

BRIEFING NOTE

CILIP Statement on new COVID-19 Restrictions

5th November 2020

The Prime Minister has announced [tougher national restrictions in England from Thursday 5th November](#) as part of the UK's pandemic response. There are alternate provisions in place in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland governing access to libraries and information services.

CILIP is committed to ensuring the safety and wellbeing of our members, as well as the users they support. We are in contact with the relevant authorities at the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), Department for Education (DfE) and the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) and will continue to liaise with their COVID-19 Hubs during the implementation of these measures.

Wider economic impact and COVID-19 strategy

CILIP notes that the global pandemic response presents no easy options and that short-term decisions to protect the public must also be balanced with the longer-term impact of significant economic downturn in terms of unemployment and the mental health and wellbeing of the population.

However, we believe that an effective public policy response must be driven first and foremost by the informed and non-partisan use of the best available evidence. We therefore urge the Government and all political stakeholders to commit to the open and transparent use of data to drive key decisions, and to publish the basis of those decisions in a way that is independently-verifiable.

We are concerned that elements of the measures announced on the 31st October are driven more by politics and public opinion than evidence or strategy. In particular, we are concerned that maintaining campus-based teaching and learning and keeping schools and colleges open could limit the effectiveness of the more general lockdown, and potentially force restrictions to remain in place for longer.

Given the tremendous efforts of librarians and information professionals in HE, FE and schools to support the shift to online teaching and learning, we would encourage the Government further to consider whether the current approach for educational providers is consistent with the overall aims of their COVID-19 strategy.

We further believe that the circumstances demand a collective effort on the part of the public, public authorities and the media to avoid spreading disinformation about the virus. We urge the Government to work with CILIP to bring forward a public programme of support for health, digital and information literacy, so that individual citizens can be empowered to make informed choices both about their own welfare and the safety of those around them. We further believe that such a programme could deliver very significant benefits by enabling the public to make better and more effective use of health services.

CILIP members in educational establishments

The Prime Minister has confirmed that schools, colleges and University campuses will remain open during this period, at least until the 2nd December. We have received confirmation via the Department for Education that

“schools and other educational establishments will remain open during the national lockdown [and] this includes any library facilities they may have”.

CILIP notes the tremendous efforts of librarians and information professionals in HE, FE and schools to support the teaching and learning needs of their users. We would highlight in particular two sets of resources:

- The [statement from the CILIP Information Literacy Group](#) highlighting the work of librarians and information professionals in moving teaching and learning online, and;
- The [Case Studies](#) provided by the School Libraries Group and School Library Association for the Great School Libraries campaign, highlighting how school librarians have supported their learner communities during COVID-19

We believe that the Government’s approach, keeping University campuses open and maintaining face-to-face teaching in schools and colleges may be inconsistent with their overall strategy to limit the ‘2nd spike’ in coronavirus infections. However, we do also acknowledge the positive benefits of face-to-face and in-person learning and socialisation for children, young people and students.

We are also aware that libraries in schools, colleges and Universities provide much-needed ‘learning space’ and that if campus-based instruction is to continue, it is important to retain access to these spaces, where this can be achieved safely.

We are also concerned that without adequate protective measures, these provisions could place our members at undue risk. We would welcome clarification as to why, if the risk is considered too severe for staff in retail and other establishments, it is considered appropriate to retain staff in educational establishments, particularly when so much effort has gone into creating digital alternatives to classroom-based teaching and learning.

However, while these provisions remain in place, we encourage employers to liaise with their staff and Unions to maintain a flexible approach and to ensure that appropriate COVID-19 risk assessments are completed and maintained and protective measures are put in place and regularly monitored for their efficacy.

CILIP members working in health and social care

We note that a significant proportion of CILIP members work in a range of health and social care contexts including frontline healthcare provision, the 3rd sector and local services. These professionals are helping to alleviate pressure on the NHS, ensuring that clinical and other interventions are based on the best available evidence and supporting the tremendous push to deliver timely and effective public health communications.

CILIP is continuing to work with our Health Libraries Group and NHS Health Education England (HEE) to monitor the ongoing impact of COVID-19 response on librarians and knowledge specialists in health.

CILIP members working in public Libraries in England

According to Government Regulations, the following provisions have been put in place for public library services in England and will remain in place at least until the 2nd December. The Regulations provide a basis for local decision-making by Local Authorities, who will ultimately decide on arrangements for local service provision.

The expectation is that public library buildings will close, but also that individual local library services may make use of the following exceptions in order to continue some activities:

- Online access to books, magazines and other information resources
- Click and collect services
- Home delivery services
- Providing public-access PC's
- Delivering School Library Services where these are low or no-contact

CILIP is part of the English Public Libraries Strategic Working Group with the Arts Council England, Libraries Connected and the British Library that is coordinating guidance for public libraries in England during this 2nd lockdown. The main channel for updates will be the [Service Recovery Toolkit](#) created by Libraries Connected and we will continue to refer enquiries to this resource in the first instance.

We welcome the recognition of public libraries as 'essential services', particularly in ensuring that people can continue to access online services and resources during the lockdown. We believe that it is vital that this recognition translates into real political buy-in and investment in the years ahead. It is our view libraries would be in a position to have done even more to support pandemic response and recovery had they not been systematically under-funded during the past 10 years.

We are concerned about the implications for the safety and welfare of our members and the users they serve. We urge Local Authorities and employers to liaise with their staff and Unions to ensure that all risks have been accounted for and adequate protective measures are in place.

We are also concerned that since the Regulations are 'permissive' (ie. they leave it to the discretion of individual Local Authorities to decide which services to provide and on what basis) they will necessarily lead to a wide variety of different arrangements in different parts of the country. We appreciate that some degree of local variation is necessary to respond to local needs, but would not wish to see this wide variation in service provision persist beyond the end of the lockdown on the 2nd December.

CILIP members working in public libraries in Scotland

The Scottish Government has provided [specific published guidance for public libraries in Scotland](#), consistent with the overall provisions set out in [Scotland's COVID-19 Response: Strategic Framework](#).

For the time being, our understanding is that public library services in Scotland will remain open, albeit subject to appropriate protective measures to ensure that they are COVID-safe.

CILIP is continuing to liaise with our partners at CILIP in Scotland and colleagues at the Scottish Library and Information Council (SLIC) to monitor developments in the national position in Scotland.

CILIP members working in public libraries in Wales

Libraries in Wales are currently operating under the ['firebreak' provisions set in place on the 23rd October](#) and due to come to an end on the 9th November. Under these restrictions, public libraries are currently closed for face-to-face services, although they continue to provide an active programme of digital and online support.

CILIP continues to liaise with our colleagues in CILIP Cymru Wales, the National Library of Wales and the Welsh Government to monitor developments and will update our guidance to reflect any new provisions post-'firebreak'.

CILIP members working in public libraries in Northern Ireland

Libraries NI have provided a [service update](#) concerning the restrictions announced by the Northern Ireland Executive to curb the ongoing spread of COVID-19. This confirms that access to library branches for book-browsing has been suspended for a period of 4 weeks from the 16th October, although service users can continue to benefit from a wide range of online resources, reading materials and activities and a 'book and collect' service.

CILIP will continue to liaise with our colleagues at CILIP Ireland and Libraries NI to monitor ongoing developments and will update our guidance to reflect any changes to these arrangements.