# Learning continuity guidance

Includes the overarching principles for learning continuity, types of disruption and roles and responsibilities.

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# Contents

# Introduction

During periods of disruption, it is critical that the learning, safeguarding and wellbeing of all children and young people in our schools in Wales is maintained. This also applies to all children and young people in Wales who are educated in a Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) or through education otherwise than at school (EOTAS) provision or, in the case of our youngest learners, who may be accessing their early education in a childcare setting.

We know that significant periods away from the classroom have a major impact on children and young people, not only in relation to their day-to-day learning and their long-term achievement, but on their physical, mental, emotional and social development.

We also know that some learners may be at greater risk of neglect, harm or abuse. All staff should be reminded of their safeguarding duties within the statutory safeguarding guidance for education settings '**keeping learners safe**' and under the '**Wales safeguarding procedures**'.

To ensure that learning continuity is planned for, and that the impact of any disruption to the learning of children and young people is mitigated, all schools in Wales should set out their contingencies for learning continuity and include these within their routine business continuity planning arrangements.

This will ensure that there are clear and agreed procedures in place for schools to follow should a period of disruption to learning take place due to a full or partial closure of the school, or if there is insufficient staffing capacity available to provide learning to the whole school.

It is critically important that high-quality, face-to-face learning is maintained for all children and young people, whenever this is possible. Any disruptions to learning should be the last resort and only happen in exceptional circumstances.

Exceptional circumstances would include where providing face-to-face learning would be contrary to the Welsh Government or UK Government guidance or where a health and safety or safeguarding risk has been identified for some or all learners within a school.

The role of the designated safeguarding person (DSP) is vital and all staff and learners should be informed of who the DSP is and how to contact them. Accessing a trusted adult, or the DSP, may be more difficult when there is a partial or full closure. Schools should consider how learners can talk to them privately. **Guidance for education settings is available**.

Schools, settings and children's services should continue to work closely together to ensure every child and family has the support needed. Local authorities will already have a range of working practices in place to ensure that safeguarding partners can work together to keep learners safe.

The Welsh Government guidance reminds practitioners working across agencies of their responsibilities to safeguard learners and to support them in responding to concerns about learners at risk. The guide links to, and should be used with, the national **Wales safeguarding procedures**.

It is recognised that it will not be possible to fully replicate all aspects of face-to-face in-school learning in a remote environment, particularly around learner–teacher and learner–learner engagement, as well as classroom organisation. However, school leaders should work with their staffing teams to ensure the best quality remote learning which meets the needs of their learners from nursery onwards and community, and ensure that this is provided in a timely manner. Having appropriate plans will avoid schools having a deficit-based model for 'catching up' what has been missed.

The Welsh Government expects schools to use this learning continuity guidance to develop local plans that best fit their context and which can be used as the basis for responding to each individual period of disruption as it occurs.

This guidance applies when schools are considering a full or partial closure due to periods of disruption, and not when remote learning is being considered to meet individual learner needs. In these circumstances, schools are encouraged to contact their local authority to discuss appropriate support and intervention.

Industrial action does not fall under the remit of this document. Existing protocols that local authorities will already have in place would instead take place.

# Context

The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, particularly during the early stages, resulted in significant disruption to the learning of children and young people across the whole of Wales. Evidence of this impact is still being collated, but initial findings suggest that the disruptions that were caused by the pandemic have had a considerable impact on the learning of children and young people and on their wellbeing.

It is anticipated that a wide range of interventions will need to be in place over the coming years to mitigate these impacts and to ensure that the long-term outcomes for children and young people are not permanently affected.

Our aim, as the Welsh Government, is to ensure that disruption on this scale never takes place in our schools again. The risks to the learning and wellbeing of our children and young people are too great.

As a direct result of these risks, learning continuity planning should be prioritised in all schools so that if, as a last resort, disruption to learning has to take place for any reason, schools are fully prepared and are able to continue to support the learning of children and young people throughout the period of disruption.

One of our key levers in addressing learning continuity is to ensure that we build

on the excellent practice in digital which was accelerated during the pandemic and **made available to learners via Hwb**. Building on this approach will ensure that any future periods of disruption, which result in the full or partial closure of a school, are managed consistently and that, during these periods, children and young people's access to high-quality learning is maintained.

To achieve this, all schools in Wales are expected to develop learning continuity plans as part of their routine business contingency planning arrangements.

# The overarching principles for learning continuity

It is recommended that the following principles are considered when planning for learner continuity when learners are unable to engage with their face-to-face lessons.

## Quality

The quality of remote learning should be as comparable as possible to the face-to-face learning experiences in the classroom in terms of content, feedback, progress, etc., recognising that remote learning provides a very different context to face-to-face learning.

Learning should be broad and balanced, and cover a range of knowledge, skills and expertise. Asynchronous and synchronous learning provide a variety of opportunities for skill development and the type of learning should be aligned with the type of experience being offered. The pandemic provided benefits for learners in terms of both digital  and independent learning: these should be borne in mind when considering options for remote learning opportunities. The differing needs of your learners, particularly your youngest learners, must be recognised and supported too, drawing on parental engagement. Above all, a

school should focus clearly on learners continuing to progress with their learning irrespective of the method of learning.

## Appropriate to the level and the nature of the disruption

The response to any disruption of learning will be relative to the circumstances of the disruption and plans may need to be modified accordingly. Schools should consider:

- the length of the disruption
- the reason for the disruption
- which learners are affected, their age and their access to devices and connectivity
- the level of parental support required
- learners' individual needs
- the ability of learners to continue with their expected learning
- upcoming external assessments or examinations

## Continuity and applicability

Where possible, schools should align the remote learning curriculum with the existing face-to-face curriculum.

Remote learning should, as far as possible, focus on the normal programme of study or schemes of work learners would follow if they attended school. This will be particularly important for the most critical learners (for example, those in examination years and the youngest learners).

# Transition to and from remote learning

Moving to and from remote learning should be as smooth and practical a process as possible. If schools need to move to remote learning, there should be as minimal a gap as possible in providing quality learning experiences.

To enable a smooth transition to virtual learning, learners should have relevant logins, access to work, resources and be trained to use any virtual learning platform as necessary prior to any disruption. This will ensure that learning will continue without any unnecessary breaks.

Schools may wish to consider how they develop and blend remote learning activities within the school's normal curriculum during periods when learners attend school. This will ensure that learners are familiar with the learning platform and remote learning process.

Any learning activities should be age- and ability-appropriate, ensuring that any expectations for parent or carer support, and the availability of parent or carer support, are taken into account. This will be particularly important for younger learners.

# Vulnerability of learners

Many learners can be considered vulnerable and schools should be mindful that this can present in different learners, in different ways, at different times.

Not all learners who are considered to be vulnerable will face barriers to learning but they may face a range of barriers to achieving their potential and will, therefore, require different solutions and support targeted towards meeting each of their individual needs.

# Wellbeing, equity and inclusion

Wellbeing is the basis for high-quality learning and progression, and so should always be prioritised. During periods of disruption schools should take a balanced approach to the academic and wellbeing provision for all learners.

Processes should be in place to ensure that learners, particularly the most vulnerable learners, have regular contact with their school. Schools should decide the best mechanism to maintain contact with vulnerable learners, recognising that all learners could become vulnerable and that levels of vulnerability can change. School leaders should decide the best approach within their local context (for example, via safe face-to-face contact, telephone contact and/or via synchronous lessons).

When designing remote learning activities, schools should carefully consider the impact of such activities on learner wellbeing and learners' ability to engage with the directed learning. This includes learners' access to equipment, resources, and support. Schools should be sympathetic to individual learners' ability to engage with the learning activity, particularly in terms of practical work and study space and how the cost of living will impact on this, and the level of parental involvement required.

Schools need to carefully consider the impact of remote learning on learners with additional learning needs (ALN). Where possible, activities should be designed to meet the individual needs of learners with ALN. This includes deploying suitably trained staff to design, engage and deliver content for learners with ALN. Schools should liaise with other agencies, such as social services or health boards, where these agencies provide therapies or other health/social care support to meet individual learners' needs at school.

Both school leaders and local authorities should understand the requirements for effective remote learning. Schools should engage regularly with their education

technology partner for advice and support. Consideration should be given to auditing the school's ICT equipment and workforce skills as part of the school's monitoring, evaluating, and reporting schedule.

If any concerns arise about the safety or wellbeing of learners, schools' normal safeguarding procedures should continue during remote learning.

During periods of school closures, local authorities should carefully consider how learners who are in receipt of free school meals receive a healthy meal daily.

Schools should ensure that any lessons delivered via live streaming or videoconferencing adhere to the relevant local and national guidance on live streaming. **Guidance has been published on Hwb to support schools in this area**.

Particular consideration should be given to the needs of:

- learners who are digitally excluded
- learners with individual development plans (IDPs)
- Black, Asian and minority ethnic learners
- learners from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities
- learners who are eligible for free school meals (eFSM) or who are impacted by other socio-economic factors
- learners who are refugees
- Welsh-medium learners
- learners who do not speak the language of their school in their home
- learners in early education

# Communication

Schools should ensure that plans and arrangements are communicated to all relevant stakeholders, prior to any plans being implemented, as well as keeping

all parties up to date during any period of learning disruption where learners are affected. This should always include parents and carers. Where it is relevant, social services departments and local health boards (LHBs) should also be informed.

## Link to existing school emergency plans

Any plans for learning continuity should align or be incorporated within school emergency plans, particularly if learning is disrupted without warning. Schools should consider reviewing and updating learning continuity plans in line with their yearly update of existing business continuity plans. Schools should present these plans to governing bodies for review and ratification. Final sign off of the plans should be undertaken by the local authority.

## Managing workforce expectation and wellbeing

Where possible, learning through a virtual platform should closely mirror the quality of learning face-to-face. Schools should consider how they develop their workforce through professional learning to be able to plan, deliver and evaluate learning using blended approaches. Additionally, schools should set realistic expectations for learning during periods of disruption. This includes learners' entitlement to appropriate learning time.

Schools should consider the differences for staff when planning, delivering and evaluating remote learning, and create systems that not only enhance learning but support staff wellbeing. Schools should also consider staff wellbeing and workload expectations. Preparation time for virtual learning needs to be considered.

# Periods of learning

Periods of remote learning should recognise the age and/or progression step of each learner and the minimum periods of independent learning that can be expected of them.

For example:

- 1 hour a day for ages 3 to 5 or the period of learning leading to Progression step 1
- 2 hours a day on average for ages 5 to 8 or the period of learning leading to Progression step 2
- 3 hours a day for ages 8 to 11 or the period of learning leading to Progression step 3
- 4 hours a day for ages 11 to 16 or the period of learning leading to Progression steps 4 and 5

This could include a mixture of synchronous and asynchronous activities, delivered through a digital or analogue medium.

# Types of disruption

## Disruption for individual learners

On occasions, individual learners may be absent from school.

In these cases, remote learning for the most critical learners (for example, those in examination years) should be prioritised and aligned as closely as possible to the face-to-face learning experiences of their peers. This is for the school to determine depending on the reason for absence and the individual

circumstances of the learner and their family.

When learners are voluntarily removed from school for authorised or unauthorised reasons (for example, term time holidays), schools are not expected to provide remote learning in these cases.

# Disruption for groups of learners and the workforce

On occasions, groups of learners or members of the workforce may be unable to physically attend the school site. These occasions could include:

- illness which is isolated to a cohort(s) of learners
- building issues affecting part of the school (for example, a fire, flood or building issues impacting a classroom or block)
- transport issues beyond 1 day that affect learners and/or staff attending school
- safe staffing levels not possible due to illness and/or lack of suitable supply cover available

# Disruption for the whole school

On rare occasions, there may be the need to close the whole school site for all learners and members of the workforce. These occasions could include:

- a local authority/Government enforced closure in the local or national interest, this doesn't include bank holidays but could include:
  - widespread illness within the school community resulting in a full closure
  - safe staffing levels unable to be achieved due to unexpected issues (for example, high rates of illness, severe weather disruption)
- short-term building closure because of safety issues (for example, heating failure, issues with power supply, minor fire or flood)

- long-term building closure because of major safety issues (for example, structure of the building, major fire or flood)

# How schools can prepare for learning disruption

The following details are provided as examples of how schools may wish to plan and implement plans for learning continuity. Schools are not expected to follow this guidance prescriptively.

## Preparing for digital learning

As part of a school's normal curriculum offer learners should have the opportunity to access and develop their digital skills. **Hwb provides all learners with a range of appropriate digital tools**. However, schools may develop and use their own digital platforms.

As part of a school's digital curriculum, learners should have regular opportunities to:

- independently log onto the digital platform
- independently access appropriate digital tools and apps confidently
- complete aspects of their weekly work through the digital platform, both in school and at home

It is important that schools understand the context of their community. Leaders should have a good understanding of learners' access to digital equipment at home. Where a lack of equipment creates a problem, schools should engage in conversations with their local authority to ensure that learners get access to suitable provision.

Activities should be appropriate to the age and ability of learners.

Schools should also consider how learners from non-Welsh-speaking homes are able to engage with learning through the medium of Welsh.

## Where digital learning is not possible or appropriate

Where it may not be possible for learners to access digital resources while at home, schools need to consider how offline learning resources can be distributed to and collected from learners. Schools should determine the best way to manage this process.

# Supporting foundation learning

Schools and childcare settings will need to carefully consider what remote learning looks like for younger learners. This includes enabling parents and carers to support their children. Within early education we recognise there is a greater level of parental involvement than at any other time in a child's educational journey. Consideration should be given to how parents and carers can be supported to engage in their child's learning at home, to help ensure access to rich learning experiences in a blended learning environment.

Early years learners are at a critical stage of cognitive development. In this period of rapid development it is crucial young learners are supported in their learning and development to avoid missing developmental milestones.

Foundation learning pedagogy provides a supportive approach to learning in the home environment with the focus on learning through play, outdoor learning and providing authentic experiences. Relevant and meaningful experiences rooted in real-life contexts enable learners to make connections, apply knowledge and consolidate skills. Speech, language and communication is key to learning and developed through those authentic experiences and play opportunities. The home environment can provide rich opportunities for learning. Children develop

early reading skills through hearing, sharing and revisiting lots of simple nursery rhymes, stories, songs, poems and rhyming texts.

Play and play-based learning supports holistic development. Through play and playful experiences, children are able to learn about the world they inhabit with others. In an outdoor environment, including community spaces, learners can explore, practise, and enhance their skills. Being outdoors supports social, emotional, spiritual and physical development, as well as providing authentic opportunities for learners to develop and consolidate **cross-curricular skills**.

**Resources are available via the Hwb repository**.

## Proactively preparing for workforce absence

School leaders should explore every possible avenue before considering suspending face-to-face learning and schools should remain open wherever this is possible.

The approach taken to managing workforce absence in order to achieve this is for the headteacher to determine at a local level, based on their own school's context. The local authority or regional consortia should provide advice where this is needed, and all decisions should be made within the requirements that are set out in the '**school teachers' pay and conditions (Wales) document 2021**'. The wellbeing of the school's workforce should always be considered in all decisions that relate to managing workforce absence.

## Proactively preparing the workforce in learning design

School leaders should carefully plan the professional learning offer to staff, and consider developing approaches of teaching and learning design for face-to-face, blended and remote learning. Schools' curriculum offers should incorporate

opportunities for staff to plan blended and remote learning activities throughout the school year so that learners, staff and parents / carers are familiar with the process prior to having to undertake blended or virtual learning due to a disruption.

During periods of prolonged disruption, school leaders should carefully consider the quality and impact of these blended and remote learning activities as part of their normal monitoring, evaluating and reporting processes.

**Additional information on pedagogical principles and learning design can be found on the Hwb website**.

## Preparing to manage wellbeing during disruption

Schools have a duty to ensure learners are kept safe and are able to continue with their learning. For medium- to long-term absence, schools should ensure that learners receive regular contact with staff, and the nature and frequency of contact should reflect the learner's vulnerability at that time.

If long-term disruption occurs close to critical education milestones, schools should consider how activities such as transition, subject option choices, examination preparation support, etc., can be provided remotely.

Schools should also consider how staff wellbeing can be supported, and procedures for keeping in touch with staff via individual contact, team meetings and associated communication procedures should also be considered.

# Roles and responsibilities

## Headteachers

- Ensure that learning continuity planning is in place as part of the school's routine business continuity planning arrangements.
- Aim for the school's approach to blended or virtual learning to be embedded across all aspects of learning and teaching and, through this approach, aim that any transition from face-to-face to virtual learning and back again is as smooth as possible.
- Ensure that blended or virtual learning experiences for all learners are as comparable as possible to the quality of face-to-face learning, recognising that remote learning provides a very different context to face-to-face learning.
- Ensure that where learners need additional support, particularly where there is a risk of digital exclusion, that this is identified and additional support provided wherever possible, and with the support of the local authority if this is needed (for example, the provision of IT equipment or the distribution of printed materials).
- Ensure that staff have the skills and access to the right professional learning to enable them to confidently deliver learning during periods of disruption.
- Ensure that the wellbeing of both staff and learners is prioritised during periods of disruption.
- Ensure that all blended and virtual learning is delivered with learners' and practitioners' digital safety as a priority.
- Ensure that parents and carers are aware of the learning contingency planning and the arrangements that will be triggered during periods of disruption to support learners.

# Practitioners

- Ensure that all learners understand the importance of engaging with and continuing their learning during periods of disruption.
- Ensure that all blended or virtual learning provision delivered across the school during periods of disruption is of a consistent high quality and as comparable as possible to the quality of face-to-face learning.
- Ensure that that the learning provision developed for vulnerable and disadvantaged learners is appropriate and accessible.
- Ensure that a range of different learning approaches are developed, both asynchronous and synchronous, and offline when needed, to ensure that learners experience a variety of approaches.
- Ensure that systems are in place for checking daily whether learners who are learning remotely are engaging with their work, and work with families to rapidly identify effective solutions where engagement is a concern.
- Ensure that all blended and virtual learning is delivered with learners' digital safety as a priority.
- Ensure that the wellbeing of learners is prioritised during periods of disruption.

# Local authorities

- Work in collaboration with headteachers to ensure that learning continuity is embedded into all business continuity planning.
- Ensure that during periods of disruption schools are supported and decisions are made in a timely manner, allowing schools to prepare for the disruption whenever this is possible.
- Ensure that every school's learning continuity plan is signed off by the local authority.

# Governors

- Ensure that the school's business continuity planning is robust and includes the provision that all learners can access high-quality blended or virtual learning during periods of disruption.

# Regional consortia and partnerships

- Provide a range of resources to headteachers and practitioners which will support the delivery of learning continuity through a blended or virtual learning approach.
- Provide appropriate professional learning opportunities for practitioners to support the delivery of learning continuity through a blended or virtual learning approach.

# Estyn

- Recognise that learning continuity should be included in all schools' planning arrangements.
- Consider the range of blended and virtual learning approaches that should be embedded into a school's learning and teaching arrangements, and how these approaches should also be used to support learners during any periods of remote learning.

# Welsh Government

- Provide a range of resources via Hwb to support learning continuity, including guidance, blended or virtual learning resources, and case studies.