



The Education Sector: Pre and Post the Coronavirus Pandemic

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The Coronavirus pandemic has had huge implications on many aspects of life, including nature, business, transport, work, and education. Whilst the seriousness of Covid-19 has been a huge, unprecedented shock to many, the world, and specifically the UK government have responded in a way they have believed best. Day to day life has altered, workers across the globe have become understandably adaptive, employers have introduced working from home and children have been out of school.

This e-book explores how the education sector has been affected in the UK. Over 90% of pupils' education has been affected worldwide, due to closures of schools, colleges and universities caused by the outbreak of Coronavirus, according to Unesco (UN education body). What reaction did schools have? How serious are the implications of children missing months of their education? Did universities respond in the appropriate way? Is mental health being given the airtime it deserves, particularly under the given circumstances?

SCHOOL CLOSURES

On 23 March 2020, the UK government announced that they were preventing children from attending school, unless the child was vulnerable, or the child of a key worker (GOV.uk). Then, over nine weeks later, on 1 June 2020, schools began to reopen, with staggered year groups to maximise the ability to *social distance*. Children are not classed as vulnerable towards the virus, therefore, the risks here are fairly low and manageable. Parents across the nation have been tasked with home-schooling their children, making sure the child attends online classes and sending their completed work to their teachers, in some cases. For many, the balance between working from home and attempting to educate a child has been an unfathomable challenge.

Social distancing – keeping space (preferably 2 metres) between yourself and individuals from another household

Implications

The phased return to school and lack of law surrounding the re-opening of schools will leave many children out of full-time education for over three months. Decisions on whether a school chooses to reopen is dependent upon location and willingness to teach, both of which raise many ethical concerns. Is it right for a five year old child to return to school for the remainder of the academic year in London, whilst in Birmingham, the child cannot, because the school have thought it unsafe to do so? Postcode advantages here are an issue, if a child in one location is able to go back to school, they are likely exposed to better educational means for the remainder of the academic year. This places the child at an advantageous standpoint, whereas, children in other areas are continuing to miss out on social interaction and professional teaching.

Ultimately, parents send their children to school to be educated by a professional, therefore, it is not unreasonable to assume many parents do not have the time, patience or even education themselves to teach their children.

Furthermore, school is not just education. In early years, the act of attending school every day from Monday to Friday, gives structure, discipline, and routine. It gives a



child, from pre-school to sixth form, a means of escapism, away from their family and home, another place for them to develop, grow and feel comfortable. Alongside this, school is a place where children learn to socialise, they make friends and learn how to interact with others of the same age (Burgess and Sievertsen, 2020).

External Examinations

Another item of breaking news struck the United Kingdom on 18 March 2020, when the Prime Minister announced that GCSE and A Level exams would be cancelled. Students who were due to sit these exams will instead receive their predicted grades. Evidence suggests that those from more privileged backgrounds are likely to be predicted higher grades, while those from disadvantaged backgrounds attending less well-acclaimed schools are expected to receive poorer results (Murphy and Wyness, 2020). In the years to come, employers will have to consider how these decisions may dampen an individuals' career prospects, affect their university choices and the implications on their mental health.

Tips for Parents

Parents are facing an abundance of challenges in the current situation, particularly those with children of a school-attending age. In the UK specifically, the responsibility of educating a child has fallen mainly on the parent or responsible adult. Whilst many parents are working full time from home, juggling these responsibilities with those of home-schooling are a battle many are acclimatising to.

The continual changes in the rules set out by the government are important for parents with young children, especially as selected age groups are returning to the classroom.

Below are some tips for parents with children that need to be educated at home:

- Set up a learning space – having a designated area for academic lessons, such as the dining room table, will be helpful for the child to understand when they sit there, they have to be willing to learn
- Creating a timetable – structure is key for home schooling, creating a weekly plan of the lessons or topics your child will cover is ideal
- Getting creative – remember that school is not just about English and Maths, spending time with the children outside, showing them various aspects of nature, teaching them how to cook, encouraging them to draw or play a musical instrument. These are all fundamental aspects of learning.
- Using educational videos – for overwhelming or busy times, allowing your child to watch educational videos about a certain topic will help to keep them engaged



Coping Techniques

Being honest and open with your child's teacher is really important. When the child returns to school, their teacher will need to adapt according to how much quality learning the child received during the time out of school. Communication is key and talking to other parents may also be useful. A parent is not expected to teach their child everything, nor spend the normal school hours teaching them. Even 30 minutes per day of doing something with your child is better than nothing at all. Removing the pressure from parents is important, as teaching is a professional qualification that teachers spend years obtaining.

Teacher Training

For individuals who are currently seeking to obtain a teacher training qualification, the guidelines have altered slightly. For instance, prior experience in schools is not a necessary requirement. ITT applications have now reduced their time frame to respond, to 20 days instead of 40 days and face-to-face interviews have been replaced by video calls. The Train to Teach events that were due to take place as physical events have been rescheduled to online events and webinars. The government guidelines have taken appropriate steps to adapt to the changing environment, please read more on the [Get into Teaching](#) website.

ONLINE LEARNING



What is Online Learning?

Post the Coronavirus outbreak, many educational hubs will continue to increase their teachings online. Proactive schools have become accustomed to teaching pupils online through video calling platforms such as Zoom. Over time, it can be expected that further technological advances will increase the accessibility of systems for the purpose of online education.

The Future of Learning

E-learning has a host of benefits, one of the most obvious being the flexibility to work anywhere. However, attending lessons via video call are less practical for younger children, with shorter attention spans. It is also important to address the lack of physical interaction a child receives through a computer screen, versus in-person teaching.

E-learning – learning done by studying at home, or in another location, using the internet for courses and information

These online teaching methods also include setting work for a student, via email or another learning software. This can include deadlines, the option to add comments or ask for help. In the final years of school and sixth form, e-learning could become more widespread. Between the ages of 14-18, many pupils in the UK are permitted study leave during their exam periods, therefore, lessons are attended by the minority. In future, if students who are due to sit their GCSE or A-Level examinations are studying at home, then setting essays online with online submission points could be a viable way forward.

In a non-academic situation, for example, in the health and fitness industry, e-learning and online coaching has increased in recent years. For many who regularly workout, especially in the gym, working out at home has become the new norm. Most industries have had to adapt during this time and personal trainers have had to focus on their online clients. However, online coaching is positive for many individuals, as they regularly communicate with their coaches, perhaps more so than in the pre COVID-19 world. Some frequent gym-goers may have previously had a face-to-face personal training session bi-weekly, however now have regular check-ins via messages or phone calls.

Benefits of Online Learning

Increases in communication can be recognised in many industries. Ultimately, humans need physical contact and if everything was done through a screen, a void would never be filled. However, e-learning has demonstrated that communication is key, and the online world is rather infinite in what it can be used to be taught. Even those who may have feared or have had prior reservations about the digital age have now began to become tech-savvy and embrace the advantages of communicating via screens (BBC, 2020).

HIGHER EDUCATION

2020 has brought with it a significant number of changes to higher education. This includes universities and other professional qualifications that require studying and examination. Suffice to suggest that the pandemic of COVID-19 will have huge implications on all university students, particularly recent graduates searching for jobs, and, those due to graduate as the class of 2020. Will employers recognise these candidates with a sense of understanding? Will the degree classifications still be a valid means of recognising intellect?

Closure of Universities

Students have experienced interruptions to final exams, lectures, seminars and attendance on campus. Following the campus closures and university buildings shutting down, the majority of eighteen to twenty-five year olds studying undergraduate degrees returned home, away from their university accommodation. Likewise, any twenty plus year old studying at postgraduate level received changes to methods of teaching, or in some cases, no teaching at all.



University Examinations

Equality is a question which should be raised here, as the government did not set a one size fits all approach to the universities across the United Kingdom. In turn, each university has chosen what they feel best for their community, which demonstrates the independent bodies and freedom of choice. With regards to final

exams, universities have been encouraged by the voices of their own students, to implement a no detriment policy, which acts as a safety net for grades.

However, a huge discrepancy here is that some universities have abandoned final exams and are using the average the student has achieved throughout the results from their second and third year. Other universities have made final exams compulsory, with the safety net only being effective if the student has already completed a certain percentage of their overall degree. Therefore, are results for finalists across the UK going to be fair, or even comparable? What affect does this have on the university rankings? Will employability post-graduation decrease? Will the students currently in higher education be given careful consideration, due to the circumstances?

Implications on University Students

Alongside finalists, other years of university are important, and the challenges have been immense for all students, especially on health and wellbeing. One of the issues is for those who have finished their second year of studying and are due to start paid undergraduate placements. In April 2020, statistics showed that over 70% of companies in the UK chose to furlough their staff (Personnel Today, 2020). These are mainly due to financial strains; therefore, many companies may not have the extra cash they expected to pay their expected placement employees. These students may face the difficult decision on whether to return to university for their final year, a year earlier than originally planned.

University students who have recently reached the end of first year will likely be sacrificing their first university summer and holidays with their new groups of friends. This will have an understandably negative impact on mental health. Grades for first year students will be difficult to judge, especially if the university has decided to use averages. These students have not yet been given chance to demonstrate their full potential, as the academic standards that are expected of them are still being learnt.

The Future of University

With the Coronavirus continually present, universities have begun to release their expectations for the upcoming 2020/2021 academic year. In the UK, large gatherings will not be permitted for the foreseeable future, therefore, universities cannot hold usual lectures in large lecture theatres. Groups will be limited for face-to-face interactions, so seminars and tutorials will likely be allowed.

Virtual communication and e-learning will continue, and in some cases, will not be replaced with physical learning. Universities are continually adapting their plans in accordance with the ever-changing government guidelines. Most universities have made the decision to permit their students due to be living on campus or in shared university accommodation to return or move in at the end of September, when the academic years are due to begin. Lectures are going to be recorded and shared online as a necessity, which will allow for a

great deal of flexibility. International students will be permitted to enrol to university in the UK and will be able to gain the materials and teachings online, until they are able to travel or relocate to England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Students will have more control over their time, if they can catch up with a lecture at a time that best suits them. This may result in an increase in part-time work for students, which should boost the economy at a time when it will be very much needed.

University and Accommodation Fees

As many methods of teaching are moving online, university campuses are likely to be quieter for the last quarter of 2020. Should university students be paying the full £9,250 per year if inside the UK, and up to £22,000 per year if International? Universities will argue that they will continue to receive the same standards of teaching, however, if lectures and seminars are carried out online, they will naturally take up less time. Commuting time will be abolished if both the lecturers and students are working from home.



Private accommodation for students may see a decrease in the next year. Landlords may experience dips in profits, as not all students will rush into moving into their respective university housing. Furthermore, the halls of residence and university owned accommodation will be less occupied. Only in the months ahead will it become clear whether there are large alternations in the trends of living in student areas.

THE FUTURE OF EDUCATION

As the world is exiting lockdown and getting back to normal, what can the UK do to best prepare and adapt in the future, while considering possible gaps in education? What have other countries already done that could be advisable for the UK to follow suit?

In New Zealand, schools and universities resumed as normal in May. The figures in the Kiwi counterpart stayed low, with less than 1,500 people infected in total (Roy, 2020). As of 8 June 2020, the country is Coronavirus free. Schools have been encouraged to vigilantly clean all surfaces with disinfectant and for those with cold-like symptoms to stay at home. These guidelines are likely to become the new normal. The country is hosting events for school children, such as virtual career fairs, which should reduce the implications that the pandemic has on them in the years to come (Independent Schools of New Zealand, 2020).

MENTAL HEALTH

Unprecedented times and unfathomable challenges have become popular ways of describing the outcomes of the new decade to the present day. This time will be a huge lesson in history, and in hindsight, humanity can learn a lot from it.

Mental health is often wrongly side lined or unprioritized at the best of times. It is important for all organisation, industries, schools and education systems to recognise that this outcomes or instability of the Coronavirus outbreak will have implications on mental health. As a method of introducing change, upon return to school, mental health should be taught as part of the curriculum. All schools should have adequate funding to have support systems in place for students who need someone to speak to.

Furthermore, universities and workplaces have to also begin to recognise that it is not human nature to be consistently okay. Not being okay and being able to express this should be normalised. One of the positive outcomes of the pandemic is that as a general rule, people find it easier to express themselves when physically distanced from someone, particularly through a screen, or being in the comfort of home. Checking in on loved ones and colleagues has become a norm, one which should not be forgotten when the environment inevitably changes.

If you do need someone to talk to, please do not be afraid to reach out. You may not have a family member, friend or manager at work with whom you feel comfortable expressing your state of mind to. For help, please speak to the Samaritans by calling 116 123. For mental health chats, please get in contact with [Mind](#).

Useful Resources

- [Rethink – Managing your Mental Health](#)
- [NHS – Every Mind Matters](#)
- [Young Minds – Coronavirus and Mental Health](#)

KEY TAKEAWAYS

The outbreak of Coronavirus was unexpected and unlike anything the human race has lived through before. What has become clear is that each country has handled the situation independently, each following scientific advice and adapting the rules from evidence. The economic state of the world has and continues to deteriorate, as every industry has been affected. As countries are slowly coming out of the other side, the UK is evidently setting out the roadmap for the adapted ways of living for the nation to adopt.

Being educated and attending school are amongst the most critical things for a child to do. The phased re-opening of schools is a positive step in the right direction. No child should have their rights to learn taken away from them, therefore, the many children with parents cannot provide them with any form of education, for various reasons, are a concern. Upon the start of the 2020-2021 academic year, the education sector will have to make allowances and be understanding towards the situation. In the summer exam period of 2021, those due to sit GCSE and A-levels may achieve sub-par results, as they have a gap in their education. How schools, exams, universities and employers will react will become clear over the years to come, as we come out of the other side of the Coronavirus pandemic.

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