

All Party Parliamentary Group on Social Mobility

What next for social mobility? The impact of coronavirus and beyond

Thursday 16th July 2020

The All-Party Parliamentary Group on Social Mobility was very pleased to host a session on the impact of Covid-19 on social mobility with the following panellists:

- Dr Chris Pascal, Co-founder and Director at the Centre for Research in Early Childhood
- Jo Hutchinson, Director for Social Mobility and Vulnerable Learners at the Education Policy Institute (EPI)
- Kirsti Lord, Deputy Chief Executive at the Association of Colleges
- Laura Bruce, Director of Programmes at the Sutton Trust

The chair of the APPG Justin Madders MP introduced the session and was joined by co-chairs David Johnston MP and Baroness Claire Tyler.

EARLY YEARS

Dr Chris Pascal spoke about the impact of Covid-19 on the early years sector. She drew on the evidence from the [Sutton Trust's Covid-19 impact brief on the early years](#), which surveyed parents, early years providers and practitioners, and an in-depth look at provision in Birmingham which Chris led. Previous Sutton Trust reports has shown that progress on closing the 'school readiness' gap had stalled. By 2019, the gap had increased back to 2015 levels. The latest Covid-19 impact brief indicates that the gap will widen significantly, which is deeply concerning. The early years is a pivotal time for addressing inequality and disadvantage. Lockdown, isolation, social distancing and deaths have had a deep impact on daily life wellbeing with young children and their families impacted. Closures of early years settings means the majority (83%) of under-5s have spent time at home outside of early years setting and dependent on uneven and unknown home learning experiences. 4 months for a 3-4 year old is a critical time in a child's development.

Chris then summarised the findings of the report and focussed her speech on the following:

i. Impact on the youngest children

- Chris noted that the lockdown would have had differing impacts depending on a child's age, home environment, parental circumstances, individual learning needs and whether they have had home-based support from their early years' providers
- The learning loss will have a significant impact on the disadvantaged and vulnerable
- Some children have experienced severe trauma e.g. bereavement or abuse
- However, some children have thrived from being at home or in a early years setting
- The biggest impact would have been on physical, social and emotional wellbeing
- There is a smaller reported impact on language development
- There is a backlog of diagnosis for those with special educational needs

ii. Impact on parents

- Most parents have accessed some form of support, via educational content on TV or online
- Many early years settings have sent home-based support, but better-off families are accessing it more

- Many parents have reported being stressed and anxious about supporting their children's development

iii. Impact on early years settings

- Many early years settings were struggling before the pandemic. All maintained nursery schools have remained open, but 2/3 of the PVI sector have been temporarily closed with many staff furloughed
- 65% are planning to re-open, but many with reduced hours or reduced level of provision. 1/3 of settings in deprived areas said they were unlikely to be open this time next year.

iv. Policy recommendations

- In the short-term, the government should offer a financial package of £88m to support the early years sector in line with similar support to schools.
- The Early Years Pupil Premium should be increased and brought in line with the primary school pupil premium for at least a year.
- In the longer term, the 30 hours childcare eligibility should be offered to those eligible for the disadvantaged 2-year-old offer
- There should be a focus on recruiting and retaining qualified staff.

A full list of recommendations can be found [here](#).

SCHOOLS

Jo Hutchinson spoke about the EPI's research during lockdown, and the recommendations that EPI has made on preventing a further widening of the disadvantage gap.

EPI has been focussing on the immediate responses and wider issues exposed by the pandemic and reviewed the possible depth of lockdown learning loss. The research has found novel challenges for post-16 providers, with an increase in students remaining in education and in particular, students in need of Level 2 English and maths provision. Teacher retention is beginning to improve, and initial teacher training applications have surged.

The EPI's latest annual report found that the disadvantage gap in 2018 was equivalent to four and a half months of learning at age five, rising to nine months by age 11 and 18 months by 16. The GCSE gap is even larger for students who are consistently disadvantaged throughout their school life, with a 23 month gap by age 16. Since 2011, progress on closing the gap has become glacially slow and based on the latest trends it is unlikely to continue to close. Next month the EPI will publish a report on analysis of the attainment gap in 2019, which is unlikely to show an improvement.

Factors that are likely to contribute to the gap widening are differences in the home learning environment e.g. internet access, hunger, lack of space, less immersion of the English language, parental time and confidence for supporting study.

The EPI has made some policy recommendations and proposals, including giving schools the flexibility in how to use the catch-up funding. They have also called for extending the looked-after children's premium to all children on the Child Protection Register and correcting the anomaly that children in alternative provision have no guaranteed educational places post-16 because there is no specialist provision available for them. There is also a concern that the government have not yet provided a plan to ensure that children with SEND can access therapeutic and educational support

from home and in school as necessary to restore their educational rights. They have also recommended guidance for schools on avoiding unnecessary exclusion of children who have faced various levels of disadvantage during lockdown. The government's new checklist does acknowledge risks and support needs resulting from lockdown, but its tools are geared towards sanctions and rewards and not building trusting relationship and motivation positive behaviour. It does not address a potential surge in exclusions and unexplained exits from schools.

A key recommendation for school-aged children was the provision of summer schemes that would be focussed on wellbeing, socialisation, cultural and outdoor activities. The rationale was to allow pastoral work to engage vulnerable children before September and reduce pressure on teachers. The eligibility should be universal to encourage good take-up and avoid stigmatisation.

A final cluster of proposals were focussed on exceptional arrangements for assessments and accountability for schools, such as the suspension of Ofsted inspections for as long as there is substantial disruption to schooling. This also includes better safeguards in Ofqual's arrangements to prevent systematic biases in exam results due to the use of teacher-assessed grades. For 2021, EPI recommends a safety net is used in exams by using question choices to allow children who have missed out on content to have a fair chance. Whatever the success of the catch-up programme, there is also a need to mitigate learning loss from any further national or localised lockdown, or from shielding.

In conclusion, a key consideration in how we support children is to focus on their wider needs as well as their academic needs and that educational practices allow for the unknown and are nurturing and not harmful to children where we don't know about their vulnerabilities.

FURTHER EDUCATION

Kirsti Lord introduced the Association of Colleges and the scope of work of colleges and spoke about the issues that have emerged in colleges with a focus on apprenticeships.

The Association of Colleges has conducted 2 surveys of their members and have been positive with the engagement of online learning, but some disadvantaged students have been unable to access online learning at all due to reason already mentioned. This has been compounded for adult students for whom English is a second language. The biggest challenge for colleges delivering a high volume of vocational and technical education is the inability to do practical activities online.

Covid-19 has highlighted the reduced financial resilience of colleges. The survey results confirm around 65% of college incomes are grant-funded which has been secured for 2020/21, but 35% of diversified income is still unsecure. Most worryingly, there has been a lack of security around apprenticeship income and very few to no apprenticeship starts during the pandemic. A large number of apprentices have been furloughed or laid off, with a lack of certainty around their future post-furlough. There is no immediate focus for companies on new apprenticeship starts despite the incentives that have been offered, with a question mark over why an apprentice should start with a £2000 incentive when they can be put on the 'kickstart' programme and have their wages paid. Furthermore, as colleges can now be made insolvent as of 2019, many colleges are laying staff who deliver apprenticeship courses in high-value areas because apprentices cannot engage with learning online. These roles would need to be recruited for again in 12-18 months when industry begins to pick up and businesses require apprentices.

As many colleges have had success in engaging pupils online and are different to schools and universities in terms of campuses and the population it serves, the AoC is looking at a blended

approach to delivery from September, which brings challenges. This includes how to concentrate in-person delivery for students who need to learn how to study before they can do so online, how to work through practical assessments, and the duty of care around wellbeing and mental health which includes providing social interaction. 98% of members surveyed reported increasing their support for mental health and wellbeing during lockdown.

A big transition is for Year 11 pupils coming to college, some of whom have had less online learning during lockdown. There is a concern among members of catch-up capability for that cohort and those resitting GCSE English and Maths, so a lot of work is being done on how to engage those students virtually. There is a concern around existing cohorts who have struggled to engage with online learning and are at risk of becoming NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training).

The college sector would welcome a review on:

- extending the pupil premium to 16+
- parity of funding with 11-16 education in terms of base rate and catch-up
- funding certainty for the future, as colleges currently work on a lag model
- looking at a more collaborative approach with schools and higher education on transition
- flexibility around accessible funding for short and long courses for adults who wish to retrain quickly to redeploy, welcoming bringing forward the National Skills Fund through an allocation model
- maintenance grants or loans for adults who want to retrain
- funding support apprenticeship providers to retain their talent pool
- support for employers in feeling confident in taking on an apprentices through a centralised supported employment scheme such as an apprenticeship training agency, where the agency employs apprentices and employers can buy in to those services, so if something goes wrong apprentices can continue their training elsewhere
- In terms of big picture, equitable, simplified and stable funding commitments for colleges for core delivery across all age groups, particularly in compulsory education up to 18

Kirsti concluded by stating we should be looking at education holistically, to enable a young person to progress appropriately through education rather than becoming more disadvantaged as they work through the system. Whilst last week's announcement from the Chancellor is welcome, what is needed is a long-term strategy around high-level skills offering career opportunities in high-level jobs.

HIGHER EDUCATION

Laura Bruce spoke about the pandemic's impact on university access and outreach programmes. The Sutton Trust has been considering those students due to enter university this year, with a particular focus on the impact of the pandemic on their decisions and the impact of the grading system this year on disadvantaged students. They have also been looking at those earlier in the education cycle, and the impact of reduced university outreach programmes on them, where there is likely to be a longer-term impact which is not currently being considered.

With regard to current university applicants, Sutton Trust research and polling has highlighted that 1 in 5 students have changed their mind about attending and half believed the pandemic would have a negative impact on getting a place at their first-choice university. There is also a concern on the impact of teacher-assessed grades on high-attaining disadvantaged students, who are often underpredicted. Ofqual should monitor any attainment gaps that appear and go as far to making adjustments if necessary, to ensure this year's grades are in line with previous trends and ensure

disadvantaged groups are not left behind due to the changes. In the longer-term, now is a good opportunity to consider how we can move away from a predicted grades system entirely and move towards post-qualification application system. There is also an opportunity for universities to apply contextual admissions in a concentrated way, so we can gain evidence of the impact of this policy. Sutton Trust research has shown that students who gain a contextual offer do go on to achieve the same or better grades than their advantaged peers. Universities should also increase hardship funding for those from families who have suffered as a result of the pandemic, and for current students. Restoring maintenance grants should also be considered. This is a formative time for A-Level students, so it is important they have the support they need from schools.

Another area is university outreach activity. Much outreach work has been moved online which has pros and cons, such as access to technology and the ability to tailor support to the individual. The Sutton Trust has launched Sutton Trust Online to deliver outreach programmes to 6000 Year 12 students. The quality of online outreach should be consistently reviewed. Whilst Sutton Trust Online will alleviate the immediate problem of this summer, it may be useful for outreach work in the next academic year and beyond. Many universities polled are unconfident face-to-face outreach will return in the next year. Year 12 students have also missed out on learning in schools and this is likely to have an impact on grades and outcomes.

The other area to consider is the impact on younger secondary students. Early exposure to university access work is unlikely to be a priority for schools who will be focussing on missed learning and universities are prioritising campus space for undergraduate learning and reducing visitors on campus. The Sutton Trust are recommending university outreach is safeguarded and should be offered digitally where possible. It will also be important to analyse the data and impact of potential missed outreach and digital support. Face-to-face support through campus visits and work experience has the biggest impact on student decision making, so it is important this is not removed entirely.

In summary, there are immediate concerns for current applicants but there are concerns about the longer term impacts on current Year 12 students and younger pupils.

Q&A SESSION

David Johnston MP asked about the multiplier effect of missed learning and the amount of impact it will have. He also asked whether there is a risk in suspending Ofsted inspections for too long, as they can ensure schools are getting back on track. He asked Laura if universities are too reliant on international students, especially those who are worse are widening access to home pupils.

Laura noted the big international student population at leading universities, and the subsequent loss in fee income for universities this year with fewer international students. This will impact on the budget for widening participation work, but she said there is the potential for more domestic students to gain places and the impact will need to be assessed. Kirsti noted that UCAS have said there has been an increase in applications from international students between January and June but acknowledged this may not translate into who turns up come September. There was a follow-up question on removing or raising the cap on domestic student students, so that vacant international places can be taken up. Laura said on one side limiting the life on the cap is to do with ensuring universities remain financially stable and that there is a choice for students, and that raising the cap could mean top universities recruit more domestic students with other universities having fewer domestic students. The Sutton Trust supports students being able to attend the university of their choice with the best outcomes they could achieve, and places should not go unused at leading

universities this year if international students do not take them up. Kirsti added that there is a challenge, as international students have a higher fee tariff than domestic students. Her concern is around the lowering of offers, which she said is good for access to an aspirational university but may mean a student needs support in keeping up with their cohort if they did not achieve a similar grade. Chris said there was a broader issue of graduates and employment. There could be many graduates working in the early years but are not remunerated sufficiently by nurseries due to lack of funding.

In answer to the multiplier effect question, Laura noted the Education Endowment Foundation's prediction that progress on closing the attainment gap in the last ten years has been undone by missed learning. Jo noted various estimates have been made based on alternative events and circumstances such as summer holidays and that the pandemic was a unique event, so estimates should be taken with a pinch of salt. But there is a potential large impact on the attainment gap and overall attainment, for example, 20-25% fewer children achieving pass grades in English and Maths. This however could be mitigated with government and school intervention. Kirsti said the multiplier effect would be challenging to calculate and the bigger challenge is the 'bell curve' in GCSE results over the coming years, with pupils performing worse in exams who are still proportionately achieving the same results as they did in previous years. There is also a risk of a generation who are disadvantaged throughout their time in education due to the missed learning of Covid-19. A year of catch-up would not be sufficient for them. Chris said a robust estimate is difficult, but that six months without education will have a huge impact in addition to a struggling sector combined with a difficult home life.

On Ofsted, Jo said the Ofsted framework does not set out how schools should react to such a situation. Kirsti said Ofsted have announced 2-day visits to colleges to talk to senior staff and students around implementation of curriculum as a supportive opportunity to connect colleges to share best practice, which has been cautiously welcomed by the sector. Chris said the Early Years curriculum framework is being revised and that she is concerned about its implementation in the autumn, when providers need to be focussing on the personal, social and physical development of children as a result of the pandemic. She also said it was an ideal opportunity to have more qualified early years staff.

There was a question on one policy that could be implemented that was aimed universally to improve provision overall. Chris said it would be investing in a qualified early years workforce. Jo said much could have been learned from having summer school provision this year focussed on pastoral care. Kirsti said a financial package for providing mental health support and Laura said the National Tutoring Programme will be important.

The final question was on collaboration between the sectors to address the impact of coronavirus on social mobility. Jo said there should be collaboration across age ranges and different children's services such as social care to support all needs. Chris said she would like to see the early years seen as part of the education system, not the childcare system. Kirsti said we are in a quasi-marketised system which sometimes sees tensions between sectors when it comes to location and locality, and that the education system should work for the individual and not for institutions to secure places. Laura agreed with the comments made and noted the education trajectory also includes employment outcomes.

The chair thanked the panellists and noted the issues raised should be revisited and closed the session.