

Survey Insights

Early Years and Covid-19

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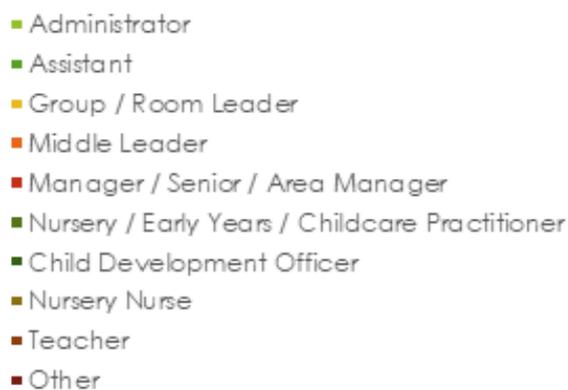
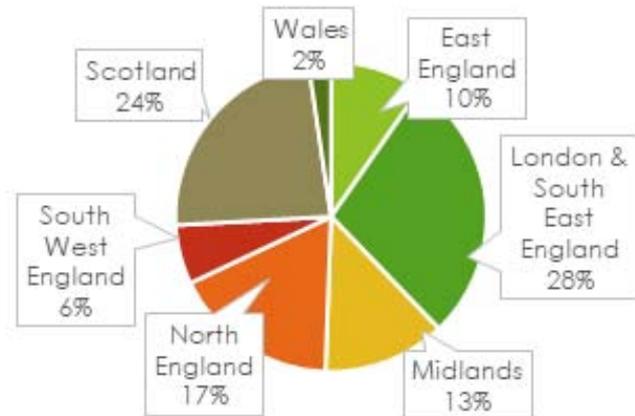
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The Coronavirus pandemic has had a massive impact on workplaces, businesses, employers and employees, families, and children, not just in the UK but across the world. The impact on the Nursery and Early Years sector has been huge, with many conflicting and mixed messages around financial support packages. Since settings have been allowed to reopen to more children there have been lots of new health and safety practices and other guidance which has had to be implemented.

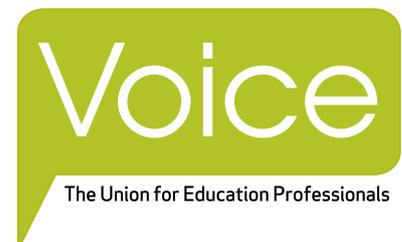
Voice surveyed its members during May 2020 to understanding the situation that our Early Years and Childcare members were experiencing. A total of 259 Voice members responded with respondents coming from across the UK and from a range of job roles and experience.

Almost 25% of respondents were members in Scotland where the advice and guidance is issued by the Scottish government. Wherever possible we have endeavoured to recognise this in our analysis of the results.



Members working directly with children in teaching or support roles made up the vast majority of responses (72%) with a good number (20%) in management positions also represented.

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Across the UK, respondents noted a greater number of settings remaining open for vulnerable children and those of critical workers - but only just. According to respondents 56% of their workplaces remained open. The picture differs slightly across the UK with almost twice as many settings closed in Scotland as those that remained open. However, in Scotland many settings were merged, forming local hubs which may account for this anomaly.

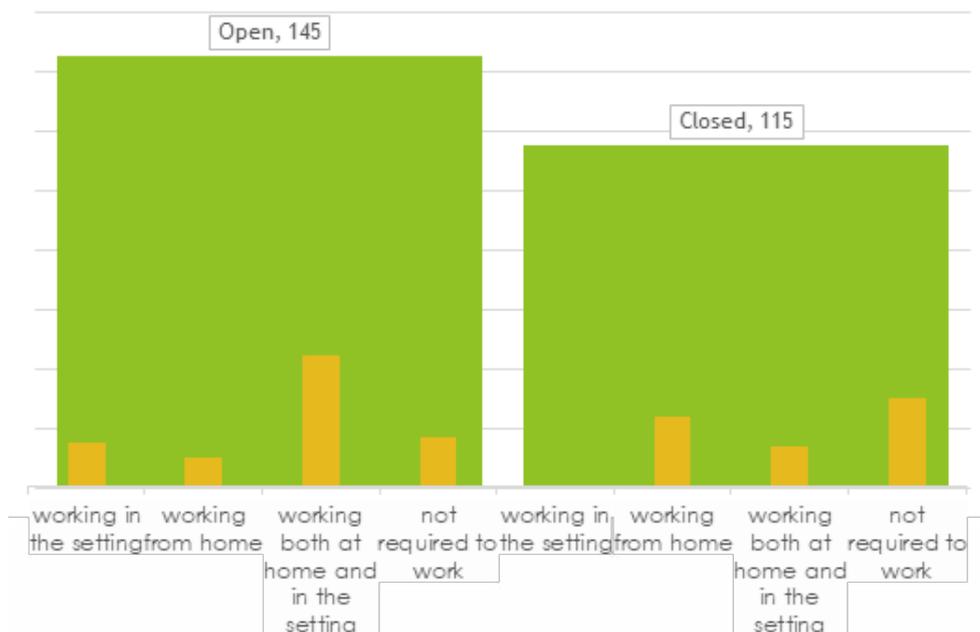
Open or Closed?



Regardless of whether the setting was closed, like for many in the education sector, work has continued.

Where settings remained open, the vast majority of staff (80%) have been required to continue working - often in the setting on a rota system, with the rest of the time undertaking a variety of tasks from home. And even where settings have been fully closed many staff have been undertaking training and planning

Working Patterns in the Setting

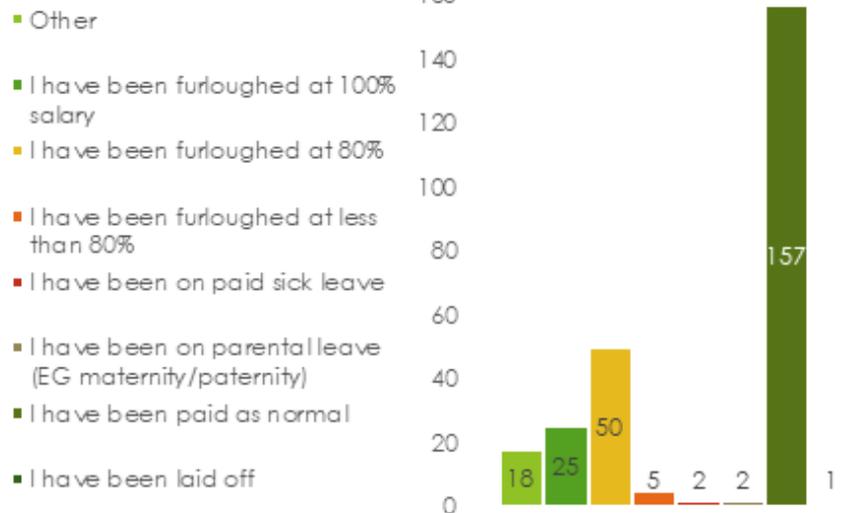


work or busily cleaning ready for re-opening. Less than half (44%) were not required to work at all.

Sadly though, for some settings the instruction to close has caused deep financial concerns and there was no choice but to reduce costs by condensing the staffing. It is likely that some provision will not survive this crisis and will close their doors for good and without the government Job Retention Scheme it is probable that we would have seen much higher job losses across the sector.

Although 60% of respondents continued to receive their pay as normal, 31% of respondents reported that they had been 'furloughed' during the lockdown and had been reliant on the government's Job Retention Scheme covering at least some of their salary. Some respondents had been shielding and either 'furloughed' or been on paid sick leave, and sadly one respondent had been laid off.

Pay during Covid-19

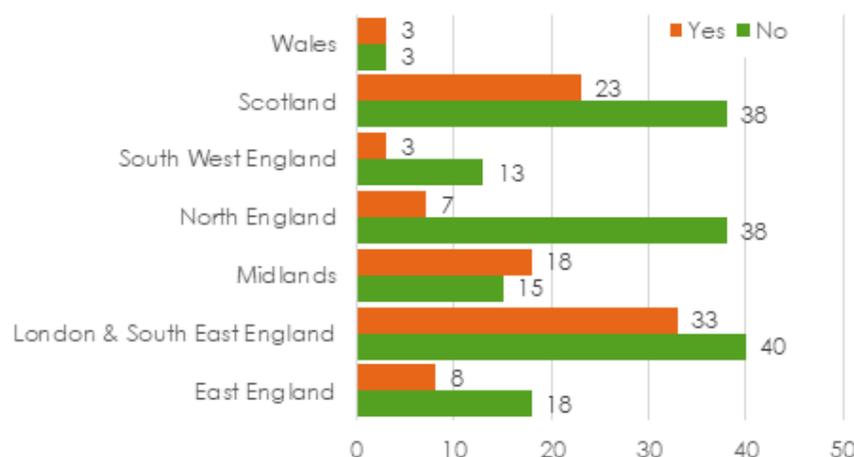


It is important that settings communicate regularly with their staff and the parents

of the children they care for – and it is even more vital during these uncertain times. It has been noted that the range of electronic and virtual communication methods has meant that several types of business have been able to move online and operate virtually. Whilst we know this is not the case in childcare provision, a wide range of communication methods has been used to keep parents and staff up-to-date. These range from the commonplace phone call (12%) email (38%), text (3%) and social media (6%), through to other more education specific systems such as Glow, Google Classroom, and the Welsh specific Hwb. Microsoft Teams, Zoom and Google Hangouts have also been used where face-to-face meetings have been required.

It is gratifying to note that almost 90% of respondents had not noted any employment issues during the lockdown and the majority of these were around availability of staff to work, shielding and pay issues – issues which are not unique to education and have been consistent across different industries and sectors.

Has the Government Guidance been clear?



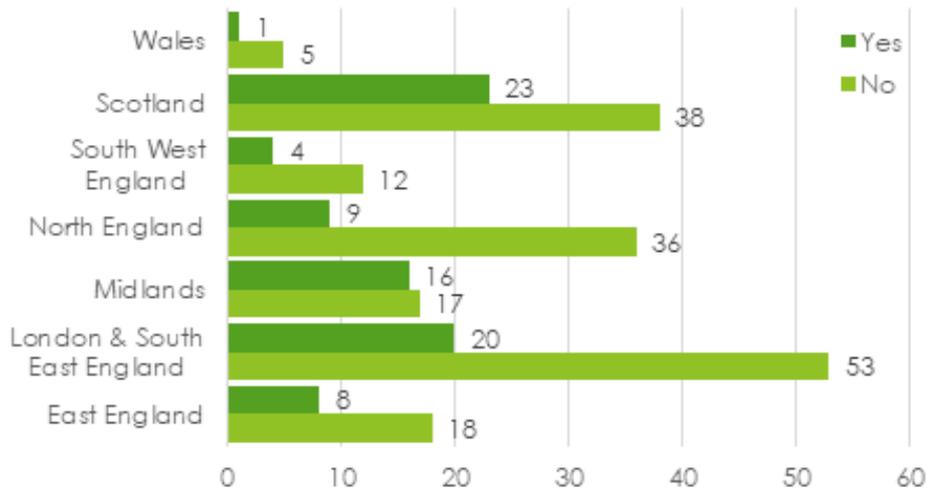
Some of the employment issues have been as a result of government initiatives, such as the Job Retention Scheme, or misunderstandings due to a potential lack of clarity on guidance issued to the sector.

According to 63% of respondents the guidance from the government was not clear, but, as can be seen from the graph this opinion was not secure across the UK. And although some areas were very closely divided the opinion differed only in the midlands with 54% feeling the guidance was clear.

Respondents were clear, though that there needed to be more time given to act on the government guidance before it needed to be implemented with only a fifth of respondents believing that settings were given enough time to act.

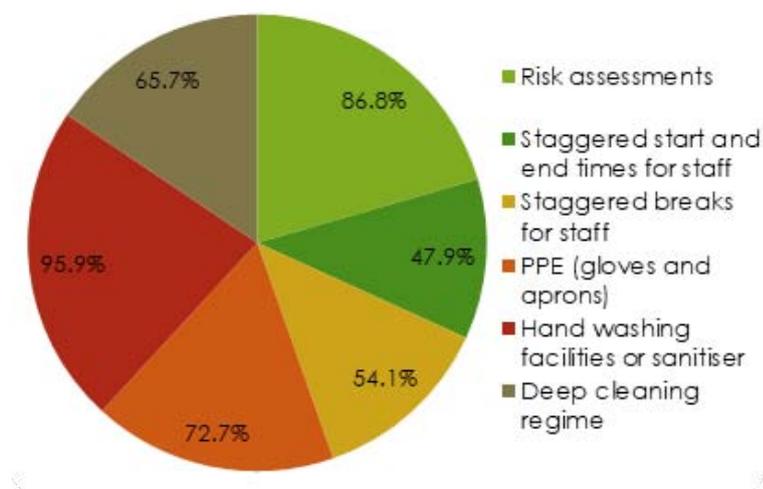
On the whole, our survey showed that employers are implementing government guidance,

and taking the exceptional steps necessary to ensure that staff are safe, this includes provision of handwashing facilities and PPE, and completing risk assessments.



As we have said in our other guidance, risk assessments are a legal requirement in all workplaces, and we would encourage members to engage with their employers to complete them and ensure that the workplace is as safe as possible for all.

Does your workplace have...?



Therefore it is worrying that 13% of respondents were not aware if their workplace had a risk assessment. More worryingly this could mean that almost 1 in 10 settings have not thought through the potential risks that they might experience through their reopening and are unprepared for any issues that may arise including the potential for staff and children to need to isolate or even quarantine. Therefore, it is not surprising to note that 77% of respondents do not feel their setting is safe to reopen saying...

"No way can we social distance and my nursery has stated "we are not a no touch nursery", I am very wary about contact with parents and other staff."

"I have to travel long distances on public transport, as do lots of the children to attend the setting."

There have been further government initiatives over the past three weeks to address the issue of social distancing in schools and Early Years settings, plus the introduction of mandatory face-coverings on public transport. And as settings have been given further advice and time to implement it, the potential for a safe return to the workplace increases – certainly we would now expect all settings to have completed their risk assessments and to have shared them with all staff.

We note that many settings are taking a very sensible and pragmatic approach...

"We are only opening to a limited number ... to see how it goes, most of our parents want to keep their children at home."

"We plan a phased re-opening so each area can be given full attention and staff, parents and children given the confidence that we are providing the best care and education for their children under the current circumstances."

"The setting has put in place a number of excellent measures to help keep the children and staff as safe as possible."

This continues to be a developing situation, and please be assured that your union is here to support you through it.

Join Voice

If you have friends or colleagues who are not currently represented, why not suggest they give Voice a try. Call our team on **01332 372 337** or visit our website at www.voicetheunion.org.uk/join to find out more.