

13th Jan 2021

To: Professor Wei Shen Lim
Chair of the JCVI

Dear Professor Lim

As the UK's Children's Commissioners, we are writing to urge you to reconsider prioritisation of teachers and other key workers in the children's sector as part of the first phase of the vaccination programme.

Thank you for your previous response to the Children's Commissioner for England, which we acknowledge ruled out this prioritisation in the first phase of the programme. This was at a time when the new strain of Covid-19 had yet to be recognised as highly transmissible and before the decision was taken to again close all schools in the UK apart from to priority children. This closure, with no firm current end point, is extremely concerning. The last lockdown led to a marked drop in safeguarding referrals (10% lower than usual) and has widened the gap between disadvantaged children and their peers. Teachers should be prioritised as administering the vaccine to teachers as a priority group alongside health workers would allow schools to reopen as quickly as possible.

Staff working with children, including social workers, children's home staff and those working with children in secure settings, should also be considered for prioritisation, as disruption to staffing levels in these services have direct impact on children's experiences (for example their ability to go outside, access education and activities and see their families).

We urge you to reconsider prioritisation of school staff, starting with those working in Special Schools, as part of the first phase of the programme. If this is not possible, then we would like to see school staff at the front of the queue in the second phase. This would help to ensure that staff, teachers and young people all have confidence in the school system and feel comfortable to return. It would be a vital first step in limiting the devastating impact of the pandemic on children's rights this year, which may well have consequences for years to come.

Yours sincerely



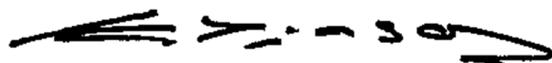
Anne Longfield OBE
Children's Commissioner for England



Sally Holland
Children's Commissioner for Wales



Bruce Adamson
Children & Young People's Commissioner
Scotland



Koulla Yiassouma
Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children
and Young People