

Release of Lockdown Measures on the Education System

As of 22 April 2020.

Welsh Government Office for Science

Introduction:

With the majority of Western Europe under stringent lockdown measures the question to be asked now is how do we release measures in a steady and sustainable manner so as to avoid a second spike of Covid-19 (C-19). In terms of businesses re-opening doors to their employees, this cannot be done without the return of children, particularly those under the age of 14, to full time education. Without the education system, care of children may fall to older / retired family members who are more susceptible to complications arising from the contraction of C-19. In addition children themselves are more resilient to the virus and are therefore in a lower risk category.

Summary of the Measures Implemented (more detail on a country by country basis below):

1. Smaller class sizes to allow social distancing, maximum of 15 if the classroom size allows.
2. Up-skilling of teaching assistants to support the greater number of classes.
3. Students return part time in order to facilitate smaller class sizes (Group A taught Monday to Wednesday lunchtime, and Group B taught the same syllabus but Wednesday afternoon – Friday)
4. Classes are not allowed to mix. In order to do this staggered break and lunch times are being implemented.
5. If a phased approach to releasing school years from lockdown is brought in, then the focus should be on children that are transitioning or due to take final exams (final year GCSE, final year A level, final year primary and final year infants).
6. Due to the reduced length of school week per pupil the focus should be on core subjects only (Maths, English, Languages and Science).
7. Allowance of one month between the phased return stages to monitor the impact on the virus. The observed criteria to proceed to the next stage of release should be based in the number of new infections, hospital admissions and deaths, and hospital occupancy rates.
8. Digital learning for anyone over the age of 16. Virtual lectures/classes and one to one sessions with teachers via video link.
9. Libraries to be closed.
10. Education on the impact of the virus and the importance of hygiene measures.
11. Enforced hygiene measures including social distancing and regular handwashing.
12. Children under the age of 11 allowed to play together in small groups but not outside of their own class.

13. As younger children are more resilient to the virus younger age groups are to return to school first.

Measures being adopted in wider Europe:

France

- On 21 April Minister Blanquer addressed the government's plans for reopening of schools. This would be done, in phases, over a 3-week period:
 - Week commencing 11 May - Return for various nursery school and primary school classes (ages 5-6, 6-7 and 10-11).
 - Week commencing 18 May - Return for various secondary school classes (ages 11-12 and 14-15; for middle school, ages 16-17 and ages 17-18; for college and industrial workshops for vocational college).
 - Week commencing 25 May - All other remaining age groups to return to school.
- Classes will be conducted in small groups of max 15 students. Parents will have the option to keep their children at home, with continued schooling online (distance learning).
- Universities will not be reopening for teaching before the summer, though they are open for timetable planning and research.

Netherlands

- Week commencing 11th May – Primary schools and day care centres will re-open with children attending for 50% of the time. This will allow increased social distancing as one half of the schools children will attend school on certain days (for example Monday - Wednesday) and the other half will attend on Thursday – Saturday.
- Children up to the age of 12 will be allowed to exercise without social distancing
- If no outbreaks occur secondary schools will re-open approximately one month later but with enforced social distancing rules.

Switzerland

- A final decision on whether to proceed will be given on the 29th April. If the Swiss decide to proceed it will be staged as follows:
 - Week commencing 11th May - Schools for children of compulsory-school age, will reopen.
 - Week Commencing 8th June - Upper secondary schools, vocational schools and higher education institutions will be allowed to resume face-to-face teaching.
- Sufficient time is being allowed between each phase so that the effects can be observed. The observed criteria to proceed to the next stage are the number of new infections, hospital admissions and deaths, and hospital occupancy rates.

- Fines will be issues to parents if compulsory schooling commences and parents do not send their children back to school.
- Protective measures have not as yet been decided.

Demark

- Schools for children under the age of 11 including nursery and primary schools were reopened on the 15th April.
- It is intended that from week commencing 11th May all secondary and upper schools (11-16 and 16-18 year olds) will re-open
- All end of term exams have been cancelled.
- Protective Measures include:
 - Parents are not allowed inside the schools
 - 2m spacing between children's desks
 - Classes have been divided up to make them smaller to allow social distancing and children are only allowed to mix with children in their own class.
 - Even in their own class children are only allowed to play in very small groups at playtime and other than this are required to social distance.
 - Handwashing every hour
 - The libraries in the schools have been closed
 - Teachers undertake as many lessons outdoors as possible
 - There is no one main entrance, children use a variety of entrances based on the location of their classroom.
- The increase in the number of classes means teachers have more to do and fewer assistants to help them do it. If they need a brief break, they can call on a small three-person team to mind their classrooms for a few minutes. But they can no longer rely on a teaching assistant to shoulder their burden for longer periods, since the teaching assistants are often now teaching their own classes.
- These measures have been both stressful and difficult for teachers but have given confidence to parents allowing their children to return to school.

Germany

- It is intended that schools will begin a phased re-opening week commencing the 4th May.
- The following measures are discussed (please note these are from a German document translated through Google Translate and may not be entirely accurate)
- Primary Schools:
 - A phased re-opening will occur according to grades with a focus on older primary school children who will be transitioning to secondary education. Significantly reduced class sizes will be used in order to better comply with the distancing requirements. A group size of a maximum of 15 students would be possible if appropriately large classrooms are available. Every effort should be made to help these

- children, even during the summer holidays to prepare as well as possible for the transition to secondary school.
 - Once this year group has been started the other grades will be brought in one by one.
- Infant Schools and Nurseries
 - In the areas of infant schools and nurseries reduced group sizes (max. 5 children per room) will commence operation with those children due to transition to primary school (5-6 year olds).starting first and then years following accordingly.
- Secondary Schools (11 – 16)
 - Operation to commence with those age groups due to take their exams.
 - For other ages and to adhere to the distancing measures there will be reduced lessons to enable smaller classes which will focus on the core subjects including German, Foreign Languages, Science and Maths.
- Upper Secondary Education (16 – 18)
 - As students of this age are more disciplined, learning can continue through a digital format. Lab based efforts should be postponed in favour of digital options.
- University
 - The summer semester should largely be an online / home learning semester to be completed.
- Overall Measures for all Age Groups
 - Guidelines will be implemented on hygiene, distancing, mouth-nose protection, testing and the consequences of the quarantine.
 - Children will not be allowed to mix with others outside of their class / group, to support this staggered breaks so that classes don't mix in the playground will be used.
 - Due to the impact of the closure on learning the focus will be on the core Subjects.

Other Considerations:

- The risks of children returning home from school and exposing older relatives is likely to be higher in cultures and countries where families of different generations cohabit than in those where elderly people tend to live in their own homes.
- The implementation of the measures in terms of reduced class sizes and distancing means teachers are working harder and are finding this stressful. However the measures are giving the parents more confidence to return their children to school.
- If a child is in a household that has a symptomatic member then should that child self-isolate with the rest of the household, even if they are asymptomatic?

