

LGA WORKFORCE UPDATE - Updated 24 March 2020

Critical Workers

The government has published guidance on the definition of 'critical workers' for the purpose of school attendance during the current COVID-19 crisis. **The LGA believes that all local government staff are likely to be critical to the delivery of the COVID-19 response irrespective of their formal role; in schools this may include teaching assistants and other support staff.** As the Prime Minister has noted, the duration and effects of the pandemic are unknown at this stage and therefore the types of work deemed to be critical may expand and change over time, so no list can be regarded as complete. Authorities should be mindful of the pressure categorising workers as critical workers will have on those working in schools while using their discretion to determine which categories of employee are reasonably needed to deliver the COVID-19 response.

From Monday all schools will be closed except those providing education provision for critical workers or for vulnerable children. Vulnerable children include children who are supported by social care, those with safeguarding and welfare needs, including child in need plans, on child protection plans, 'looked after' children, young carers, disabled children and those with [education, health and care \(EHC\) plans](#). More information on school closures and workforce issues can be found [here](#).

The government's information on who might constitute a critical worker can be found [here](#).

It is not a precise list of role definitions, rather an outline of what types of work could lead to someone being deemed a critical worker. Councils will be considering where staff with particular skills and qualifications can be best used, for example any staff with valid DBS clearance may be sensibly refocused during this period irrespective of their formal role. We would remind authorities of the more general guidance from the LGA regarding redeployment and the need to ensure volunteers are sought first and relevant training and risk assessments are undertaken.

For workforces relating to local government, the most relevant descriptions are listed below. Please note this is not an exhaustive list and the DfE guidance should be referred to for more details.

- **Social Workers**
- Care workers
- Frontline health and social care staff and those required to maintain the sector
- Childcare, support and teaching staff in schools and relevant specialist education professionals required to support this provision
- Staff essential to the operation of the justice system
- Workers delivering key frontline services
- Staff involved in the management of the deceased
- Administrative staff in local government essential to the delivery of the COVID-19 response

- Staff delivering essential public services such as payment of benefits
- Staff involved in the distribution of food or other key goods
- Police and police support staff
- Fire and rescue staff and support staff
- Transport workers
- Utilities workers
- Probation staff
- IT staff necessary to support COVID-19 response
- Call centre staff
- Payment providers
- Waste disposal services

In addition, other workers described include:

- Armed forces personnel
- MoD civilian staff and contractors
- National Crime Agency
- Border security
- Prison staff
- National security staff
- Religions and charity staff
- Journalists and broadcasters

This does not mean children of all workers in these categories can or will continue to send their children to school. Many parents working in these sectors may be able to ensure their child is kept at home. Every child who can be safely cared for at home should be. However, if a parent's / guardian's work is critical to the COVID-19 response or is in a key sector such as health and social care and the child / children cannot be kept safely at home, then priority will be given for continued education provision.

The key principles DfE outline are as follows:

1. If it is at all possible for children to be at home, then they should be.
2. If a child needs specialist support, is vulnerable or has a parent who is a critical worker, then educational provision will be available for them.
3. Parents should not rely for childcare upon those who are advised to be in the stringent social distancing category such as grandparents, friends, or family members with underlying conditions.
4. Parents should also do everything they can to ensure children are not mixing socially in a way which can continue to spread the virus. They should observe the same social distancing principles as adults.
5. Residential special schools, boarding schools and special settings continue to care for children wherever possible.

Process for those needing continued education provision:

If workers think they fall within the critical categories above they should confirm with their employer that, based on their business continuity arrangements, their specific role is necessary for the continuation of this essential public service.

Schools and local authorities will be coordinating so, if one school is closed, the authority will redirect to one that is open.