

Written evidence submitted by Publishers Association

# Responding to COVID-19

## Funding Physical Resources

This paper has been produced by the Publishers Association to inform the response to school closures during the COVID-19 pandemic.

### Executive Summary

During this unprecedented period of school closures, there is substantial evidence to suggest that physical resources such as textbooks and workbooks are critical in supporting pupils from disadvantaged or disconnected background. These resources will be quick to distribute, cost-effective and high-quality. The DfE must **act now** to include physical resource spend as an “exceptional cost associated with coronavirus (COVID-19) for the period March to July 2020.” A proposal of how this critical support package might be structured is as follows.

### Key statistics

Results from our latest research underline how teachers, parents and pupils continue to rely on physical resources, such as workbooks or textbooks, now that schools have (mostly) closed but that additional resource is required:

- **57% of headteachers don't believe they have funding available to buy the emergency print materials their pupils need.**
- **35% of teachers in state schools do not believe their pupils have the physical resources they need to learn** (roughly 3.1m children in England).<sup>1</sup>
- This **rises to 41% (723k children in England) in deprived schools** (Free School Meals Quintile 5) compared with 27% of affluent schools (FSM Q1).
- **Only 14% of teachers in the most deprived schools believe their pupils can access digital textbooks when needed**, compared with 34% of teachers in the most affluent schools.
- Over half of teachers in deprived schools are relying on physical resources of some kind to deliver their lessons.<sup>2</sup>
- 56% of teachers at Special/AP are using physical resources to teach remotely.
- **Only 4% of teachers in state schools believe all their pupils have adequate access to a device such as a laptop or tablet to learn from.**<sup>3</sup>
- 15% of teachers in state schools believe that a third or more of their pupils don't have access to a digital device to learn from. 10% say the same proportion don't even have access to the internet.

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<sup>1</sup> 6,977 respondents, Teacher Tapp, 24.04.20.

<sup>2</sup> 6,659 respondents, Teacher Tapp, 22.03.20.

<sup>3</sup> 6,877 respondents, Teacher Tapp, 25.03.20.

### Reaching disadvantaged students

Whilst digital infrastructure is key to ensuring continuity in our education system, physical resources are just as essential for pupils without adequate access to devices or internet connectivity, and for those at special/ AP schools.

Publishers also note that physical resources are significantly quicker and cheaper to distribute than new digital devices, and are guaranteed to contribute to a learner's progression even when there is competition for devices within a household. They have been properly sequenced, tested and designed to promote learning.

Of course, some students have the option of attending school because of their disadvantaged status; but the evidence suggests that these pupils are still choosing to remain at home. Adequate and timely provision of physical learning tools is therefore vital to ensuring this crisis does not widen the attainment gap further.

### Supporting schools

Most teachers are choosing to **implement their existing lesson plans**, only using resources that are familiar to them (29%), or only occasionally introducing new resources into their established planning (20%).<sup>4</sup> It is therefore logical that a government support package should enable teachers, where possible, to repurpose their tried and tested methods for the new context. This is likely to be more effective than trying to introduce completely new resources.

Whilst teachers would typically make purchasing decisions to support disadvantaged learners using the pupil premium grant, **school closures have hit at a time when budgets have already been allocated and spent for the year**. As such, many schools do not have the reserves to meet the unexpected costs demanded by school closures.

Teachers cannot rely on printing, photocopying and digital solutions in the same way they might do in the classroom. Up to three quarters of teachers in deprived schools have suggested that they don't have access to a digital platform to disseminate work.<sup>5</sup> It's also worth noting that printing digital resources at school is inefficient, expensive and often yields a lower-quality outcome than buying the mass-produced, sequenced resources on the market.

### Proposed model

With almost half of teachers suggesting they don't have the funding required to make emergency purchases of print resources, targeted funding would go a long way to help adequately equip learners from all backgrounds.

Schools should be empowered to make targeted purchasing decisions to teachers' existing lesson plans and respective students. This will be the quickest and most consistent way of assisting teaching across the country.

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<sup>4</sup> 6,912 respondents, Teacher Tapp, 25.04.20.

Publishers suggest that this funding is distributed in a similar way to the [existing emergency funding](#) made available to schools. This would allow schools to make the necessary payments from their existing budgets, with the assurance that the government will directly reimburse the costs up to a clear limit.

The existing framework of the pupil premium grant might be one way in which government quickly identifies the population of school pupils most at need. However, officials should remain mindful that this will not necessarily capture the full scope of pupils that teachers have identified as being left behind by the new circumstances.

### Indication of costs

A primary workbook containing instruction and exercises in a core subject costs roughly £2.50, and £5.00 at secondary. An uplift of £15.00 of funding for the students most in need could therefore be the difference between learning progression or learning loss in Maths, English and Science.<sup>6</sup>

The cost of a print textbook ranges significantly depending on the topic and age-group. For GCSE and A-level students, an essential textbook might cost £10.00 to £40.00. This would then be a tool for the school to re-use with future year-groups.

Finally, schools may need support in the postage and dissemination of resources, where they cannot set up an effective mechanism for pupils to collect packages from school or other pick-up points.

Rough calculations would suggest that making available approximately £30.00 per disadvantaged pupil (e.g. the 723k identified earlier in this paper) would make a significant difference to learners.

N.B: Publishers are already negotiating the prices of their products to help schools make the purchases that are needed. They are willing to further engage in these negotiations as appropriate.

### Logistics & supply chain

A typical supply chain for these resources sees print books go directly to schools. Normally teachers can then hand books directly to students in classrooms as required. Given the new circumstances, this is no longer possible.

Publishers are ready to work with the DfE to find new ways to distribute physical resources. Teachers must continue to play an essential role in this, as they are best placed to assess their student's needs.

#### 1. Delivery through schools

Some schools are effectively distributing resources by producing “packs” that are left in an open space (e.g. in alphabetised stacks in the playground). Pupils can collect these packs at allocated times, to minimise contact. Any uncollected packs are then distributed in the post.

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<sup>6</sup> At 4p a page, printing an equivalent 100-page book in black and white on a school photocopier would cost upwards of £4.00 plus the time taken by the teacher or administrative assistant.

## **2. Delivery through hubs**

There may also be a “click and collect” model that sees resources sent to supermarkets, food banks etc. Teachers could “prescribe” resources for specific pupils, and have the bundles distributed at a preferred pick-up point.

The Publishers Association has several contacts from within publisher logistics teams ready to speak with DfE officials about progressing this thinking. Please do let us know if we can facilitate these introductions.

### **Conclusion**

A quick and practical solution is urgently needed by teachers and pupils who currently do not have the resources they need to teach and learn. Physical workbooks and textbooks represent a high-quality option that is ready to go, with the appropriate financial support as necessary.

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