unable to access the furlough scheme fully.

<sup>15</sup> DfE (2020) Childcare and early years providers survey: 2019 [Online] Available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/childcare-and-early-years-providers-survey-2019>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.nurseryworld.co.uk/news/article/government-makes-u-turn-on-nurseries-access-to-furlough-cash>



Early guidance from the Department for Education (published on 24 March) stated that early years settings could access funding from both the CJRS and early entitlement funding, but did not state any restrictions on the interaction of these sources of funding.<sup>17</sup> While guidance published by HM Revenue and Customs on 26 March made clear that CJRS could not be used for the same costs as public income,<sup>18</sup> this distinction was absent in the DfE guidance. Guidance published three weeks later (on 17 April) clarified that funding from the CJRS could only be used to cover the proportion of staff costs that are usually made up by private sources. This meant that settings could not claim from both schemes to cover the same costs. While this is a sensible distinction to draw, the initial guidance from the DfE failed to make it sufficiently clear that funding from the two schemes was limited in this way and led to early years providers holding inaccurate expectations about the support they would receive.

As noted by the authors of one study, the distinction in how funds from the CJRS and from free early education entitlements could be accessed came with complications in practice.<sup>19</sup> Namely, because the furlough scheme initially prevented employees being furloughed part-time. Some providers with an employee who had any part of their wages covered by public funding would not have been able to claim any money from CJRS for that employee, even if most of their wages were not covered. One poll of early years settings in England in May found that 75 per cent of eligible settings had understood that they would be able to access both schemes fully, and 47 per cent said they may have to make staff redundant as a result.<sup>20</sup>

Self-employed childcare providers, mostly childminders, were ineligible for support from the CJRS, but could get support via the Self-employed Income Support Scheme (SEISS). This provided a taxable grant whose size depended on the average profits that providers reported in previous years; it was worth up to 80 per cent of profits for three months, and 70 per cent for the following three months. Providers could claim this in full while also claiming support via government-funded hours of childcare so long as at least a proportion of their average income had previously come from parents' fees. While some providers, such as those who had registered as a childminder not long before the pandemic hit, missed out on funding from the SEISS, for others it was quite generous because it was possible to claim from other sources of funding at the same time.

Some early years settings were also eligible for a range of generic forms of business support. These included business loans such as the Business Interruption Loan Scheme (BILS) and the Bounce Back Loan Scheme, the latter of which granted loans of between £2,000 and £50,000 to small and medium sized businesses affected by the pandemic. It is unclear how many nurseries have taken up these forms of support, with a survey taken within a month of the announcement of the BILS finding that only three per cent of providers were accessing or planning to access it.<sup>21</sup> Some settings were also able to defer payments, such as their VAT and mortgage or rental costs. The UK government agreed with mortgage lenders that mortgage holidays were to be granted to landlords who

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<sup>17</sup> See here for a current version of the guidance, which has since been updated: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-early-years-and-childcare-closures/coronavirus-covid-19-early-years-and-childcare-closures>; see here for commentary in April of the guidance from 24 March: <https://www.nurseryworld.co.uk/news/article/government-makes-u-turn-on-nurseries-access-to-furlough-cash>

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/claim-for-wage-costs-through-the-coronavirus-job-retention-scheme> (Contents of guidance at the time confirmed by DfE.)

<sup>19</sup> Blanden et al. (2020) Challenges for the childcare market.

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[https://www.eyalliance.org.uk/sites/default/files/the\\_forgotten\\_sector\\_early\\_years\\_alliance\\_june\\_2020.pdf](https://www.eyalliance.org.uk/sites/default/files/the_forgotten_sector_early_years_alliance_june_2020.pdf)

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

experienced financial difficulties due to the pandemic. Mortgage or rental costs are significant for many early years settings, but many rent the premises on which they operate, and tenants were reliant on landlords to apply for a payment holiday on their behalf which may have prevented some from accessing this support.

Other forms of support such as the Coronavirus Statutory Sick Pay Rebate Scheme, and support through expanding eligibility for and generosity of Universal Credit at the lower end of the income distribution, created further means of support for early years providers and their staff across the UK.

Outside of these UK-wide schemes, there are some important differences in the types of support offered across countries. While some governments offered new sector-specific grants to support providers to remain open, others relied more heavily on generic business grants or a continuation of funding for government-funded early education and childcare (ECEC).

### Government-funded early education and care

Most early education settings in the private, voluntary and independent sectors in the UK rely on a mix of private and public funding for revenue. The private funding comes mostly from parents' fees for early education and care, while the public funding comes in a variety of forms which differ between the four countries (England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland). All four governments directly fund some amount of early education and care for a group of children defined by age and in some cases other characteristics like their family income. There are considerable differences between countries, with entitlements for three and four year olds ranging from 12.5 hours per week in Northern Ireland to 30 hours per week for working parents in England and Wales.<sup>22</sup> Plans in Scotland to expand their offer of free childcare for three- and four-year olds from 600 hours per year to 1,140 hours, putting it on a par with England's offer, were postponed in April due to the pandemic.<sup>23</sup> These differences are likely to have implications for the significance of this public funding for the sustainability of early years providers since the pandemic.

In England, it was announced in July that settings will be funded for the autumn term at broadly the levels they would have expected to see in the 2020 autumn term had there been no coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak, making it the longest commitment among the four nations to pay for funded hours even where children are not able to attend.<sup>24</sup> Pupil numbers will be reassessed in January 2021. Wales continued to pay settings for the hours of government-funded childcare already booked for three months from 18 March, after which funding would only be available where settings were open and children were in attendance.<sup>25</sup> Similarly, Northern Ireland committed to funding until the end of the academic year (the end of June), and we were told by the Department of Education that all funded settings provided remote learning during the period of school closures. In Scotland, funding was committed 'for the duration of closures',<sup>26</sup> and guidance for local authorities in August

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<sup>22</sup> In England funding covers 38 weeks per year (approximately term time), while in Wales it covers 48 weeks per year.

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/sdsi/2020/9780111044919>

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/use-of-free-early-education-entitlements-funding-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak/use-of-free-early-education-entitlements-funding-during-coronavirus-covid-19>

<sup>25</sup> <https://gov.wales/childcare-offer-wales-payments-will-continue-even-if-children-do-not-attend-due-coronavirus>

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-support-to-childcare-sector/pages/private-and-third-sector-providers-financial-support/>

encouraged ‘sustainable local funding models’ which recognize the investment some settings will have made in preparation for delivering an extended 1,140 hour entitlement from August 2020.<sup>27</sup>

While settings in England were originally told that they would continue to receive funding for government funded ECEC even if they closed, guidance released five weeks later said that funding could be redistributed between settings by local authorities to ensure that vulnerable children and the children of key workers could access ECEC, though this was only to happen in ‘exceptional circumstances’.<sup>28</sup> This change left some providers who had closed uncertain of their funding. Combined with changes to government guidance regarding the funding that settings are eligible for from the CJRS and public funding (discussed above), early years settings at times faced considerable uncertainty in what funding they would eventually receive from government via these schemes.

While all countries continued to pay early years settings for government-funded ECEC, this is likely to be of greater significance to the sustainability of settings in some countries compared to others. As described above, before the pandemic, the governments in England and Wales funded more ECEC (in terms of the proportion of eligible children multiplied by the number of hours each is eligible for) than the governments in Scotland and Northern Ireland. To the extent that this means that government funding represents a higher share of providers’ income in England and Wales than in Scotland and Northern Ireland, a continuation of this funding would be of greater support to settings in England and Wales.

In Wales, the government introduced a new kind of funded ECEC for vulnerable children and the children of key workers, covering out-of-hours and weekends, with no limit to the number of hours available - the Coronavirus Childcare Support Scheme (CCAS). For the three month period in which funding for the Childcare Offer of 30 hours per week for working parents of three- and four-year olds had been continued even where children could not attend due to the pandemic, funding for the Scheme was in addition to pre-existing government funding. From late June, funding for the Childcare Offer was available only where eligible children were in attendance. The Welsh Government estimated in August that over the period it was available, CCAS provided care for approximately 9,600 children of critical workers and over 900 vulnerable children.<sup>29</sup> While this is a substantial number of children, this is only equivalent to about 13 per cent of the number of childcare places available in Wales in 2017 (the most recent data publicly available).<sup>30</sup> It is unclear how many of these children would have accessed childcare without the scheme, or how many who did use it accessed more hours per week than usual. Therefore, it is difficult to estimate its impact on the sustainability of the sector. However, the combination of funding for the Childcare Offer and the CCAS from late June, while more accurately targeted at the children in need of early education and care, is likely to have represented less funding for providers than if funding under the Childcare Offer for children who were not attending had continued.

In England, eligibility for government funded ECEC was broadened to a lesser degree with a relaxation of the minimum earnings threshold for the entitlement to 30 hours a week of free

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<sup>27</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/publications/funding-follows-the-child-and-the-national-standard-for-early-learning-and-childcare-providers-interim-guidance/>

<sup>28</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/use-of-free-early-education-entitlements-funding-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak/use-of-free-early-education-entitlements-funding-during-coronavirus-covid-19#section-two>

<sup>29</sup> Correspondence with Welsh Government.

<sup>30</sup> <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/statistics-and-research/2019-07/171031-childcare-capacity-en.pdf>

childcare, so that parents whose income had been temporarily reduced because of the pandemic could continue to access the scheme until October 2020.

## Sector specific grants

Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales offered sector-specific grants to settings. The stated intention of these grants varied between countries, from supporting settings either to cover the additional costs incurred by operating with new safety guidance to supporting settings dealing with reduced occupancy. The funding was provided as a direct payment, which settings can decide how to spend. In Scotland and Northern Ireland, grants vary in size depending on the number of children a setting cared for and, in Northern Ireland only, on type of provider and how long it had been operating within a specific time period. In Wales, the Childcare Providers Grant was announced on 12 August and made available to childcare settings who agreed to reopen by 14 September and had been unable to access other business support schemes offered by the UK and Welsh Governments.<sup>31</sup> In Wales and Northern Ireland, grants were available to childminders as well as other types of settings. In Scotland, childminders were not eligible for the Transition Fund, but the government did invest in a Childminding Workforce Support Fund, which enabled over a thousand childminders experiencing financial hardship to receive awards of up to £350.<sup>32</sup> In Northern Ireland, two grant schemes were available, one ran April to June to provide funding for open settings supporting vulnerable children and children of key workers, as well as for closed settings with fixed costs, then a further grant scheme announced on 22 July was set up to support settings to reopen during July and August.<sup>33</sup> In Scotland, the Transitional Support Fund was announced on 16 July and applied to settings which had reopened by 7 September.<sup>34</sup>

Grants to early years settings varied in size: up to £5,000 per setting in Wales, depending on the difference between their income in a period in 2019 and the same period in 2020, £1,500-£8,000 in Scotland based on registered capacity and £1,500-£27,000 in Northern Ireland based on registered capacity and when they opened (July to August scheme). A setting registered for around 30 places<sup>35</sup> would be eligible to receive £5,500 under Scotland's scheme, and up to £18,501 under Northern Ireland's.<sup>36</sup> All schemes are likely to have a substantial impact on the sustainability of some early years settings. The scheme in Northern Ireland is the most generous in absolute terms and per child, covering the period July-August 2020.

Northern Ireland also offered sector-specific grants earlier in the year (April to June) to support providers, including childminders, to remain open to care for vulnerable children and the children of key workers or to be able to reopen when required, and to operate for longer hours such as into

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<sup>31</sup> <https://gov.wales/4-million-funding-pot-childcare-providers-response-coronavirus>

<sup>32</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-support-to-childcare-sector/pages/transitional-support-fund-for-childcare-providers/>

<sup>33</sup> <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/ministerial-announcement-childcare-recovery-fund-22-july-2020>

<sup>34</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-support-to-childcare-sector/pages/transitional-support-fund-for-childcare-providers/#:~:text=The%20Transitional%20Support%20Fund%20will,grants%20to%20eligible%20childcare%20settings.>

<sup>35</sup> The average number of places a PVI setting in England is registered for was 33 in 2019:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/childcare-and-early-years-providers-survey-2019>

<sup>36</sup> Figures for Scotland's Transition fund from <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-support-to-childcare-sector/pages/transitional-support-fund-for-childcare-providers/>; Figures from Northern Ireland's Coronavirus Childcare Recovery Scheme from <https://www.early-years.org/childcare-recovery-support-fund>

evenings at lower cost. This scheme is distinctive in that take-up of the funding was relatively low, with £2.8m being spent on the scheme,<sup>37</sup> about 23 per cent of the £12m originally made available. Settings which remained open could apply for the government to cover their full costs for the period, including a 20 per cent uplift in staff salaries, while settings that remained closed could apply for up to 80 per cent of their fixed operating costs for the period up to a maximum threshold. It is unclear exactly why take up was so low. Applications from group-based settings were lower than expected, with only 46 per cent of closed settings applying for funding by mid-June. A spokesperson for the Department of Education said, 'Some settings availed [themselves] of other Covid-19 emergency support schemes, for example the £10,000 Business Support Grant, and therefore the amount they required from the childcare scheme was significantly reduced,' and that demand for childcare was less than anticipated.<sup>38</sup>

## Other forms of support

In England and Northern Ireland, some settings were eligible for generic business grants to support businesses whose incomes were affected by the pandemic. In England, eligibility for the Small Business Grant Fund is based on eligibility for business rates relief, which means that some settings such as those who are eligible for 'charitable status relief' and settings which rent their premises or are based in premises that have no ratable value missed out on funding.<sup>39</sup> A survey in April found that 22 per cent of settings were accessing or planning to access business rates holiday, with 14 per cent saying the same for small business grants, while a considerable proportion of settings said they would like to benefit from each but could not (7 per cent and 28 per cent respectively).<sup>40</sup> In Northern Ireland, some small businesses – those with a total Net Annual Value of £15,000 and below – were eligible for a grant worth £10,000.<sup>41</sup> In both England and Northern Ireland it is unclear how many early years settings were eligible for, or claimed for, these grants.

## Summary

Whilst we cannot yet accurately quantify the relative scale of support for early years settings across countries, it is clear that a significant proportion of government support for the sector was delivered via UK-wide schemes like the CJRS and SEISS. However, these will have benefited some providers more than others; for instance, providers for whom fixed costs make up a larger share of their total costs will have a greater proportion of their costs unsupported by the CJRS. Furthermore, the way that the CJRS was implemented, including early guidance which was unclear about its interaction with other sources of public funds, led to inaccurate expectations among some early years settings about the support they were eligible for, while some providers may have been unable to access the furlough scheme fully.

There are considerable differences in how the four governments supported early years settings. Continued payment of government funded hours during the period of school closures is likely to have been a key element of support. Support appears to have been most generous in England, where the government committed to funding places even where children are unable to attend until

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<sup>37</sup> Correspondence with Department of Education.

<sup>38</sup> <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-53083774>

<sup>39</sup>

[https://www.eyalliance.org.uk/sites/default/files/the\\_forgotten\\_sector\\_early\\_years\\_alliance\\_june\\_2020.pdf](https://www.eyalliance.org.uk/sites/default/files/the_forgotten_sector_early_years_alliance_june_2020.pdf)

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[https://www.eyalliance.org.uk/sites/default/files/the\\_forgotten\\_sector\\_early\\_years\\_alliance\\_june\\_2020.pdf](https://www.eyalliance.org.uk/sites/default/files/the_forgotten_sector_early_years_alliance_june_2020.pdf)

<sup>41</sup> <https://www.nibusinessinfo.co.uk/sites/default/files/Coronavirus-%C2%A310000-Small-Business-Grant-Scheme-FAQs-V1.7-29Jun2020.pdf>

the end of the year, and in Scotland, where guidance for local authorities encouraged them to reach agreement with providers on sustainable local funding models. However, early entitlement funding is not a silver bullet, since few providers relied entirely on public funding before the pandemic, and providers vary considerably in the proportion of their income made up by government funding and parents' fees respectively. Providers that relied more on private income will have missed out on the generosity of continued government funding.

Sector-specific grants, which ranged in value from £1,500 to £27,000 per provider across all countries' schemes, are likely to be important to some providers, and these were the most generous (in terms of the maximum amount paid per provider) in Northern Ireland, followed by Scotland and Wales. However, these were absent until mid-July in Northern Ireland and Wales, and until mid-August in Scotland, four or five months after the partial closure of early years settings. Business rates relief for providers in England and Northern Ireland was welcome (providers in Wales and Scotland had already been made permanently exempt before the pandemic). Small business grants available to providers in England and Northern Ireland may have provided additional support to eligible providers, but it is unclear how many took up this support during the period of school closures.

### Survey evidence on the extent of pressures on early years settings during the pandemic

There are indications that many private, voluntary and independently run early years settings across the UK were struggling to cover the costs of providing high-quality early education and care even before the pandemic. In England in particular, there were widespread reports of settings struggling to make ends meet. We know that settings were vulnerable to this crisis in a number of ways, and that without the right kinds of government support, many providers would be forced to close.<sup>42</sup>

Table 3 collects information gathered since the beginning of the pandemic on the pressures faced by providers, as well as the numbers who are expected to close their doors permanently. There is much more evidence available about providers in England than in other countries, though this should not be read as an indication that providers in other countries are not also facing financial pressures.

Surveys of early years settings confirm that occupancy throughout lockdown was low and reveals the likely impact that this will have on the sector. In England, a survey in April found that 25 per cent of respondents felt that it was 'somewhat unlikely' or 'very unlikely' that they would be operating in 12 months' time.<sup>43</sup> More recent surveys show that settings are reopening, with 77 per cent of all early years settings in England, including those in the maintained sector, open on 24 September.<sup>44</sup> In Wales, 91 per cent of settings were open on 2 October. The highest proportion of settings open so far is in Scotland, with 93 per cent of early years settings open on 29 September.<sup>45</sup> Keeping in mind that the methods used to create these estimates differ between countries, the figures suggest that settings in Scotland have reopened at the fastest rate following the beginning of the autumn term, followed by Wales and then England, taking account of different term dates between countries. However, methodological differences between data collections are likely to matter, with data in England gathered via a survey of local authorities, leading to the status of some settings being unknown (10% at the most recent count), while data in Wales and Scotland is reported by the

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<sup>42</sup> <https://www.tes.com/news/coronavirus-will-early-years-providers-survive>

<sup>43</sup>

[https://www.eyalliance.org.uk/sites/default/files/the\\_forgotten\\_sector\\_early\\_years\\_alliance\\_june\\_2020.pdf](https://www.eyalliance.org.uk/sites/default/files/the_forgotten_sector_early_years_alliance_june_2020.pdf)

<sup>44</sup> <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/attendance-in-education-and-early-years-settings-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-outbreak/2020-week-39>

<sup>45</sup> <https://public.tableau.com/profile/sg.eas.learninganalysis#!/vizhome/COVID19-SchoolsandChildcareInformation/Introduction>

countries' respective Care Inspectorates – the bodies with whom early years settings are registered. We have been unable to access comparable data on the number of early years settings that remained open since March 2020 in Northern Ireland.<sup>46</sup>

Further, a survey of providers in Wales found that they were planning in July for just over half (51 per cent) of the usual number of children to attend in autumn, and 61 per cent were expecting to run at a loss through the autumn term,<sup>47</sup> suggesting that the challenges faced by the sector are not over. Information on the permanent closure of early years settings is currently patchy, likely due to the difficulty in receiving survey responses from such providers.

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<sup>46</sup> Data has been collected in Northern Ireland, though we have not been able to access it in time for this publication.

<sup>47</sup>

[https://www.ndna.org.uk/NDNA/News/Press\\_releases/2020/Wales\\_Majority\\_of\\_nurseries\\_will\\_continue\\_to\\_run\\_at\\_a\\_loss\\_due\\_to\\_uncertainty\\_over\\_funding\\_and\\_lack.aspx](https://www.ndna.org.uk/NDNA/News/Press_releases/2020/Wales_Majority_of_nurseries_will_continue_to_run_at_a_loss_due_to_uncertainty_over_funding_and_lack.aspx)

**Table 3: Summary of surveys and studies on the extent of pressures or actual closures of early years settings**

Coverage/data		Summary of results
<a href="#">Department for Education</a>	England: Survey of local authorities April to present	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>As few as 32% of early years settings (including those in the maintained and PVI sectors) were open in mid-April 2020, during the period of school closures. This rose to 62% by mid-July at the end of the summer term, before falling again during the summer holidays and rising to 77% at the latest count on 24 September, with 13% closed and the status of 10% unknown.</li> <li>674,000 children aged 0-4 attended early years settings on 24 September, representing about 52% of children who would usually attend in term time, up from approximately 5%-7% in April and May.</li> <li>30% of all children classified as 'Children in Need' or who have an Education, Health and Care Plan were attending on 24 September, up from a low of around 7% in mid-April but not yet as high as it was in July (around 31%). Note that the data on the number of children in this group who usually attend is not available, so this is a proportion of all such children.</li> </ul>
Care Inspectorate Wales (forthcoming)	Wales: Care Inspectorate data about registered providers from March to present	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Of the number of settings that had been open in March 2020, 56% were open on 23 June, the first day that childcare providers were allowed to reopen to all children, of a government announcement on 19 June.</li> <li>At the most recent count, on 2 October, 91% of settings were open.</li> <li>More detailed breakdowns of the data were not available in time for publication of this report.</li> </ul>
<a href="#">Scottish Government</a>	Scotland: Survey of PVI providers, including childminders, from March to May, and Care Inspectorate data from May to present	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Between March and early June, the proportion of early years settings open appears equivalent to 20% or fewer of all settings, though not all providers responded to surveys in this period.</li> <li>Between early June and early August, the proportion of settings open doubled from around 15% to 30%.</li> <li>In the seven weeks from the August 5 to September 22, the proportion open grew from 30% to over 90%.</li> <li>From the data available it is not possible to calculate the proportion of children that attended of those who would usually attend.</li> </ul>
<a href="#">IFS</a>	England: Modelling of providers' finances in a range of scenarios, September 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>If, during lockdown, all fee income from parents dried up, a quarter of private nurseries may have operated at a significant deficit during this period, compared to 11% of providers before the pandemic.</li> <li>Providers most likely to be negatively affected by the crisis are those dependent on income from parent fees.</li> </ul>



		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Childminders are likely to have been particularly hard-hit. It is estimated that one in three could have run a significant deficit during the lockdown.</li> <li>The likelihood that a setting ran a significant deficit during the period of school closures does not appear linked to the size of providers, the level of qualifications of their staff or the level of deprivation of the area they are in.</li> </ul>
<a href="#">Care Inspectorate Scotland</a>	Scotland: Care Inspectorate data about registered providers up to August 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The number of childcare agencies, day care of children settings, childcare agencies and childminders that have cancelled their registration with the Care Inspectorate between March and September 2020 (322) is fewer than in the same period in 2019 (428).</li> <li>It is unclear why fewer settings have cancelled their registration with the Care Inspectorate this year than last year. It may be that administrative delays caused by the pandemic have meant that some settings which have closed have not yet appeared in data captured by the Care Inspectorate, but we have not been able to identify evidence to verify this.</li> </ul>
Welsh Government (not published)	Wales: Survey of 474 childcare providers, including childminders, registered to deliver the childcare offer, August 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Providers indicated that including government support, they received approximately 40% less in childcare fees per week on average during the 2020 Summer term than they would have expected in the absence of the pandemic.</li> <li>The survey received response from around 20% of providers. Over half of providers that responded were childminders and just over a quarter were full day care providers, which broadly matches the split of setting types in the sector as a whole.</li> </ul>
<a href="#">Ceeda</a>	England: Survey of 336 PVI settings and 370 childminders in September 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>98% of settings open for families in the week commencing 7 September, up from a low of 33% on 20 April, when their weekly surveys began. Similarly, 95% of childminders were open, up from 52%.</li> <li>Average occupancy was 59%, up from 38% in the beginning of June when they began collecting data on this. For childminders, these figures were 43% and 36% respectively.</li> </ul>
<a href="#">NDNA</a>	Wales: Survey of PVI providers in July 2020.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>61% of providers expected to run at a loss through the autumn term, with 31% expecting to break even, 4.3% expecting to have to close and 2.9% reporting that they can operate 'slightly above breaking even point'</li> <li>Nurseries were planning for an average of just over half of their usual number of children returning in autumn</li> </ul>

<a href="#">Early Years Alliance</a>	England: Survey of 6,000 PVI providers and childminders in May 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>12% of settings who responded to the Alliance's May survey expected to be able to open for 100% of their normal intake whenever they opted to reopen – the reduction in capacity appears to be due to the difficulties involved in safely caring for children in the context of the pandemic. Half of respondents expected to be able to offer places to 50% or less of children normally attending their setting</li> <li>69% of settings responding to the Alliance's May survey said they expect to operate at a loss over the next 6 months.</li> </ul>
<a href="#">Early Years Alliance</a>	England: Survey of 4,000 parents in May 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>When asked in May, 45 per cent of parents whose providers had confirmed that they were reopening on or shortly after June 1 said they were planning to take up their child's place in June.</li> <li>Of those parents who were not planning to take up their child's place in June, 79 per cent said a sustained fall in the number of coronavirus cases nationally would be needed for them to be willing to take up a childcare place. 55 per cent said the same but for their local area, 58 per cent said more information from the government on the science underpinning the decision to reopen and 40 per cent said the development of a coronavirus vaccine.</li> </ul>
<a href="#">Sutton Trust</a>	England: Analysis of Early Years Alliance surveys in April and May 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>67% of providers in PVI sector reported being temporarily closed during lockdown. This varied by type of provider, with more pre-schools and fewer childminders being closed.</li> <li>Settings in more deprived areas were more likely to expect to have to close in the coming year, and more likely to expect to have to make redundancies.</li> </ul>
<a href="#">Early Years Alliance</a>	England: Survey of 3,000 PVI providers and childminders in April 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>25% of respondents felt that it was 'somewhat unlikely' or 'very unlikely' that they would be operating in 12 months.</li> <li>74% of respondents said the government hasn't provided enough support for early years providers during the crisis.</li> </ul>
<a href="#">PACEY</a>	England: Survey of 6,000 childminders in March 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>46% of respondents had closed their setting for the foreseeable future due to coronavirus</li> <li>Of those who remained open, many reported that they were caring for significantly fewer children than before lockdown; 45% of these providers were concerned this is not financially viable for them going forward.</li> <li>Of those who had closed their setting, fewer than half (46%) said they planned to reopen within 3 months to a year.</li> </ul>

## School provision during lockdown

In response to the Coronavirus outbreak, schools and other education settings across England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland closed in late March for all pupils, except children of key workers and those classified as vulnerable.

Table 4 summarises the share of schools remaining open, the share of all pupils attending schools and the share of vulnerable pupils – the definition of which varied by country - attending schools during lockdown across the four countries of the UK. Figure 2 then shows the detailed trend in the share of pupils attending schools during lockdown across the four countries. In interpreting these trends and differences, it is important to understand the different assumptions underlying the constructions of these statistics, which are summarised in the final column on Table 4. All figures also include school holidays, during which times attendance generally dropped off slightly.

School provision for children of key workers and those classified as vulnerable was organised on a different basis across the four countries of the UK. These differences mostly reflected pre-existing differences in the way the systems are organised. The different countries also placed differing emphasis on pupils attending school during lockdown. For example, Northern Ireland emphasised that provision for key workers during lockdown was only a last resort and only available for pupils up to and including age 14 (provision was available for vulnerable pupils of all ages). Partly as a result of these different policy choices and messages, different patterns emerged in the share of institutions remaining open and the share of pupils in attendance.

Provision in England was largely organised by individual schools, in collaboration and in consultation with local authorities and multi-academy trusts. This reflects the greater role for individual schools in the English system. About 71 per cent of schools remained open for provision during lockdown in April and May 2020, before re-opening began from early June 2020. Children attending these schools represented about 1.7 per cent of the wider pupil population, on average, with attendance rates gradually rising over the course of lockdown to reach a peak of about 2.5 per cent in late May 2020 before partial re-opening in June. The share of vulnerable pupils attending schools in England started relatively low at 5 per cent in April, before rising to over 8 per cent in May (averaging about 7 per cent over the course of lockdown). The share of vulnerable pupils attending school then went up to nearly 20 per cent as schools partially reopened over June 2020.

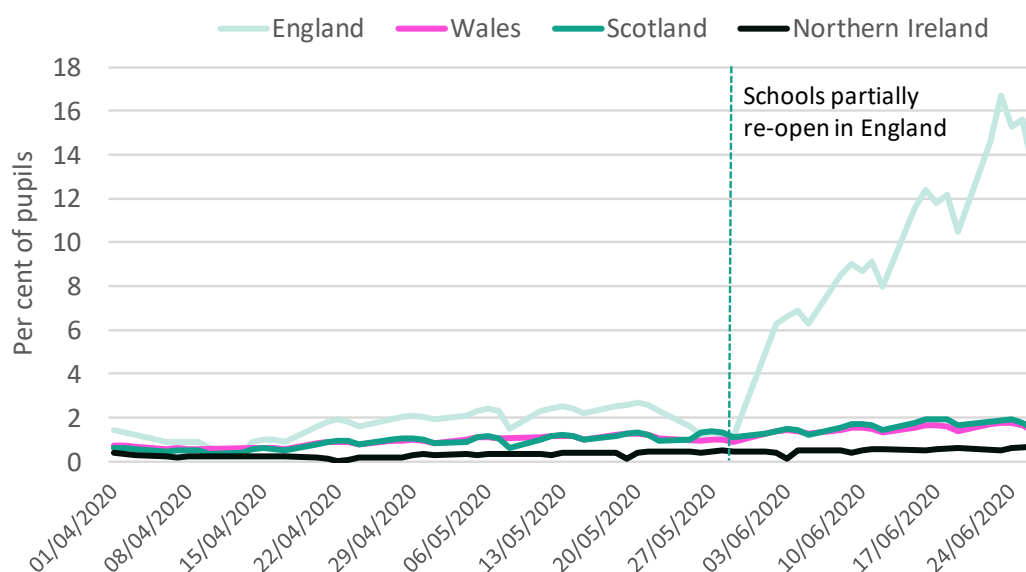
In contrast, provision was largely organised by local authorities in Wales and Scotland. Most chose to employ a hub-based model, such that individual schools were chosen to provide for all pupils across a given area. As a result, a lower share of schools and other settings were open during lockdown in Scotland and Wales than in England. About one third of schools in Wales and about one quarter of schools in Scotland were open, on average. This pattern was relatively stable over time in Wales, but the share of institutions open in Scotland increased over lockdown as they prepared for re-opening in August (from 18 per cent in April 2020 to 35 per cent in June 2020).

The share of pupils attending schools in Scotland and Wales during lockdown (about 1.1 per cent of all pupils) was also much lower than in England (1.7 per cent of all pupils). Attendance rates also followed a similar pattern over time in both Scotland and Wales, rising gradually from 0.7 per cent of pupils in April 2020 to about 1.6-1.7 per cent of pupils in June 2020.

The share of vulnerable pupils attending schools in Scotland and Wales was about 4-5 per cent on average during lockdown, with gradual rises over time in both countries to reach about 6-8 per cent in May 2020. In both cases, however, the figures are notably lower than the share of vulnerable pupils attending schools in England.

In Northern Ireland, decisions were left to individual schools to make in consultation with the Northern Ireland wide Education Authority. Some chose to form clusters. As a result, about 30 per cent of institutions were open, on average, during lockdown and this stayed relatively stable over time. A lower share of all pupils attended schools in Northern Ireland (0.4 per cent) as compared with the rest of the UK (over 1 per cent). A very small share of vulnerable pupils attended schools too (less than 1.5 per cent, on average). These lower attendance levels will likely reflect both the lower share of open institutions and the stronger overall message discouraging parents from making use of provision during lockdown unless they had to. In the case of vulnerable pupils, guidance encouraged schools, parents and authorities to work together for the best interests of the child.

**Figure 2: School attendance rates over time during lockdown**



Notes and sources: See Table 4

In summary, the four countries of the UK adopted quite different approaches to school provision for children of key workers and vulnerable pupils during lockdown. In England, provision was largely organised by schools. A much larger share of institutions were open in England (over 70 per cent), a larger share of pupils attended (1.7 per cent) and a greater share of vulnerable pupils attended too (about 7 per cent on average during lockdown). In contrast, provision in Wales and Scotland was a largely hub-based approach organised by local authorities. Fewer institutions remained open (25-35 per cent), a smaller share of pupils took up the offer (just over 1 per cent) and a lower share of vulnerable pupils attended (about 4 per cent). Even fewer pupils attended schools during lockdown in Northern Ireland (about 0.4 per cent), which also adopted a mostly hub or cluster-based approach. The low share of all pupils attending schools in Northern Ireland also reflects the much stronger message that provision was a last resort.

What this comparison reveals is that supply-side decisions are the main determinant of provision and attendance levels. In England, where more individual schools remained open, more pupils attended during lockdown, with more vulnerable pupils in school and a greater number of key workers potentially able to access childcare. In Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland, hub or cluster-based approaches were associated with reduced attendance levels, but will have led to fewer children and staff mixing with each other during the height of the pandemic. The right choice is not

obvious, even in hindsight, but policymakers across the UK clearly made different choices in this regard.

**Table 4: School attendance details during lockdown**

	April 2020	May 2020	June 2020	Average during lockdown*	Key Notes
<b>Share of institutions open</b>					
England	69%	73%	91%	<b>71%</b>	<i>Includes all state-funded schools, independent and 16-18 providers; figures adjusted for non-response.</i>
Wales	33%	30%	38%	<b>34%</b>	<i>Includes maintained schools and other community settings; independent schools excluded; raw figures.</i>
Scotland	18%	20%	35%	<b>24%</b>	<i>Independent and grant-aided schools are excluded; raw figures</i>
Northern Ireland	26%	30%	31%	<b>29%</b>	<i>Includes all state-funded early years and education settings; raw figures</i>
<b>Share of pupils attending</b>					
England	1.3%	2.1%	10.4%	<b>1.7%</b>	<i>As above.</i>
Wales	0.7%	1.1%	1.5%	<b>1.1%</b>	<i>As above.</i>
Scotland	0.7%	1.1%	1.6%	<b>1.1%</b>	<i>As above.</i>
Northern Ireland	0.2%	0.4%	0.6%	<b>0.4%</b>	<i>As above.</i>
<b>Share of vulnerable pupils attending</b>					
England	5.0%	8.4%	18.9%	<b>6.7%</b>	<i>Shown as share of pupils with EHCP or social worker.</i>
Wales	1.8%	4.2%	6.1%	<b>4.0%</b>	<i>Shown as share of pupils with statement of SEN or social worker.</i>
Scotland	1.8%	4.7%	8.1%	<b>4.8%</b>	<i>Wider definition of vulnerable pupils. Shown as share of pupils with child plans.</i>
Northern Ireland	0.8%	1.8%	2.5%	<b>1.5%</b>	<i>Wider definition of vulnerable pupils. Shown as share of pupils with statement of special educational needs.</i>

Notes: \*lockdown only covers April-May for England, given partial reopening from early June 2020.

**Attendance figures for England:** (<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/attendance-in-education-and-early-years-settings-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-outbreak>); **Wales guidance** (<https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2020-04/guidance-hubs-schools-coronavirus-provision.pdf>); **Attendance figures for Wales** (<https://gov.wales/attendance-local-authority-settings-during-coronavirus-covid-19-pandemic>); **Scotland guidance** (<https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-guide-schools-early-learning-closures/>);

**Attendance figures for Scotland** (<https://public.tableau.com/profile/sg.eas.learninganalysis#!/vizhome/Covid19ELCandHubs/Introduction>); (<https://www.gov.scot/publications/summary-statistics-schools-scotland-no-10-2019-edition/pages/3/>); **Attendance figures for Northern Ireland**

(<https://www.opendatani.gov.uk/dataset/attendance-at-educational-settings-during-the-covid-19-outbreak-23-march-2020-to-29-june-2020>); (<https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/school-enrolments-201920-statistical-bulletins>)

## Lost weeks of schooling

The closure of schools to most pupils during lockdown will have led to significant losses in schooling, which will be partly mitigated by home learning and online-learning opportunities (see next section). However, whilst lockdown and school closures took effect from a similar point in time across all four nations of the UK, the actual weeks of schooling lost across different year groups varies substantially by country. This reflects a combination of factors: differences in school holiday and terms dates; exam leave; and, differences in school re-opening dates.

Figure 3 illustrates this point by showing the number of complete weeks of lost schooling for different sets of year groups across the four nations up to the end of July 2020. In addition, it shows the important role played by exam leave and schooling delivered after re-opening in England and Wales in determining lost weeks of schooling. The year groups shown reflect the extent of variability within each country. For example, year groups taking exams are split out across each country, whilst year groups are divided more finely in England to reflect the staged and partial re-opening of schools during June 2020.

This figure illustrates that an earlier end to the school year in Scotland and Northern Ireland meant that the potential weeks of schooling lost was always going to be lower in these countries. After the beginning of lockdown, there were 15 weeks till the end of the school year in Northern Ireland and 14 weeks in Scotland, as compared with 17 weeks in England and Wales. This is partially offset by shorter holidays in Scotland and Northern Ireland (in England and Wales, about 3 weeks of school holidays were already scheduled during lockdown, whilst just over 2 weeks were scheduled to take place in Scotland Northern Ireland). Nevertheless, the lost weeks of schooling for pupils not taking exams is generally lower in Scotland (about 11 weeks) and Northern Ireland (about 12 weeks) as compared with equivalent year groups in England and Wales (12-14 weeks lost).

This effect of school term and holiday dates is largely mechanical and reflects historical choices, but has a number of important implications. First, the lost learning and the effects of educational attainment during lockdown are likely to be slightly lower in Scotland and Northern Ireland, assuming all else is equal. This is simply because lockdown occurred during weeks when pupils were less likely to be in school in Scotland and Northern Ireland than in England and Wales. Given that pupils also returned to school earlier in Scotland (from August 11<sup>th</sup>) and Northern Ireland (from August 24<sup>th</sup>), future lockdowns during the winter of 2020-21 could even accentuate this pattern.

Second, the effect of term dates shows the potential value of adjusting term dates should further lockdowns and school closures be required. Policymakers in Wales sought to extend the summer term by one week. This proved not to be feasible in most areas due to a dispute over contracts (with only Conwy, Pembrokeshire and Powys extending the school year). However, policymakers in all four countries should make preparations and be in a position to adjust school holidays to reduce loss of schooling in any future lockdowns. Any such adjustments, or the potential for them, should be with significant notice to schools, parents and other stakeholders in order to minimize any disruption.

The effect of exam leave is significant. Pupils taking exams in 2020 are likely to have lost only about 5-6 weeks of schooling as they would have likely been outside of school during much of the summer term in a normal year. This effect is smallest for final year students in Scotland due to earlier exams.

The clear implication is that these year groups are likely to have lost less formal schooling and experience a smaller impact on educational attainment and skills than other year groups. This will be important to account for in any future research and policy interventions. Of course, these year groups will be highly affected by the effects of using predicted rather than actual grades for

qualifications. However, this serves to further illustrate the significant heterogeneity in likely impacts on different sets of pupils.

Lastly, the re-opening of schools in England and Wales will have reduced the loss of schooling during June and July 2020. In practice, the effects are relatively small for most pupils due to actual attendance rates and the number of pupils that could be in school at any one time.

In England, primary school pupils in reception, year 1 and year 6 could return from June 1<sup>st</sup> 2020 and receive 7 weeks of schooling. However, because only about 30 per cent of these year groups attended school on any given day over this period, the actual weeks of schooling received is likely to be about 2 weeks, on average. This will have led to 12 weeks of lost schooling, on average. Few pupils will have experienced this average, however. In some cases, primary schools re-opened for these year groups at the start of June and pupils will only have lost 7 weeks of schooling in total. Some of this provision will have been part-time, with only two thirds of primary schools offering full-time provision.<sup>48</sup> In other cases, pupils might not have received any weeks of schooling and could thus have lost 14 weeks in total.

Primary schools were able to open to other year groups too from June 15<sup>th</sup>, but this rarely happened in practice due to space constraints. As a result, all other year groups in primary school are likely to also have lost 14 weeks of schooling.

Years 10 and 12 could return from June 15<sup>th</sup>, but only about 10 per cent attended on any given day over the next 5 weeks and only about 40% of secondary schools offered full-time provision.<sup>49</sup> Other year groups did not return at all. As a result, the loss of learning was about 13 weeks, on average, for those in years 10 and 12, and about 14 weeks for years 7-9. As for primary schools, these are average figures and the actual weeks of schooling lost is likely to vary by individual due to different school policies and family choices.

In Wales, actual schooling received in July is likely to have been only about 3 days, on average. Most schools were able to open for 3 weeks from June 29<sup>th</sup>, but only a third of pupils could attend at any one time and about 60 per cent attended when invited. The actual weeks of schooling received will have varied due to particular school choices (e.g. whether to operate at maximum capacity of one third and use of full-time/part-time days) and the fact that some local authorities were able to extend the school year by one week.

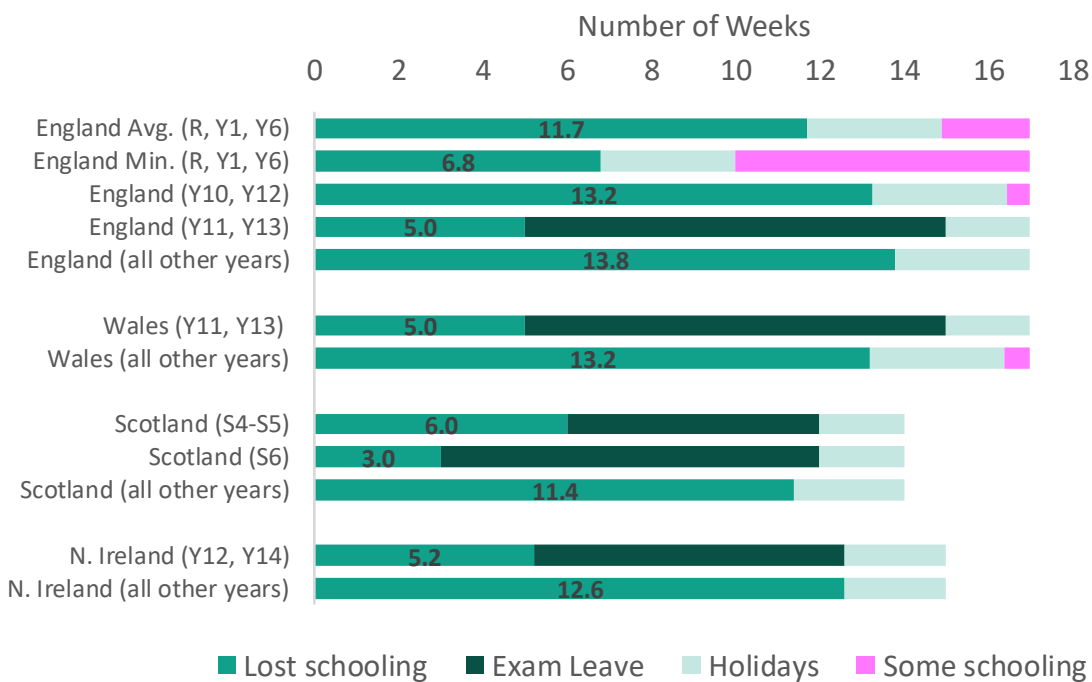
Amongst those not taking exams, the actual weeks of schooling lost therefore vary by year group in England, with the least schooling lost by those in reception, year 1 and year 6 (from 7 to 14 weeks) and the most lost by those in years 2-5 and 7-9. The effects on education and skills will therefore vary slightly accordingly. The lost weeks of schooling are spread out across year groups in other countries: 13 weeks in Wales; 11 weeks in Scotland; and 12 weeks in Northern Ireland.

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<sup>48</sup> <https://www.ifs.org.uk/publications/14980>

<sup>49</sup> Ibid

**Figure 3: Lost weeks of schooling during lockdown (up to the end of July 2020)**



**Notes and sources for England and Wales:** School year is assumed to finish on July 17<sup>th</sup> 2020. The last day of the summer term is July 21<sup>st</sup> or 22<sup>nd</sup> across most local authorities, though the vast majority will have planned to use these as INSET days. Holidays include 2 weeks of Easter Holidays, VE Day Bank Holiday and May half-term; exam leave is assumed to commence on May 11<sup>th</sup> 2020 on the first day of the planned exam season (<https://www.jcq.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Key-Dates-2019-20.pdf>) and students are not assumed to return during the summer term. In England, “Avg” is assumed to be the available weeks of schooling from the official return date (7 weeks for reception, year 1 and year 6; 5 for years 10 and 12) multiplied by the average share of each year groups attending over these weeks (<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/attendance-in-education-and-early-years-settings-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-outbreak-23-march-to-17-july-2020>). In Wales, pupils could attend school for 3 weeks (or in some cases 4 weeks) after re-opening on June 29<sup>th</sup>. Schools were able to admit one third of pupils on each day and about 60% of invited pupils attended at least one session each week, on average (<https://gov.wales/attendance-local-authority-settings-during-coronavirus-covid-19-pandemic-13-17-july-2020>). We therefore calculate 3 days of schooling received by pupils in Wales (15 days x 60% x 1/3).

**Notes and sources for Scotland:** The school year is assumed to finish on June 26<sup>th</sup>, with 2 weeks for Easter holidays and 3 days of holidays in May. Actual term finish date vary from June 24<sup>th</sup> to July 3<sup>rd</sup> (<https://www.mygov.scot/school-term-holiday-dates/>). Exam leave is assumed to last the full period of the planned exam season, with year groups S4 and S5 returning to school (<https://www.scotsman.com/news/scottish-news/exam-dates-scotland-2020-when-are-national-5-higher-and-advanced-higher-exams-542486>).

**Notes and sources for Northern Ireland:** – Holidays include a 7-day holiday at Easter and 2 bank holidays in May. The summer holidays are assumed to be begin on July 1<sup>st</sup> (<https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/articles/school-holidays>). Exam leave for years 12 and 14 (equivalent to years 11 and 13 in England and Wales) is assumed to take the same form as in England and Wales.



## Home learning

In order to mitigate the effects of lost schooling, parents were asked to provide home learning for their children. In the case of younger pupils, this will have required parents to be directly involved, whilst with older pupils, this will have involved more independent study and, potentially, online lessons. Schools assisted with this by providing some materials and resources, mostly through online platforms. Nevertheless, home schooling will have represented a significant challenge, given the speed at which arrangements were made, parents' lack of experience in providing home schooling, the need for many parents to continue working through lockdown and a lack of necessary space or equipment amongst some pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds.

A number of surveys of home learning were undertaken during lockdown. Table 3 summarises their coverage across the different countries of the UK and the main results. Only a small number of these surveys were large enough to enable comparisons across the UK, with most based on small samples or single countries.

A number of key findings emerge:

- The amount of home learning is dependent on the exact way in which questions were asked or phrased, varying from an average of about 2.5 to 4.5 hours per day across studies.
- Despite these measurement difficulties, the amount of home learning is clearly a lot lower than average hours spent on educational activities each day before lockdown. The high-end estimates of 4.5 hours per day for the amount of home learning imply a 25-30 per cent reduction compared with pre-lockdown educational activities. Averages of 2-2.5 hours per day would imply even larger losses.
- There is significant variation in the amount of home learning. Across studies, about 10-20 per cent of parents reported their children were doing about 4 hours or more of home learning per day, with about 20 per cent doing less than 1 hour or none per day.
- In the one study where clear UK comparisons can be made, hours of home schooling were highest in London, the south-east and south west of England (where 22-25 per cent of children were doing 4 or more hours per day) and lowest in Wales, Scotland, the midlands and northern England (where 15 per cent or less were doing 4 or more hours per day). Figures for Northern Ireland and east England lay in the middle, with about 18 per cent doing 4+ hours per day.
- More home learning supervision was undertaken by mothers than fathers, with mothers doing about 1.5 more hours of home-schooling per day. This was particularly likely to interfere with work for graduate mothers. In Northern Ireland, the difference was particularly stark with two thirds of mothers engaging in home-schooling compared with 14 per cent of fathers.
- Parents of primary school age children were more likely to need to spend time undertaking home learning, about 2 hours more per day. The survey for Wales confirms that about half of parents were undertaking daily numeracy/literacy activities with primary school children, compared with 35-40 per cent providing daily support for secondary school children.

- In addition, parents of primary school and pre-school age children reported spending additional hours on interactive or developmental activities (such as painting, cooking, bike rides or games), with mothers doing over 3 hours per day and fathers just less than 2 hours per day.
- All studies report a significant gap in the amount of home learning by socio-economic background. Graduate parents were more likely to provide home-schooling at least 4 days per week (80 per cent) compared with non-graduates (60 per cent). Children eligible for free school meals were less likely to receive 4 hours per day (11 per cent) than other children (19 per cent). Differences in home learning between high- and low- income families equated to about 75 minutes per day, which would have led to about 15 days less schooling for children from low-income families up to the end of July. Such gaps were clear within individual studies for England, Northern Ireland and Scotland, though it is not possible to make direct comparisons.
- There is consistent evidence that children from disadvantaged backgrounds often lacked the necessary digital equipment and resources to undertake effective home learning. About 10 per cent lacked the necessary digital equipment and/or good internet connection. This was concentrated amongst disadvantaged students and was more problematic for secondary school age pupils. 40 per cent of low-income families lacked at least one essential resource. Teachers perceptions of the problem were even higher. The Ulster University study for Northern Ireland also highlights the difficulties faced by parents of children with special educational needs in obtaining the necessary resources and materials.
- A lack of a quiet study space was arguably an even larger barrier to effective home learning. In the ONS study, about 18 per cent of parents cited this as a key barrier to home learning, whilst the IFS survey highlighted this as a particular problem for low-income families (with 60 per cent of primary school pupils and 20 per cent of secondary school pupils from low-income families lacking their own study space). This is a much harder constraint for policymakers to address.
- The nature of the support provided by schools varied. Children from more affluent families were more likely to receive live online classes or other forms of active teaching support from schools, with larger differences for secondary schools. About 24 per cent of teachers provided live online lessons. About 60 per cent of teachers provided recorded content, with similar shares providing project work or worksheets. There is some regional and country variation in this type of support. Across the UK, about 27 per cent of children had less than one hour of offline lessons/tasks per day. This rose to 40 per cent in north-east England, was close to 30 per cent in Wales, Scotland and rest of England, falling to 20 per cent in Northern Ireland.

By and large, the amount of home learning is clearly a lot less than what would have been provided in school. It is also highly varied across pupils and areas. Disadvantaged pupils received less home learning, which is likely to be partly related to barriers faced in terms of access to the internet, digital equipment and a quiet study space. In most cases, it is not possible to do robust comparisons across the UK. Where it is possible, the amount of home learning seems to be highest in London and the south of England, and lowest in Wales, Scotland and north-east England.

**Table 5: Summary or surveys on extent of home learning**

Coverage/data		Summary of results
<a href="#">Sutton Trust (2020)</a>	UK: Sutton Trust survey of UK parents and Teacher Tapp surveys in April 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>44% of middle-class parents and 33% of working-class parents spending 4 or more hours help with home learning,</li> <li>23% of pupils reported receiving online lessons (30% for middle class homes, 16% for working class homes).</li> <li>27% of teachers in least disadvantaged schools receiving over three quarters of work back from students, compared with just 8% in most disadvantaged schools.</li> </ul>
<a href="#">Green (2020)</a>	UK: Sample of 4,559 children in UK-HLS study in April 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2.5 hours average of home learning per day.</li> <li>18% spending 4 or more hours on home learning per day, 20% doing less than 1 hour per day.</li> <li>11% of children eligible for FSM spending 4 or more on home learning, 19% for other children.</li> <li>22-25% of children in London, SE England and SW England spending 4 or more hours on home learning; 18% in east of England and N. Ireland, 15% in Wales, 14% in Scotland; 15% or lower in the midlands and northern England.</li> <li>20% of pupils eligible for FSM lack to a computer, compared with 7% for other pupils.</li> <li>72% had less than one hour of online lessons per day (little variation by country).</li> <li>27% had less than one hour of offline lessons per day (worksheets, videos etc..) per day (40% in north-east England, close to 30% in Wales, Scotland and rest of England, falling to 20% in Northern Ireland).</li> </ul>
<a href="#">Centre for Longitudinal Studies (2020)</a>	UK: Sample 18,000 parents across five cohort studies in May 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Parents spent 2.2 hours per day spent on home learning for their children.</li> <li>Mothers spent 1.5 hours more, working parents spent 1.3 hours less, parents with primary school children spent nearly 2 hours more.</li> <li>Mothers of primary school pupils spent further 3.4 hours on interactive activities, 1.8 hours for fathers.</li> </ul>
<a href="#">ONS (2020)</a>	GB: Two pooled datasets of 6,000+ respondents from Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (April-June 2020)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Primary school pupils spent about 2 hours per day on schoolwork, secondary school pupils just over 3 hours per day.</li> <li>Hours of schooling significantly reduced if child aged 0-4 in the household.</li> <li>Older children more likely to access to real-time, interactive lessons (44% of 16-18 year olds, 13% of 5-10 year olds).</li> <li>1 in 10 cited lack of appropriate digital devices as a reason for struggling with home learning.</li> <li>18% cited lack of quiet study space as a reason for struggling with home learning.</li> </ul>

<a href="#">Child Poverty Action Group</a>	<p>GB: 3,600 families receiving means tested benefits across England, Wales and Scotland in May 2020</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 40% missing at least one essential resource.</li> <li>▪ One third had to purchase laptop, tablet, or other device.</li> </ul>
<a href="#">Andrew et al (2020) and follow up</a>	<p>England: Online survey of 4,000+ parents of children aged 4-15 in May 2020</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Home learning of 4.5 hours per day on average (25-32% reduction compared with pre-lockdown).</li> <li>▪ Gap of 75 minutes per day in home learning between children from high- and low-income families.</li> <li>▪ Translates into an extra 7 days of home learning up to end May 2020 or extra 15 days up to end July.</li> <li>▪ Pupils from low-income families more likely to lack computer/tablet (15% of children from low-income families).</li> <li>▪ Children from low-income families were also more likely to lack their own study space (about 60% for primary school children and over 20% for secondary age children).</li> <li>▪ Children from better off families were more likely to receive active help/resources from schools, such as online classes or video-chats. Differences between better-off and most-disadvantaged were 53%/41% in primary schools and 64%/47% in secondary schools.</li> </ul>
<a href="#">Anders et al (2020)</a>	<p>Kantar Public Voice Survey of c.500 parents with school-age children (end April to early June)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 80% of graduate parents provide home schooling at least 4 days a week, compared with 60% of non-graduates.</li> <li>▪ 70% of graduate parents confident in their household's ability to provide home schooling, 60% for non-graduates.</li> <li>▪ Mothers provide more home-schooling, with 80% of mothers doing more or the same as father.</li> <li>▪ This is more likely to which interferes with work most for graduate mothers, with 80% of graduate mothers reporting that home schooling interfered with work, compared with two thirds of graduate fathers and half of non-graduates.</li> </ul>
<a href="#">NFER (2020)</a>	<p>England: 1,200 leaders &amp; 1,800 teachers in May 2020</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Teachers in regular contact with about 60% of pupils.</li> <li>▪ Parental engagement lower in the most deprived schools (41%) compared with least deprived schools (62%).</li> <li>▪ More pupils returning work in least deprived schools (49%) than in most deprived schools (30%).</li> <li>▪ About 25% of pupils have little or no internet/IT access, rising to about 39% amongst most disadvantaged pupils; more significant problem in secondary schools.</li> <li>▪ About 60% of teachers providing recorded content, project work or worksheets; 24% providing live online lessons</li> <li>▪ Over 80% of schools used texts, emails and the school website to provide support, 70% via telephone/video calls and about 50% using a virtual environment.</li> </ul>

<a href="#">National Survey for Wales</a>	Wales: Monthly telephone survey of 1,000 adults 16+	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>50-60% of primary school parents report helping children with maths or literacy every day in May/June.</li> <li>35-40% of secondary school parents report helping children with schoolwork every day.</li> </ul>
<a href="#">Coronavirus and me Survey</a>	Wales: 24,000 children aged 3-18 (May 2020)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Almost all children had been contacted by their school and 50% felt confident about home learning.</li> <li>25% lacked confidence, with specific concerns about electronic devices, support for additional learning needs and more interactive teaching.</li> </ul>
<a href="#">Lundie and Law (2020)</a>	Survey of over 700 teachers (mainly in Scotland) in May 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>High level of concern for pupils' mental health and well-being.</li> <li>Low attaining pupils less likely to engage with home learning materials and more likely to lack necessary resources.</li> </ul>
<a href="#">UNESCO Centre, Ulster University (2020)</a>	Northern Ireland: Survey of 4,600 parents during April/May 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>72% of primary school pupils did 1-3 hours work per day, 27% of post-primary pupils did 2-3 hours and 18% more than 4 hours, 36% of pupils in special schools did more than 1 hour.</li> <li>Around 10% of pupils lacked resources or digital equipment.</li> <li>Pupils with special educational needs or eligible for free school meals were more likely to lack necessary resources, digital equipment and received fewer hours of home learning.</li> </ul>
<a href="#">Centre for Research in Educational Underachievement</a>	Northern Ireland: Survey of 2,000 parents in May 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>9% of children spending 4 or more hours on home learning, 32% spending more than 3 hours.</li> <li>23% report schools engaging in online classes sometimes or frequently.</li> <li>7-8% of children with poor or no internet access, 23% with no printer.</li> <li>Graduates most likely to become directly involved in children's home-schooling (27% vs 15% for lower levels).</li> <li>2/3 of mothers engaging in home-schooling, 14% of fathers.</li> </ul>
<a href="#">Parenting Northern Ireland</a>	Survey of 439 parents across Northern Ireland in May 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>75-80% finding pandemic difficult for them and their families.</li> <li>63% believe NI executive have not done enough.</li> </ul>

## Free school meals

School closures meant that the vast majority of the 1.7 million pupils across the UK who would usually receive free school meals during the day in term time could no longer access these.<sup>50</sup> For many children, the meal that they receive at school is a key part of their diet, and its absence could put a significant strain on families' already stretched budgets.

Specific plans for providing free school meals were announced first in Northern Ireland, where direct financial payments were to be made on a fortnightly basis to parents of all eligible children. Funding in Wales and Scotland, for local authorities to use at their discretion to provide free school meals, was announced shortly after school closures. In England, guidance initially advised schools to use a variety of means to provide meals to eligible children, including working with caterers to provide home deliveries and using supermarket vouchers, while a national approach was developed. Eleven days later, on March 31, details of a national voucher scheme were announced.

In all cases, children who had been eligible for free school meals before the pandemic remained eligible, and in some cases other groups from disadvantaged backgrounds were also made eligible. For instance, in England eligibility has been temporarily extended to include some children who have no recourse to public funds.<sup>51</sup> In Wales, guidance to local authorities strongly encouraged them to use their discretion to allow the children of families who are experiencing severe hardship because they have no recourse to public funds to benefit from free school meal provision during the period of school closure.<sup>52</sup> In Northern Ireland and Scotland, no extensions were made to eligibility for free school meals to children with no recourse to public funds during the pandemic, though in Scotland local authorities already had discretion to extend eligibility in this way.<sup>53</sup>

The number of children eligible for Free School Meals is likely to have increased over the period of school closure due to the economic effects of the pandemic and the spike in Universal Credit take up.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Author's calculations, based on data for England: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/plans-set-out-to-support-pupils-eligible-for-free-school-meals>; Wales: <https://statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Education-and-Skills/Schools-and-Teachers/Schools-Census/Pupil-Level-Annual-School-Census/Provision-of-Meals-and-Milk/pupilseligibleforfreeschoolmeals-by-localauthorityregion-year>; Scotland:

<https://www2.gov.scot/Topics/Statistics/Browse/School-Education/MealsSD/mealsped>; Northern Ireland: <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/news/school-meals-northern-ireland-201718-statistical-bulletin>

<sup>51</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-free-school-meals-guidance/guidance-for-the-temporary-extension-of-free-school-meals-eligibility-to-nrpf-groups>

<sup>52</sup> <https://gov.wales/free-school-meals-coronavirus-guidance-schools#section-40902>

<sup>53</sup> <https://www.mygov.scot/school-meals/>

<sup>54</sup> <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-8999/>

**Table 6: Summary of provision of Free School Meals during lockdown, by country**

	England	Wales	Scotland	Northern Ireland
<b>How support was provided</b>	National voucher scheme, direct provision and alternative vouchers	Supermarket vouchers, direct payments, and direct provision (deliveries and at hubs)	Supermarket vouchers, direct payments, and direct provision (deliveries and at hubs)	Direct payments only
<b>By whom</b>	National scheme delivered by private company via schools	Collaboration between schools and local authorities	Collaboration between schools and local authorities	Education Authority, and in some cases the Home Office
<b>Local discretion</b>	Some discretion, though costs mostly met via national voucher system	Local authorities encouraged to use 'local approaches'	Provision that 'meets local needs and circumstances' encouraged	None
<b>Level of support</b>	National voucher scheme: £15 per week, or £3 per day. Costs of other means of support likely to vary	Government funding for vouchers: £19.50 per week, or £3.90 per day. Costs of other means of support likely to vary	Varies between local authorities and by method of support, from £10 to £20 per week	£13.50 per week, or £2.70 per day
<b>Period of support</b>	Term time, Easter holiday, spring half term and summer holiday	Term time, Easter holiday, spring half term and summer holiday	Term time, Easter holiday, spring half term for all eligible children and summer holiday for children from means-tested families only	Term time only until June 30, and summer holiday

As shown by Table 6, there are significant differences in how governments across the four countries approached free school meal provision during lockdown. The first is the level of local discretion granted by governments to local authorities and schools. While in Northern Ireland there is only one nationally delivered means of support, schools in England and local authorities in Scotland and Wales are, in principle, able to choose between a handful of means of providing food to families. In practice, there appear to be differences in how much local discretion there has been in England, Scotland and Wales.

In England, the main method of providing free school meals had been via the National Voucher Scheme, while in Wales and Scotland, where local authorities were encouraged to focus on local needs and circumstances, and where a national system of supermarket vouchers was absent, there appears to have been greater variety in how support was provided. Additionally, in Wales and Scotland, but not in England, local authorities were able to directly transfer money to families, and in Northern Ireland this was the only option available for most eligible families. Some charities have

claimed that direct financial payments offer the greatest support to children by offering the greatest flexibility to their families in how the money is used.<sup>55</sup>

In Wales, local authorities changed the way they provide support over time, with local authorities learning from experience that some approaches worked better in their area than others. For instance, in rural areas with fewer supermarkets, vouchers were a less useful choice and so some local authorities switched to direct provision of meals.<sup>56</sup> Similarly, in Scotland some authorities used a variety of ways to support families depending on local circumstances such as rurality.<sup>57</sup>

There is a considerable difference across the four countries in the weekly value of the support available, which ranges from £10 to £20 per child per week across the UK. Support in Scotland varies between either end of this range depending on which local authority a child lives in and which type of support they receive. In the other three countries, support ranged from £13.50 per child per week in Northern Ireland to £19.50 in Wales, with England in the middle in terms of support at £15 per child per week. In Scotland, the government did not set a specific amount per child to be passed on by local authorities, rather they were given the flexibility to set the amount based on their own circumstances and the needs of the communities in their area.<sup>58</sup>

In Northern Ireland, the level of support provided appears to be in line with the average cost of providing free school meals, with £13.50 being above the cost of providing meals in nursery and primary school, and below the cost of providing meals in secondary school.<sup>59</sup> In England, DfE increased the amount offered per meal from the £2.30 that schools usually receive to £3 in recognition of the fact families will not make the same bulk savings as schools can.<sup>60</sup> In Wales, the cost of school meals varies between local authorities from £2.30 per child per day to £2.90.<sup>61</sup> In calculating a national rate of funding per child to fund support for eligible children throughout the period of school closures, the Welsh Government used the higher rate and also took into account the fact that many primary school children may usually have received a free school breakfast and milk. The Government added £1 per day to compensate for this, bringing the total to £3.90 per day or £19.50 per week.

It has been claimed that in England the government created an incentive for schools to use the national voucher scheme over other forms of support<sup>62</sup> in a way that does not appear to have been present in Wales or Scotland. In England, guidance advised schools, along with other public bodies, to support suppliers such as caterers who could be considered at risk due to the pandemic. To this end, the government continued to provide schools with the funding they would usually receive for the provision of free school meals. Therefore, the funding available through the national voucher scheme for families enrolled in it by schools was additional to, rather than instead of, funding that schools were already getting for the provision of free school meals. Further, the national voucher scheme was funded at £15 per child per week, higher than the free school meals allowance of

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<sup>55</sup> CPAG (2020) The cost of learning in lockdown: family experiences of school closures [Online] Available at: <https://cpag.org.uk/policy-and-campaigns/report/cost-learning-lockdown-family-experiences-school-closures>

<sup>56</sup> Based on discussions with national and local policymakers in Wales.

<sup>57</sup> Correspondence with Scottish Government.

<sup>58</sup> Correspondence with Scottish Government.

<sup>59</sup> <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/free-school-meals-payment-scheme>

<sup>60</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/voucher-scheme-launches-for-schools-providing-free-school-meals>

<sup>61</sup> <https://gov.wales/atisn13904>

<sup>62</sup> <https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/3381/html/>



£11.50 per week.<sup>63</sup> Adding to the incentive to sign up to the national voucher scheme, Department for Education guidance on April 7 suggested that schools that had opted to buy food or purchase other vouchers after the national voucher scheme was introduced would not be reimbursed, that schools would have to use their existing funds for these expenses and that the department would not confirm the reimbursement process for any additional costs until June.<sup>64</sup>

In Wales and Scotland, there appears to have been greater variety in the ways that local authorities have supported families eligible for free school meals. This seems to have been driven by greater encouragement on behalf of governments for local discretion and the lack of a national voucher scheme in either country. While governments in both countries announced additional funding for providing free school meals during the period of school closures on top of existing funding provided for free school meal provision, this funding could be used to support families in a range of ways. This may have helped to ensure that one form of support was not so clearly favoured over others in Wales and Scotland, as in England. In Wales, government guidance to schools made clear that the government had confidence in local authorities to work with schools to provide support in a way that suited local circumstances. Here, support appears to have been delivered by a collaboration between local authorities and schools, with local authorities having responsibility for some areas, such as direct payments to families, and schools responsible for their own provision where they remained open. In Scotland, schools were responsible for delivering meals on site where hubs were open to children of key workers and vulnerable children, but otherwise local authorities delivered meals via a mix of direct payments, vouchers and arranging food deliveries to families.<sup>65</sup>

There were several delays in the announcements associated with the national voucher scheme in England that were not present in Wales, Scotland or Northern Ireland.<sup>66</sup> For example, the extension of the voucher scheme during the Easter holiday was not announced until April 7, with Easter Sunday falling on April 12 and some schools already on holiday at this point. At the same time, the voucher provider's site was closed for maintenance on April 11 and 12. Similarly, the extension of the voucher scheme to cover the May half-term was announced publicly on May 27, five days into the holiday. For many families, these delays meant they faced a considerable delay in accessing the support they needed to feed their families.<sup>67</sup>

The decision to extend support for children eligible for free school meals to cover the summer holiday came first in Wales (22 April), followed by Scotland and England (16 June) and Northern Ireland (25 June). The later announcements in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland are likely to have caused some difficulty for families trying to plan their finances ahead of the summer holiday. While the announcement in Scotland followed a statement earlier in the month that the Deputy First Minister was considering what support should be in place to support families during the holiday period,<sup>68</sup> the announcement arrived less than two weeks before the summer term was due to end in

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<sup>63</sup> <https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/3381/html/>

<sup>64</sup> <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/05/27/uk-children-england-going-hungry-schools-shut>

<sup>65</sup> Correspondence with Scottish Government.

<sup>66</sup> <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/07/23/submission-uk-parliament-education-committee>

<sup>67</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2020/apr/09/uks-poorest-families-suffering-as-free-school-meal-vouchers-delayed>

<sup>68</sup> <https://www.theyworkforyou.com/sp/?id=2020-06-10.7.0>

most local authorities.<sup>69</sup> Meanwhile, although the announcement in England came further ahead of the beginning of the holidays, with summer term running until mid-July in most areas, it followed a statement just the day before which indicated that free school meal provision would not be extended to cover the summer holiday.<sup>70</sup> The decision followed a high profile campaign led by footballer Marcus Rashford calling to extend free school meal support for low income families over the summer holiday.<sup>71</sup> In Northern Ireland, the Education Minister outlined a proposal to extend the scheme on 18 June, with funding yet to be confirmed.<sup>72</sup> The term-time scheme of payments for families was scheduled to end on 30 June, meaning this late announcement may have caused some difficulties for families planning for the summer.

The fact that the voucher scheme in England was operated at a national level, and that it quickly became the main means of providing free school meals for schools in England, may have led to some issues that were not present in Wales, Scotland or Northern Ireland. For instance, the platform used by parents and schools to participate in the national voucher scheme, a website provided by private company Edenred, was initially overwhelmed by demand, leaving parents unable to log on and in some cases schools unable to check which parents had received vouchers.<sup>73</sup> Once parents had received vouchers via email, some reported issues redeeming the vouchers at supermarket tills, although Edenred claimed that every supermarket voucher it sent to parents was valid.<sup>74</sup> These issues meant that at some schools, where parents had waited weeks for vouchers, teachers were forced to direct parents to local foodbanks or to make donations to parents themselves.<sup>75</sup> The national voucher scheme required supermarkets participating in the scheme to already have in place a digital gift card system that could be processed at all of its stores. This meant that some supermarkets that were more popular among lower income families, such as Aldi, McColls and Iceland, were initially excluded from the scheme, though they have since joined.<sup>76</sup> However, Lidl has not been added to the scheme despite early talks about implementing a physical voucher system to enable parents to redeem their vouchers at the store. We were told by the Welsh Government that they had considered a national voucher scheme, but due to the distribution of supermarkets in the country they had not been able to get coverage of enough of the country because of these kinds of practical restrictions.

Overall, the support provided by governments to help children to continue to access free school meals during the period of school closures is likely to have been very important to reducing pressure on family incomes. Allowing local discretion in the delivery of support, as in Wales and Scotland, and

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<sup>69</sup> For term dates, see <https://www.scotsman.com/education/when-are-school-holidays-2020-scotland-term-dates-spring-summer-autumn-and-winter-1398220>

<sup>70</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/football/2020/jun/15/boris-johnson-rejects-marcus-rashfords-plea-for-free-school-meals-over-summer>

<sup>71</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2020/jun/16/boris-johnson-faces-tory-rebellion-over-marcus-rashfords-school-meals-call>

<sup>72</sup> <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/news/weir-outlines-proposals-support-vulnerable-children-and-young-people-summer>

<sup>73</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2020/may/07/government-gave-national-pupils-food-voucher-contract-to-small-company> & <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/coronavirus-dfe-confirms-plans-for-15-a-week-free-school-meal-vouchers/>

<sup>74</sup> <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-52551464>

<sup>75</sup> <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/how-the-governments-free-school-meals-voucher-scheme-is-leaving-children-without-food/>

<sup>76</sup> <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/2187/documents/20156/default/>

providing direct payments to parents as in Northern Ireland appear to have run into fewer problems than England's national voucher scheme. Making sure that announcements related to that support, and any changes to it, such as extensions over the school holidays, were made earlier are likely to have given families much needed certainty. Examples include the Northern Ireland Executive announcing initial support on 26 March, and the Welsh Government announcing the extension over summer on 22 April. Meanwhile, national funding commitments per child varied between as well as within countries, with Wales and England the most generous, Northern Ireland the least, and Scotland the most variable by local authority.

## Digital inclusion

In order to access and engage with online home learning resources and materials, pupils needed access to a computer or tablet together with a reliable internet connection. Unfortunately, as revealed by the home learning surveys, about 5-10 per cent of pupils lacked access to the required digital equipment and/or internet connections, with the problems concentrated amongst pupils from low-income and disadvantaged families. A potential alternative would have been paper-based worksheets provided by some, though certainly not all, schools.

With this in mind, all four nations created schemes to source and provide digital equipment to disadvantaged pupils. These varied in terms of their scope, organisation and delivery times.

In April 2020, the UK government announced plans to provide over 200,000 routers to disadvantaged pupils in England, plus 4G routers, at an expected cost of £85m. This commitment was increased to 230,000 by early June. As detailed in Department for Education guidance on the scheme, these devices were distributed to disadvantaged children and young people who did not have access at home or via another source.<sup>77</sup> Laptops and tablets were focused on care leavers, all children with a social workers and disadvantaged pupils in year 10. 4G wireless routers were provided for care leavers, secondary school age pupils with social workers and disadvantaged pupils in year 10 in 2019-20.

These devices were ordered by the Department for Education and then sent on to local authorities and academy trusts for delivery to pupils. Local authorities and academy trusts owned these devices, and could either gift or loan these to individual pupils. The aim was for 230,000 laptops or tablets to be delivered by the of June 2020. In the end, just over 200,000 were delivered or dispatched by end of June 2020, covering about 2.6 per cent of pupils across England. The fact that most of these devices were only delivered in mid/late June meant that these pupils probably only had access to them for about 4-5 weeks at the end of term and could have missed out on over 2 months of potential online home learning time, with the only alternative being paper-based worksheets delivered by some schools.

The number of routers delivered was much smaller, with about 47,000 delivered by the end of June 2020, covering about 0.6 per cent of pupils. This would have limited access to online content for many vulnerable and disadvantaged learners.

What is missing from this picture is how many extra laptops or devices were loaned or gifted to pupils by individual schools, local authorities and academy trusts from existing stocks. In making these allocations, the Department for Education made an assumption regarding how many laptops

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<sup>77</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/laptops-tablets-and-4g-wireless-routers-provided-during-coronavirus-covid-19>

and tablets schools already had to loan or gift to pupils. As reported in Schools Week,<sup>78</sup> the government assumed secondary school already had an average of 87 tablets and 195 laptops, and that primary schools had 27 tablets and 49 laptops. This was based on a survey from 2019.<sup>79</sup> However, no data is available on how many devices were actually available and passed on to pupils in addition to those ordered by the Department for Education.

In April 2020, the Welsh Government announced a £3m plan to support digitally excluded learners.<sup>80</sup> Drawing on existing analysis and infrastructure on digital exclusion, the Welsh Government worked with local authorities and schools to identify digitally excluded learners. They also examined how their needs could be met from existing school and local authority stocks.

During April and May 2020, local authorities, the Welsh Government and schools repurposed existing laptops and tablets to meet minimum hardware and software specifications, and to ensure access to 'Hwb' resources. The 'Hwb' is a collection of online resources and materials for schools and pupils in Wales, which existed well before the pandemic and was widely used for online learning during the pandemic.<sup>81</sup> These laptops were then issued to any learner that needed one. The Welsh Government and local authorities will be prioritising replacement of these stocks in the future. Unfortunately, as in England, the number of laptops and tablets provided by schools and local authorities is unknown.

In addition, the Welsh Government sourced nearly 11,000 MiFi units (wireless routers) to ensure good quality internet connections for digitally excluded learners, covering about 2.7 per cent of pupils. The MiFi units were mostly delivered to local authorities during mid-May 2020 and sent to pupils very shortly afterwards. All were delivered by the end of May. This represents a faster delivery of digital devices than the three other UK nations and would have given disadvantaged pupils nearly 2 months of access to online learning opportunities (subject to access to a computer, laptop or tablet)

In May 2020, the Scottish government announced a £9m plan to provide 25,000 laptops with internet access for disadvantaged pupils.<sup>82</sup> However, none had been delivered by the end of the school year. About 20,000 were delivered by mid-August 2020, with the rest expected to be delivered by the end of August 2020. By this time, full-time schooling had resumed for most pupils too, limiting the value of these devices (unless further lockdowns become necessary). Once all are delivered, the number of devices would cover about 3.6 per cent pupils across Scotland. Whilst this is clearly a wider coverage than all other UK nations, the slower pace of delivery meant that many disadvantaged pupils will have missed out on online learning opportunities for nearly 3 months.

As a partial mitigation, a number of locally organized schemes did seek to provide digital devices for pupils in Scotland, such as 600 devices provided by the Aberlour Child Care Trust and Children 1<sup>st</sup> during the pandemic and tablets provided to all pupils in Glasgow before the pandemic.<sup>83</sup> In

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<sup>78</sup> <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/dfe-assumed-schools-had-280-devices-each-before-deciding-free-laptop-allocations/>

<sup>79</sup> <https://edtechnology.co.uk/latest-news/besa-ict-report-secondary-school-ict-budgets-drop-by-17m/>

<sup>80</sup> <https://gov.wales/extra-3-million-pounds-support-digitally-excluded-learners-wales>

<sup>81</sup> <https://hwb.gov.wales/>

<sup>82</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/news/schools-to-re-open-in-august/>

<sup>83</sup> <https://news.stv.tv/scotland/laptops-and-tablets-available-for-vulnerable-families?top;https://www.tes.com/news/glasgows-mass-ipad-rollout-we-will-not-apologise>

addition, the Scottish government encouraged local authorities to use additional funding to provide laptops/tablets to disadvantaged pupils.<sup>84</sup>

In May 2020, the Northern Ireland Executive announced plan to lend laptops and tablets to disadvantaged pupils. Initially, the schools and the Education Authority worked together to work out how much of existing stocks within schools could be loaned to pupils. On top of this, the Northern Ireland Executive sought to make “3,000 new laptops available in coming weeks ... [and] scope to provide up to 24,000.”<sup>85</sup> Pupils in year groups 11, 13, 6 and 3 were prioritised (in that order), as were vulnerable and disadvantaged pupils.

The initial batch of 3,000 devices was delivered by the end of June 2020, covering about 1.1 per cent of pupils. These devices did not have internet access, which would have made it much harder for many pupils to access online learning opportunities if they had no or poor internet access. The fact that delivery only occurred in June 2020 will have meant many digitally excluded pupils missing out on potentially 2 or more months of home learning. Mitigating against this would have been any devices delivered from existing school stocks. However, as with other countries, the extent of such lending is uncertain.

The Northern Ireland Executive has also recently announced a plan to provide up to an additional 8,000 devices with internet access to pupils in August 2020. This would increase coverage to 3.5 per cent of pupils. With schools now returning full-time, access to devices at home is less of a barrier than during lockdown.

In summary, all four nations made significant efforts to provide digital devices to disadvantaged and vulnerable learners who did not have the necessary equipment at home to access online learning materials. Making use of well-established infrastructure on digital inclusion, policymakers in Wales were able to re-purpose existing stocks of laptops and send new MiFi devices to disadvantaged learners by the end of May. Delivery of laptops and 4G routers came later in England, with all digital equipment sent out by the end of June. In Scotland and Northern Ireland, delivery was only complete by or after the end of the school year, limiting access to online learning materials for disadvantaged learners without the necessary equipment.

Looking forwards, the delivery of such equipment should help limit any digital divide if future lockdowns need to be employed, particularly if devices were gifted rather than loaned. In preparation for future lockdowns, policymakers and schools should be surveying pupils and parents to better understand needs for digital equipment and resources.

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<sup>84</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/publications/supporting-pupils-parents-teachers-learning-during-term-4/pages/2/>

<sup>85</sup> <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/news/minister-outlines-plans-provide-digital-devices-disadvantaged-children>

**Table 7 – Delivery and coverage of digital devices**

Delivery		Coverage
England	114,000 devices and 23,000 4G routers delivered/dispatched by mid-June; 202,000 devices and 47,000 routers delivered/dispatched by end-June	Laptops: 2.6% of pupils by end June 2020 Routers: 0.6% of pupils by end June 2020
Wales	10,848 MiFi devices and 9,717 software licences funded by the Welsh Government by end May 2020	MiFi devices cover about 2.7% of pupils by end of May 2020
Scotland	No laptops delivered by July 2020 About 20,000 delivered by mid-August 2020	Laptops/tablets with internet access cover about 3.6% of pupils by end August 2020
Northern Ireland	3,600 devices (no internet access) delivered in June 2020 Up to 8,000 devices planned for August 2020 (with internet access)	Laptops/tablets (no internet access) delivered by end-June cover 1.1% of pupils

**Notes and sources for England:** UK government plans (<https://committees.parliament.uk/oralevidence/325/pdf/>, <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/coronavirus-majority-of-free-laptops-wont-be-delivered-until-june/>, <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2020-06-09/debates/1FB411B2-E5C6-4E6B-A9F2-1DDBF5F5E8B1/EducationSettingsWiderOpening>); *delivery of laptops and devices* (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/laptops-tablets-and-4g-wireless-routers-progress-data>); ‘Schools, Pupils and their Characteristics, January, 2020’ (<https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/data-tables/school-pupils-and-their-characteristics>)

**Notes and sources for Wales:** Welsh government plans (<https://gov.wales/extra-3-million-pounds-support-digittally-excluded-learners-wales>); ‘Device and connectivity update for digitally excluded learners during coronavirus (COVID-19)’ (<https://gov.wales/device-and-connectivity-update-digittally-excluded-learners-during-coronavirus-covid-19#section-45249>); ‘Schools’ census results: as at January 2020’ (<https://gov.wales/schools-census-results-january-2020>).

**Notes and sources for Scotland:** Scottish government plans (<https://www.gov.scot/news/schools-to-re-open-in-august/>); *delivery of laptops by July 2020* (<https://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/28877.aspx?SearchType=Advance&ReferenceNumbers=S5W-30015&ResultsPerPage=10>); *delivery of laptops by August 2020* (<https://www.tes.com/news/coronavirus-over-40-councils-opt-out-national-laptop-scheme>); total pupil numbers of 698,000, excluding early learning and childcare (<https://www.gov.scot/publications/summary-statistics-schools-scotland-no-10-2019-edition/pages/3/>).

**Notes and sources for Northern Ireland:** – Northern Ireland Executive plans (<https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/news/minister-outlines-plans-provide-digital-devices-disadvantaged-children>); *Delivery in June 2020 and further plans* (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-53218939>); *Number of students in primary, post-primary and special schools* (<https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/school-enrolments-northern-ireland-summary-data>)

## SEND Provision

Changes to education provision due to the pandemic have led to significant changes to the day-to-day lives of many children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).<sup>86</sup> In England, 3.3 per cent of all pupils in schools have an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) - a document that sets out the child's need and the extra help they should receive following a formal assessment. A further 12.1 per cent of pupils have SEN support, without an EHCP.<sup>87</sup> Previous EPI research has shown that the proportion of children who are identified as having SEN in England between Reception and Year 11 is considerably greater than the proportion who are identified as having SEN at any one point in time.<sup>88</sup>

### Modification of duties on local authorities

In response to the pandemic, the governments of the UK considered making amendments to the duties on various bodies, such as local authorities and health commissioning bodies, regarding the provision of educational support for children with SEND or additional support needs, or to the timescales within which these duties had to be carried out. These include the duty to secure a needs assessment or plan for children with suspected SEND or additional support needs and to secure special educational and health care provision in accordance with a plan, within certain time limits. Governments in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland made changes which in practice meant that in circumstances where a failure of relevant bodies to carry out such duties or to do so within the usual time frame was attributable to the pandemic, it would not be considered a failure. The Welsh Government did not modify these duties.

Specifically, the time limits usually associated with certain processes in England and Scotland, such as to secure a needs assessment or review a support plan for children with suspected SEND or additional support needs, were disregarded to the extent that any failures to carry out the duty in this timeframe were attributable to the pandemic.<sup>89</sup> In Northern Ireland, changes meant that relevant authorities had a duty to make their 'best endeavours' to meet their original duty where they were unable to comply with the original duty due to the pandemic.<sup>90</sup> Changes to the duty to secure special educational provision for children with a plan were slightly different, with Northern Ireland again changing it to a 'best endeavours' duty and England requiring local authorities and

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<sup>86</sup> The term 'Special Educational Need or Disability (SEND)' is used in both England and Northern Ireland. In Wales, the term 'Additional Learning Needs' is used to define a similar set of needs to those described by SEND. In Scotland, the term 'Additional Support Needs' is used to define the broader set of needs of children or young people who, for whatever reason, require additional support, in the long or short term, in order to help them make the most of their school education and to be included fully in their learning. For simplicity, throughout this section we use the phrase 'SEND' to cover the definitions used in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and the term 'additional support needs' to describe the definition used in Scotland.

<sup>87</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/statistics-special-educational-needs-sen>

<sup>88</sup> Hutchinson, J. (2017) How many children have SEND? [Online] Available at: <https://epi.org.uk/publications-and-research/many-children-send/>

<sup>89</sup> England: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/changes-to-the-law-on-education-health-and-care-needs-assessments-and-plans-due-to-coronavirus/education-health-and-care-needs-assessments-and-plans-guidance-on-temporary-legislative-changes-relating-to-coronavirus-covid-19> ; Scotland:

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-act-2020-educational-continuity-direction/>

<sup>90</sup> <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/notice-temporarily-disapplying-or-modifying-education-duties-no2-northern-ireland-2020> ; <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/notice-coronavirus-act-2020-temporary-modification-education-duties-no10-cancellation-notice>

health commissioning bodies to use their ‘reasonable endeavours’ to discharge this duty.<sup>91</sup> In Scotland, changes meant that failures by local authorities to comply with their statutory duty to make adequate and efficient provision for children and young people with additional support needs for whose school education they are responsible would be disregarded, to the extent that these failures could be attributable to the pandemic.<sup>92</sup>

Changes to duties or to the usual statutory time limits within which duties were to be carried out were modified from 21 May to 10 August in Scotland,<sup>93</sup> and from 2 April to 24 August in Northern Ireland.<sup>94</sup> In England, changes were put in place on 1 May, with the ‘reasonable endeavours’ duty in place until 31 July and the disapplication of the usual time limits in some circumstances in place until 25 September.<sup>95</sup>

It is unclear how the different approaches to modifying these duties impacted the actual actions of relevant bodies. In theory, the modification of the duties of authorities to assess children’s needs and secure provision for them could affect a great number of children with special educational needs. Some parents, teachers, organisations representing children with SEND and their families argued that the changes would have significant negative implications for children’s development, while at least one legal challenge has been made.<sup>96</sup> The modification of duties towards children with SEND in England was described as ‘disproportionate to the situation’ by Anne Longfield, the Children’s Commissioner.<sup>97</sup>

Some types of support, such as one-on-one support, or some types of therapy, were particularly difficult to provide during the period of school closures, when social distancing was a priority and such provision would usually have been delivered at school. However, some parents report not receiving any support at all, and claim that at least some of the support their children were entitled to could have been provided.<sup>98</sup> For students who rely on a combination of education, therapy and health services, missing out on any one of these areas of support could be detrimental to the other two. For instance, a child who relies on speech and language therapy may not be able to make the most of the education offered to them without it.<sup>99</sup>

Some have worried that the modification of the duty was being interpreted or implemented differently in different areas in England, with some schools providing comprehensive support to

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<sup>91</sup> England: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/changes-to-the-law-on-education-health-and-care-needs-assessments-and-plans-due-to-coronavirus/education-health-and-care-needs-assessments-and-plans-guidance-on-temporary-legislative-changes-relating-to-coronavirus-covid-19>; NI: <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/notice-temporarily-disapplying-or-modifying-education-duties-no2-northern-ireland-2020>

<sup>92</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-act-2020-educational-continuity-direction/>

<sup>93</sup> See the lack of a continuation of the disregard of duties in the 5<sup>th</sup> Direction:

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-act-2020-educational-continuity-direction/>

<sup>94</sup> <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/notice-temporarily-disapplying-or-modifying-education-duties-no2-northern-ireland-2020> ; <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/notice-coronavirus-act-2020-temporary-modification-education-duties-no10-cancellation-notice>

<sup>95</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/changes-to-the-law-on-education-health-and-care-needs-assessments-and-plans-due-to-coronavirus/education-health-and-care-needs-assessments-and-plans-guidance-on-temporary-legislative-changes-relating-to-coronavirus-covid-19>

<sup>96</sup> <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/government-faces-legal-challenge-over-emergency-send-powers/>

<sup>97</sup> <https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/7566/html/>

<sup>98</sup> E.g. this article on provision in England: <https://www.politics.co.uk/comment-analysis/2020/06/15/special-needs-children-left-without-support-amid-covid-education>

<sup>99</sup> <https://www.tes.com/news/changes-law-ehcps-will-have-serious-impact>



those with an EHCP while some parents reported having no contact with either their school or local authority about what was going to be provided for them.<sup>100</sup>

## Support provided to children with SEND

A minority of children with SEND attended school during the period of school closure. While the data available are not directly comparable between countries, the proportion of vulnerable children attending school, which includes those with an EHCP in England, was considerably higher during the period of school closures than the proportion of vulnerable children attending school in Wales, Scotland or Northern Ireland (see Table 4).

Providing remote learning to children with SEND during the period of school closure presented a series of difficulties for teachers and families. A survey of teachers in special schools in England found that children with SEND can have issues accessing virtual support and resources, and that the individualised nature of children's learning pathways means that tailored advice for parents on how to deliver learning activities is often required, sometimes alongside the physical resources required for specific activities.<sup>101</sup> While some parents report that being at home with their child had led to some positive outcomes, such as reduced anxiety and fewer behavioural outbursts from their child,<sup>102</sup> there is evidence that school closures have had a negative impact on children's wellbeing, their behaviour, and their learning, as well as on the wellbeing of parents, for whom school can be a respite especially among those whose children have very high needs.<sup>103</sup> This section focuses on the support available to children with SEND who remained at home during this period.

In England, the government allocated an additional £10 million of funding to the Family Fund, on top of its planned £27.3 million investment, specifically in response to the pandemic. This funding is to provide items and services to support over 75,000 low-income families raising children with disabilities and serious illnesses; for example, devices and sensory toys to help with education.<sup>104</sup> As part of a £1bn catch-up package, the government has invested £650 million to support schools, with special schools getting a higher amount per pupil in recognition of the costs they face. The government expects schools to use some of this funding to support children with SEND, including through funding extra teaching capacity, speech and language therapists, and educational psychologists.<sup>105</sup> The other £350 million aims to increase access to high quality tuition for disadvantaged and vulnerable children and young people, some of whom will have SEND. The government has also funded the Oak National Academy to support schools in delivering remote education across a range of subjects from Reception through to Year 10 by producing online lessons. This includes a Specialist Curriculum aimed specifically at supporting pupils who would normally receive their education in specialist settings, available from 7<sup>th</sup> September.<sup>106</sup> Finally, the DfE

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<sup>100</sup> <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/coronavirus-support-for-send-children-has-dropped-off-a-cliff-experts-warn/>

<sup>101</sup> Skipp, A., Hopwood, V., Julius, J., & McLean, D., (2020) Special education during lockdown: Returning to schools and colleges in September [Online] Available at: <https://www.nuffieldfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Special-schools-during-lockdown.pdf>

<sup>102</sup> [Ibid.](#)

<sup>103</sup> See Table 8 below.

<sup>104</sup> <https://www.tes.com/news/coronavirus-send-pupils-get-ps10m-extra-covid-19-crisis-support>

<sup>105</sup> Correspondence from Department of Education.

<sup>106</sup> <https://classroom.thenational.academy/specialist#subjects> (When trying to access the resource on 4<sup>th</sup> September, the website said these resources would become available from 7<sup>th</sup> September.)

published a list of online educational resources to help children with SEND to learn at home, including specific guidance for parents.<sup>107</sup>

In Wales, the government created a framework of guidance for local authorities and allowed decisions to be taken locally about the best way to support vulnerable children, including those with SEND. The government have supported access to school hubs for children with SEND and requested special schools to remain open where possible, as well as covering the costs of residential care settings to remain open whether or not children stayed in places.<sup>108</sup> We were told that in the vast majority of cases, local authorities have offered a place in a hub to children with additional learning needs and that in most other cases, alternative provision such as one-to-one support, has been provided where appropriate. Wales also included children with SEND in their package of support for children in the early years. Using a broad definition of SEND due to the difficulties with identifying additional support needs at a young age, the package offers to pay for the childcare costs of the parents of vulnerable children.

In Scotland, guidance for local authorities emphasised the need for local decisions to be made about how to support children with additional support needs. Guidance stated that if pupils can learn safely at home, they should, but that local authorities need to ensure and prioritise continued care and support for pupils with additional support needs 'where appropriate'.<sup>109</sup> We were told by the Scottish Government that because the vast majority of learners in Scotland with additional support needs attend mainstream schools, as opposed to special schools, they would not have provided specific guidance for additional support needs. Instead, reference to providing appropriate support for children with additional support needs was included in broader guidance for local authorities and education settings to continue to support children's learning during the pandemic.<sup>110</sup> This included encouraging local authorities and education authorities to take into account the individual needs of children, supporting their emotional wellbeing through 'careful planning, including discussion with [children] and their parents and carers', taking an inclusive approach to learning, and working with partner organisations. Online resources for parents of children with additional support needs were made available via Parent Club, a website funded by the Scottish Government.<sup>111</sup>

In Northern Ireland, the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) worked in partnership with officers from the Education Authority (EA), the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools, and the Controlled Schools Support Council to support individual schools as designated link officers. All schools in Northern Ireland have a link officer, who acts as a point of contact between schools and national organisations by recording any requests or queries schools have, to inform the Department of Education and Education Authority. These link officers played a role in supporting access to school for children with SEND who were eligible for a place (those with a statement of SEN) during the period of school closures. They did so by acting as a point of contact between schools, both open and closed, the EA, and child's social worker where required, to seek a decision on placement and, where necessary, additional support and resources from the EA. The ETI engaged with schools to

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<sup>107</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/help-children-with-send-continue-their-education-during-coronavirus-covid-19>

<sup>108</sup> Discussion with Department for Education and Skills.

<sup>109</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-guide-schools-early-learning-closures/pages/vulnerable-children/>

<sup>110</sup> See <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-support-for-continuity-in-learning/pages/additional-support-for-learning/> and <https://www.gov.scot/publications/supporting-pupils-parents-teachers-learning-during-term-4/>

<sup>111</sup> <https://www.parentclub.scot/articles/supporting-children-and-young-people-with-additional-support-needs>

find out what kind of support they were providing for their pupils, including those with SEND, with potentially useful examples for other schools and families written up as case studies and included in a range of guidance and support documents.<sup>112</sup> The EA's support services include a range of online resources and a telephone line which parents can call for support, including for special educational needs (although it appears that some telephone lines were not in operation due to the pandemic).<sup>113</sup> An organisation which usually provides support to children with complex needs related to autism, the Middletown Centre for Autism, shifted its focus during lockdown to providing online resources available to all families, children and young people, as well as continuing to support via telephone those families with whom they were already providing support.<sup>114</sup>

We were told that schools in Northern Ireland provided a range of support for pupils with SEND through school websites, online lessons, and physical learning materials sent to children's homes. Evidence from surveys of parents during the period of school closures give a varied picture of the level of engagement from schools in Northern Ireland but highlight that children with SEND were more likely to lack necessary resources, digital equipment and received fewer hours of home learning.<sup>115</sup> We were told that therapists who usually worked with special schools provided online support, tasks and equipment to help children with issues such as speech and language, occupational and physiotherapy support. It is unclear how many children received such support.

In summary, children with SEND in England, Wales and Northern Ireland and those with additional support needs in Scotland are likely to have faced significant challenges during the period of school closures. Because of the variety of the types of educational and support needs that children have, no one policy was likely to be adequate for all children, and a heavy reliance on the support of those professionals who were familiar with the needs of children whose needs had already been assessed was likely to be necessary to each government's response. It is unclear so far how the different approaches to modifying the duties on relevant bodies in each country to assess and secure educational provision for children with SEND has impacted the actual actions of relevant bodies. However, it seems possible that some children have missed out on access to education or had an assessment of their needs postponed due to these changes. Overall, it appears that the support made available to support children with SEND and additional support needs has been uneven, with some children missing out depending on the support available from their school or local authority and the complexity of their needs.

### Evidence from surveys of parents of children with SEND or additional support needs

The evidence available from surveys of parents and carers suggests that a considerable proportion have struggled to access support from their school or local authority (see Table 8). Due to the lack of comparable surveys across countries, it is unclear from this evidence whether families in some countries have fared better than in others. Findings suggest that parents with children that have SEND or additional support needs were likely to find it difficult to support their child during the period of school closures and that they were likely to have received support from their school or local authority that they considered to be inadequate, though results vary between surveys.

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<sup>112</sup> <https://www.etini.gov.uk/news/eti-continuity-learning-guidance-schools>

<sup>113</sup> <https://www.eani.org.uk/>

<sup>114</sup> <https://www.middletownautism.com/covid19>

<sup>115</sup> UNESCO Centre, Ulster University (2020) [Experiences of supporting children's home learning during COVID-19 \[Online\] Available at: https://www.ulster.ac.uk/coronavirus/research/impact/understanding-parents-experiences-of-home-schooling-in-northern-ireland](https://www.ulster.ac.uk/coronavirus/research/impact/understanding-parents-experiences-of-home-schooling-in-northern-ireland)



**Table 8: Summary of surveys of parents of children with SEND on the impact of school closures and the support available**

Coverage/data		Summary of results
<a href="#">Simpson Millar</a>	England: Survey of 162 parents with an Education, Health and Care Plan in June 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>44% of parents have struggled to get support from the Local Authority during lockdown</li> <li>55% have seen a reduction in support through the pandemic</li> </ul>
<a href="#">Special Needs Jungle</a>	England: Survey of 1,000 parents of children with SEND in June 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>29% of parents agreed that their child’s educational placement had provided good or very good support during lockdown, while 55% disagreed or strongly disagreed.</li> <li>23% of parents reported that schoolwork had been suitably differentiated for their child's needs.</li> <li>Most children who usually received therapies such as speech and language (SLT) or occupational therapy, missed months of sessions during lockdown.</li> <li>For children who normally had 1:1 teaching assistant support, only 9% of pupils in mainstream settings received any continuation of this online during lockdown.</li> </ul>
<a href="#">Disability Children's Partnership</a>	England: Survey of 4,000 families with disabled children in May 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>76% of families who did receive support before lockdown had all support withdrawn during the pandemic.</li> <li>72% of parents reported providing a lot more care compared with the amount before lockdown.</li> <li>Half of parents whose children had been receiving crucial therapies or other extra support have seen this stop. 86% said lockdown had a negative impact on their disabled children's learning and communication</li> <li>The lockdown was impacting on statutory processes - two-thirds going through an assessment process had seen it delayed and 43% of annual reviews had lapsed or been put on hold.</li> </ul>
<a href="#">Family Fund</a>	UK: Surveys of 4,500 families raising disabled or seriously ill children in April and May 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>65% of parents said that formal support for their child had decreased due to the pandemic.</li> <li>78% reported no longer receiving support from an educational psychologist, 78% from occupational therapy, and 77% speech and language therapy.</li> <li>94% of families said the Covid-19 outbreak had negatively affected their disabled or seriously ill child’s health and wellbeing</li> </ul>

<a href="#">University of York</a>	UK: Survey of 339 parents of children with SEND between March and May 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There was considerable variation in parental satisfaction with support for their child with SEND, suggesting a substantial inequality in support:</li> <li>Less than half of parents (40%) reported that the level of support they received had been adequate to meet their child's needs. A comparable proportion (37%) rated the support they received as inadequate and the remaining minority (22%) rated the support as neither adequate nor inadequate.</li> </ul>
<a href="#">CPAG</a>	Scotland: Survey of 3,218 parents and carers in May	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Parents of children with additional support needs, and in particular parents from low-income families, reported concerns about their child's wellbeing during school closures.</li> <li>Across the board, parents highlighted lack of additional support for their children, which has caused a huge strain during lockdown</li> </ul>
<a href="#">University of York</a>	UK: Survey of 241 parents of children with SEND in March and April 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Both parents and children appear to be experiencing loss, worry and changes in mood and behaviour as a result of the rapid social changes that have occurred.</li> </ul>
<a href="#">NFER</a>	England: Survey of 3,000 teachers and senior leaders in May	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>On average, teachers report that 58 per cent of children with SEND are less engaged in remote learning than their classmates.</li> </ul>
<a href="#">Ulster University</a>	Northern Ireland: Survey of 4,600 parents in April and May	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Parents of children with SEND were more likely than other parents to struggle with a range of aspects of home learning. This was more pronounced among parents of older (post-primary age) children, of whom 17 per cent of those of a child with SEND reported a lack of resources, compared to 12 per cent of other children.</li> <li>Parents of children with a diagnosed SEN did not always feel supported, with some parents describing learning packs as generic and therefore not always appropriate to the learning needs of their child.</li> </ul>
<a href="#">Parenting NI</a>	Northern Ireland: Survey of 439 parents in April and May	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Some parents reported that the 'online, hands-off support available for their children was insufficient and they were in need of more help'.</li> <li>One parent said, 'Online work to do which is extremely difficult with a special needs child...I am not a teacher.'</li> </ul>
<a href="#">Connect</a>	Scotland: Survey of 1,578 parents and carers in April	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Children with additional support needs less likely to engage with their work at home (no quantitative findings reported).</li> <li>At least a few parents report struggling to meet the additional support needs of their children, especially those with complex disabilities.</li> </ul>

## Policy and implementation lessons

Whilst the intention of this report is to document choices, rather than engage in detailed evaluation of the impact of these choices, a number of key lessons do emerge:

- **Importance of clear expectations** – Given the financial risks posed by the pandemic to early years providers, it was highly unfortunate that the UK Department for Education took until mid April to clarify the precise nature of support they could claim through the furlough scheme and thus allowed incorrect expectations of higher support to take root. Similarly, policymakers in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland announced free school meals support for school holidays relatively late. In contrast policymakers in Wales were able to announce such support and provide reassurance much earlier.
- **Reliance on existing infrastructure and relationships** – Policymakers were able to act faster and more effectively where they could rely on existing infrastructure and relationships. For example, the existence of a digital inclusion strategy in Wales allowed schools, local authorities and the Welsh Government to work together to quickly provide laptops and internet connections to disadvantaged learners in April/May 2020. Where new procurement systems had to be put in place, delivery of digital devices was much slower (end of June in England and Northern Ireland, and August 2020 in Scotland). Similarly, the creation of a new voucher and online system for free meals in England led to significant delays and gaps in provision. In contrast, reliance on local-authority based provision in Wales and Scotland led to fast and locally tailored provision.
- **Heterogeneity in lost schooling** – Not all pupils will have lost the same amount of schooling. Pupils in Scotland and Northern Ireland will have lost less schooling as term times meant pupils were due to be in school less during the period covered by lockdown. Similarly, pupils in exam years will have lost less schooling as they would have been in school less during a normal year. The re-opening of schools in Wales and England during June and July 2020 will have also lessened the loss of schooling, but there will have been significant heterogeneity in terms of how much schooling pupils actually received.
- **Common challenges on disadvantage** – All four nations faced significant challenges in aiding disadvantaged pupils. This includes areas where policymakers could provide some support, such as replacements for free meals and digital devices. But it will also include areas where there is little they could do, such as a lack of quiet study space. All the evidence suggests significant inequalities in access to home and online learning. It must therefore be a priority for all policymakers to assess just how much further disadvantaged pupils have fallen behind and to provide appropriate and targeted catch-up support.
- **Supply drives demand** – In England, where more individual schools and early years providers were open during lockdown, a much larger share of all learners and vulnerable learners attended education during lockdown. Where a hub- or cluster-based approach was employed, as in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland - fewer schools and settings were open and fewer pupils attended. This strongly suggests that supply decisions play a major role in determining attendance levels.
- **Reduced support for vulnerable learners** – It is clear that policymakers, schools and local authorities faced enormous challenges in providing appropriate educational support for learners with special educational needs or vulnerable pupils more generally. Across England, Scotland and Northern Ireland, the duties placed on local authorities to provide assessments and provision were reduced to

varying degrees. Duties were, however, essentially unchanged in Wales. It will be important to understand the impact of these decisions and to prioritise restoring support to these learners.