**Frequently Asked Questions:**

**For school leaders and staff- Transitions in the senior phase post COVID-19**

There are a number of things to consider as young people enter into, or continue within, the senior phase, after a substantial period of learning at home. This frequently asked questions section may be useful to you in your establishment, as the resumption of school-based learning begins.

*We are unsure as to how much learning has taken place for our young people. Should we assess where they are now, and move them swiftly into their new courses and programmes?*

No. Research shows that the most important thing to do when young people return to school after a period where schools are closed due to disasters, epidemics or emergencies, is to support their mental and emotional wellbeing. Re-establishing routines, structures and timetables are important, but most important in young people’s lives during this time are connections, relationships and support as they begin to return to ‘normal’ school life. Placing the burden of assessment on young people would not be appropriate during this initial period of transition. It will, however, relieve some pressure on senior phase learners, to re-introduce them to the types and level of work required for their NQ courses or awards. It will be particularly useful early on, to continue to share and collaborate with others across schools and local authorities, examples of resources and materials which young people can access at home if the return to school is on a part time basis.

*It is really important to “get them up to speed” with learning. Should we focus on delivering a full curriculum in the initial weeks back?*

There will be some gaps in learning for young people and a sense of frustration as they did not have the opportunity to complete S3, S4 or S5 work. As learners move into the senior phase, it is important that young people have a strong sense that the learning has moved on as they begin to re-engage in school based work. It is equally important that young people can look ahead and create educational goals, plan their pathways within the senior phase and view their school education as a positive aspect of their lives once again.

*There is fear, bereavement and anxiety to deal with and staff may not have the skills to help our young people. How can we support the mental and emotional fallout from the period of lockdown?*

You know your young people well and are attuned to their needs. This will be crucial in supporting the emotional wellbeing of all young people as they return to school life. Additionally, it will be important to draw on the skills of particular members of your team who work in pastoral care or pupil support, for example, to engage with those young people who want to express their anxieties as they make their transitions. You may have colleagues trained in Scottish Mental Health First Aid who can support other staff with strategies to use when engaging with young people in a state of distress. There are professional learning resources online to help staff who would like to enhance their skills in supporting emotional wellbeing.

Schools can also call on key partners who can help them to support the mental health of young people, including social services, counselling and psychological services.

*How can we ensure that we reach every young person to offer help and support for their transition, both back into school and into S4, S5, or S6?*

Schools may be using email, social media, websites and other platforms to share and disseminate information, and will be using Glow, or a similar platform, to issue work to young people in a range of curricular areas. It is crucial that schools ensure that disengaged young people and their families have equitable access to information. Additionally, family workers (or equivalent), partner agencies such as Community Learning and Development can support schools with this, as can Social Work colleagues and Youth Workers. Posting out key information may be the best solution for some of your learners. In some cases, schools and local authorities have issued an appropriate mobile device to disadvantaged young people, to enable them to access education and communication channels.

*Those who are most disadvantaged through social circumstances, poverty or significant learning needs may need the most help to reintegrate and may have missed out the most during the lockdown. How can we ensure that those young people who are most at risk are well supported?*

The school data, local context and PEF funding has facilitated targeted support to those who need it most during this time. This sound evidence base and detailed knowledge will enable schools to target young people who may have had issues with engaging in learning during the lockdown period, or be experiencing trauma and distress. However, it is important to bear in mind that in an unprecedented and unpredictable pandemic, evidence shows that ALL young people need greater levels of support and may react in ways we cannot anticipate. Schools should be alert to any changes in learners’ behaviour, attitude and engagement levels for a significantperiod after learners return to school.

*How can we ensure that physical distancing and other measures to prevent the spread of coronavirus are adhered to in our schools?*

There will be a period of preparation required before young people return to classrooms around the country. Classrooms and social spaces may have to be reconfigured to accommodate smaller numbers of young people. There will be arrangements made in line with local arrangements and [government guidelines](https://www.gov.scot/collections/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance/). Local authorities will set out clear expectations in relation to young people’s compliance with any instructions in order to protect the health and wellbeing of everyone within the school community.

*What can we do right now to make reintegration and transitions easier for our young people and staff?*

Stay as connected as possible with your learners. Pastoral care staff may be in touch by phone and work closely with partner agencies to ensure the wellbeing of learners. You will be sending work and offering feedback through a number of digital platforms. Young people and their parents may have questions or concerns and they should be made aware of how best to communicate with the school, particularly about transitions, both back into school and into senior phase. Reassuring and involving young people by checking in with them, asking what support they might need, can be empowering and offers them an element of control about their planning for the future.

*What can we do to ensure that we are still able to deliver our courses and programmes?*

During the current lockdown, teachers across Scotland have found new and innovative ways to connect with learners and deliver the curriculum. This flexibility will remain key to engaging learners successfully in the coming weeks and months, as many young people experience a blend of face to face, online and home learning. Once learners return to school based learning, staff in should continue to work flexibly to offer opportunities for young people to learn and experience aspects of their curriculum.

As far as possible, schools should endeavour to deliver a broad curriculum which meets the needs of learners. In practical subjects, for example, there will be concerns about limitations on group work, collaborative learning and team activities. As far as is practicably possible, arrangements should be made in line with local arrangements and [government guidelines](https://www.gov.scot/collections/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance/). This may mean that departments have to adapt and modify their practice, possibly starting with more theoretical aspects of courses and programmes until distancing guidance are changed or relaxed.

Please find below a selection of reflective questions for consideration as learners begin to return to school post-lockdown:

**Reflective Question For Consideration**

**All practitioners**

* How do we ensure that all members of our school community feel safe and included?
* To what extent do you feel confident supporting learners *and colleagues* with pastoral and health and wellbeing issues? Are you aware of how to access or request relevant professional learning?
* Upon returning to school, colleagues may need to self-isolate throughout the coming months. How can we work collegiately to support each other within and across different departments/faculties?
* It is likely that learners will return to school on a part-time or asynchronous basis. How do we plan for continuity of learning in school and at home?
* What existing arrangements are in place to gather evidence of learner progress? Are there any elements of department/faculty moderation and quality assurance processes that you wish to review in light of being asked to provide detailed SQA estimates in 2020?
* What will the assessment of learner progress look like moving forward?

**Middle and senior school leaders**

* How will we ensure that our young people and their families have access to reliable and up-to-date information on the structure of the school day / week, revised school transport arrangements and SQA qualifications?
* Do we need to consider changing or making adaptations to our current communications processes to ensure that no one in our school community is at risk of missing out on key information?
* Have young people in our school community experienced hardship as a result of COVID-19? How can we build on existing programmes to support those affected?
* In what ways can our school ensure that additional pastoral and learning support is available for all young people when they return to school?
* How can we best support practitioners to engage in professional learning to support all young people effectively during the recovery period?
* To what extent will we be able to offer our planned senior phase curriculum in the 20/21 academic session? Do we face particular challenges with practical subjects, consortia arrangements or school-college partnerships?
* As a result of financial hardship or other factors, do we expect a rise in the number of young people leaving school? If a young person decides to leave school aged 16, do we have mechanisms in place to allow them to return later for S6 to complete further qualifications?
* Do we anticipate a change in the number of ‘winter leavers’? How will we plan a meaningful and engaging curriculum for this group of young people? Do we need to review existing work placements or partnership agreements?
* Many schools work closely with partners to run careers fairs for learners in the senior phase. How will we ensure that learners can still access information from a range of partners? Could we engage with partners using video conferencing or other digital tools?
* Which options (subjects) will be offered in a different format?
* How will pupils be supported and advised during the options process if this had not already been completed?
* How will this information be communicated effectively to parents and carers?