

Message from Yvette Stanley, Ofsted National Director Regulation and Social Care, 24 April 2020

To children's social care providers and local authorities:

Dear colleagues,

Another week of what is beginning to feel like the 'new normal'! We at Ofsted were delighted to play our part in getting COVID-19 testing up and running for children's social care keyworkers. Although they weren't originally included in the list, we lobbied hard and successfully to ensure foster carers have keyworker status. Foster carers play such an important role in the care of our children and we applaud each and every one of them. For those of you working with foster carers please pass on my heartfelt thanks to them at this challenging time.

Covid-19 testing programme

The government has now launched an online booking portal and expanded the list of key workers eligible for COVID-19 (coronavirus) testing. Read the press release from the DHSC [here](#). You can use this new portal or you can continue to book tests with the Ofsted booking system. The form for Ofsted's system is [here](#).

We will continue to provide you and your keyworkers in children's social care, including foster carers, with this service until the government's online system is well established, and we will let you know when we plan to discontinue the Ofsted system. Ofsted will not be processing applications for key workers most recently added to the eligible list, which include transport workers, teachers and utilities staff. These key workers will need to use the government's online booking portal.

Testing available for children

We have been asked which sites offer testing for children. This is an ever-changing picture and so any list we provide would be quickly out of date. We have updated our form to include the age range of the person requesting the test so that we can match people to the nearest centre that can administer the test based on the latest information we have.

Message from the Department for Education (DfE):

Changes to children's social care regulations in response to COVID-19

We recognise that local authorities and providers may find it more challenging to meet the full range of statutory duties relating to children in need, child protection, safeguarding and care during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

The Department for Education is making temporary changes to ten sets of children's social care regulations.

The Adoption and Children (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations 2020 will enable you to introduce greater flexibility for local authorities and providers to respond to the pandemic while maintaining a strong focus on core responsibilities and duties relating to child protection and safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children.

They will:

- ease administrative burdens
- enable visits and contact to take place remotely
- relax strict timescales, where possible

Changes to the regulations will come into force on 24 April and will be kept under review and remain in force until the Coronavirus Act renewal date on 25 September 2020.

A full breakdown of these changes can be viewed on legislation.gov.uk.

Ofsted fees for children's social care providers

The DfE has decided not to implement its previously agreed increases for annual and registration fees due for implementation from 1 April 2020. Ofsted will begin sending out annual fee invoices to providers over the next few days applying the 2019-20 fee rates. This position will apply for the entirety of the financial year 2020-21.

As previously notified, Ofsted is also allowing providers an extended period to pay their fee(s) rather the usual 30 days by allowing providers up to 30 September 2020 to make payment.

Applications to register

We have been asked about making emergency applications to register.

We are prioritising applications at this time and aim to process them as quickly as possible. We will shortly publish some guidance setting out how we intend to do this. If you can help us by submitting a full and accurate application, we will process the application as quickly as we can. Please contact your local regulatory inspection manager (RIM) who will be able to advise you of what you need to do to help the application process.

Message from Sarah Blackmore, Executive Director, Social Work England

Social Work England has been tackling the impact on social workers in a number of ways. I would be grateful if you could share the information below with your teams.

Firstly, all of our latest updates about Covid-19's impact on Social Work England can be found in a new section on our [website](#). This includes updates on our registration and fitness to practise processes, plus information for employers, students and education providers.

Secondly, I would like to highlight the new 'Social Work Together' initiative: www.local.gov.uk/social-work-together, which is appealing to former social workers to help bolster the sector. Under the Coronavirus Act we were given powers to temporarily add 8,000 former social workers to our [register](#). This means they are able to express an interest in returning to practice on the frontline through the Covid-19 pandemic and find an employer through the Social Work Together portal. This initiative has been developed by Social Work England, the Department for Education, the Department of Health and Social Care and the Local Government Association. We need as many social workers as possible to return to their roles so they can protect vulnerable children and adults needing more support than ever at this time.

Thirdly, the Department for Education has published guidance for local authorities and others who safeguard children, including social workers. It is to guide them on flexibilities in delivering statutory duties, and the principles they should apply, to manage the risks to vulnerable children as a result of Covid-19. You will find the guidance [here](#). We are also working closely with the Principal Social Worker networks for both adults and children's services to produce guidance that will reassure and assist social workers in their practice during these difficult circumstances.

Thank you for your ongoing support and do not hesitate to contact me if there is anything we can assist you with.

I hope our continuing updates are helpful to you. Please do not hesitate to contact us at socialcare@ofsted.gov.uk if you have any further queries. Best wishes to you all and the children you are working so hard to support and care for.

Best wishes,
Yvette