Written evidence submitted by IntoUniversity

IntoUniversity written submission – The impact of COVID-19 on education and children’s services

Executive summary

The pandemic and the national lockdown are creating an unfolding crisis for the young people we support: already from the most educationally deprived communities, they face a series of new hurdles.

- A digital gulf which sets these students behind their peers, up to six months ‘learning loss’ that will further disadvantage them, and an economic downturn that will make employment even more competitive.
- A survey of our centres found that the majority of our students are using online learning. However, close to half of our centres have reported that almost none of their students have access to their own personal laptop or PC and many students do not have a proper place to study at home.
- In addition, many parents are struggling to support their children’s home learning due to their own educational poverty. Since the beginning of the crisis, we have worked to adapt our programmes to support students and parents remotely. We’re also using qualitative data collected as part of conversations with students and families to inform ongoing adaptations of our programmes.
- Despite this important remote support, after the crisis, our young people will inevitably have missed out on key learning opportunities.
- In the long term, the attainment gap is set to widen - school closures are predicted to reverse the progress made in closing the attainment gap over the last ten years. This gap could increase by up to 75%, according to Education Endowment Foundation analysis.

The relevance of IntoUniversity centres has been amplified by the pandemic; we are uniquely positioned to provide the vital recovery support needed to get young people back on track after the disruption to their learning, caused by school closures. We believe we are best placed to support our students now, and to help them recover from the impacts of the crisis once we are able to reopen our centres.

We are there for the long term and have known these students for a long time, meaning we have developed trusted relationships. During this crisis, we have been regularly contacting our students and their families to ensure we understand the challenges they are facing, enhancing our ability to respond to and support them. Our recovery programme will impact not only the students but also their families and the local community. IntoUniversity delivers a long-term trusted service, contrasting to intensive ‘catch up’ initiatives which only run over a short period of time. Ultimately, our centres provide, and will continue to provide, a critical resource for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, which will support our students to recover from the impacts of the crisis.

At IntoUniversity we are working with our partners both to sustain and extend our 31 vital learning centres, continuing with our ambitious growth plans which will allow us to support thousands more young people across the UK in the years ahead. However, we know this coming academic year will be
crucial in the lives of the most disadvantaged young people as they strive to recover from the severe impacts of the shutdown. We need to take collective action to ensure these students aren’t disadvantaged further and are ultimately able to progress into Higher Education.

About IntoUniversity

IntoUniversity provides 31 local learning centres, based in the heart of communities, where over 40,000 young people each year are inspired to achieve. Our charity exists to tackle inequality and regional imbalance in access to education; young people from the UK’s most disadvantaged postcode districts are 4.7 times less likely to go to university than those in the most advantaged areas (UCAS 2017). In communities across the UK, there are students who can benefit from additional support in order to achieve their ambitions.

At IntoUniversity, we provide the following multi-stranded programme which offers young people support designed to meet their needs at every stage of their development: inspiration at Primary School, support with Secondary transition, mentors to act as role-models, high-quality information, advice and guidance through the Secondary years, support with employment skills and university access:

Academic Support: Our after-school Academic Support sessions encourage young people to become active, independent learners and help them to develop effective study skills. We provide a quiet and safe place to study, as well as skilled tutors and the educational resources that students may not have access to at home.

The FOCUS programme: A series of interactive workshops, career days and trips, introducing students from a young age to the possibility of going to university. The programme raises student’s aspirations and aims to increase students’ knowledge of Higher Education, career opportunities and educational pathways.

Mentoring: Students are paired with university students and young professionals who provide one-to-one academic and pastoral support. Mentors are motivating role models and help students to develop confidence and other soft skills.

Student Enrichment: We provide work experience, internships, and networking opportunities through our Student Enrichment programme, giving students access to opportunities and professional advice from a range of industries.

IntoUniversity takes an innovative and effective place-based approach to address the geographical nature of poverty, inequality and educational underachievement. Our impact evidence shows that our centres can transform the fortunes of disadvantaged young people, providing a gateway to greater adult prosperity and a route out of poverty. Our unique approach is based on the following principles:

We start early - Being certain about Higher Education by age 10 means a child is 2.6 times more likely to end up at a more competitive university than someone who decided in their late teens (UCAS,
Our programmes run from age seven, in order to engage our students with the possibility of university before negative attitudes to learning and future employment options can set in.

**We are inclusive** - Our centres do not only target those deemed to be the ‘brightest’ or most ‘gifted’, we believe that all young people growing up in poverty deserve support to make the best of their lives. Each centre works with at least 1,000 young people in a local neighbourhood each year (once established).

**We are based in the community** - Our research tells us that disadvantage is strongly linked to where people live. Our centres are based in the heart of communities which allows us to forge lasting relationships in the local area. This helps to create a tradition of aspiration, reaching not only the students themselves but also their families and the wider community.

**We are there for the long term** – We won’t open a centre until we have five years’ funding in place. We know from our experience of working in some of the UK’s most under-privileged communities that social inequality is deep-rooted and requires ‘a long-term, sustained commitment’ that needs to be built on ‘consistently over time to have a transformative impact’ (DfE, Unlocking Talent, 2017). We support our students throughout their educational journey to help them achieve the best outcomes. We aim to be a permanent presence in the community, allowing us to provide consistent, pastoral support.

Our data shows that our students significantly out-perform their peers in terms of progression to both HE and the best universities. This data has been assured by PwC (2019):

A. Denotes information forming part of the scope for the external assurance completed by PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP (PwC).
The long-term impact on the most vulnerable groups, including the Department’s approach to free school meals

The pandemic and the national lockdown are creating an unfolding crisis for the young people we support: already from the most educationally deprived communities, they face a series of new hurdles: a digital gulf which sets them behind their peers, up to six months’ ‘learning loss’ that will further disadvantage them, and an economic downturn that will make employment even more competitive.

In the immediate term, these young people are highly vulnerable to the adverse effects of living in close proximity with multiple family members, in crowded accommodation, typically with no access to outside space, and the negative impact this has on mental health (The Lancet, April 2020). Consequently, there is often no space for home study. Our own survey of young people shows that ‘almost none’ of our children has access to their own computer in order to participate in online learning. Where there is IT equipment, often it is shared with other family members. Young people at state schools are half as likely to be engaging in online learning as their independent school peers (The Sutton Trust, 2020). Many parents are struggling to support their children’s education owing to their own educational poverty - fewer than half of parents with no higher education qualifications feel confident supporting home learning (The Sutton Trust, 2020).

In the long term, the attainment gap is set to widen - school closures are predicted to reverse the progress made in closing the attainment gap over the last ten years. This gap could increase by up to 75%, according to Education Endowment Foundation analysis. Anticipated learning losses for disadvantaged students as a result of school closure are estimated to be between four and six months (Elliot Major and Machin, 2020). Employability prospects for these students are also reducing. Formal internships and work experience placements are declining, impacting our students’ ability to gain a competitive edge in the job market, as they lack the personal connections for less formal opportunities (Sutton Trust, 2020).

Testimonials

A Year 11 student who we have worked with since IntoUniversity Bristol South opened, is a thoughtful and diligent student and despite her exams being cancelled, she is still keen to continue her studies, to prepare herself for starting sixth form. However, lockdown has meant that she has to share the family computer to do work, and she describes the atmosphere as noisy and chaotic and so has taken to doing her homework in her room. Without a computer or a desk, she must sit on her bed and use her phone to do all of her GCSE work. It’s students like this child that make me appreciate the impact that Academic Support can have. It’s not just about having someone to help with homework, it’s about having somewhere to do it.’ Centre Leader, IntoUniversity Bristol South

‘One single parent reported that she lacks the skills and confidence to support her Year 5 child with his Maths and English work, therefore has previously taken school letters and homework tasks to the local library, where she can rely on staff to translate the content to her. With that facility currently
unavailable to her, there is very little help she can offer to her son. Although he has been coping relatively well during his periods of independent study, IntoUniversity remains the only academic line of support for the family, as his school is currently closed.’ Centre Leader, IntoUniversity Leeds East

‘As I’m in Year 11 and going into sixth form next year I realise that there may be things I’ll need to catch up on, because I will have gaps in my GCSE knowledge because of missing things in lockdown. I feel quite worried about catching up. I also haven’t felt too confident asking for help from my teachers in lockdown. I find it a lot easier face to face when they are explaining things, rather than having them help me in an email or over the phone, because I find I get confused more easily.’ Year 11 student, IntoUniversity Oxford

‘It’s going to have an effect both academically and socially. One student had a breakdown when coming back to school because it was simply too much after lockdown. They’re probably going to be on catch up for a long time. We haven’t just missed content; the students have actually gone backwards.’ Teacher from a partner school, IntoUniversity Hammersmith

IntoUniversity’s response

Ultimately, our students need us more than ever – both now and after the immediate impact of the crisis. Our response strategy has been specifically tailored to support our students throughout the crisis and to help them recover from the impacts of the pandemic:

Immediate

The COVID-19 crisis has necessitated the temporary closure of all IntoUniversity centres. To ensure our students maintain their educational progress we are providing a remote service based around a three-pronged approach: an online learning platform (Seesaw), email resources and telephone tutorials, to ensure that all students are able to access support regardless of their level of access to devices and the internet. Initial calls were primarily pastoral to gauge how students were coping; whilst this remains an important element, the calls have now transitioned to more structured academic support. In the 11 weeks since the lockdown began staff have made 19,050 successful calls to 3,250 students. Crucially, our staff are able to routinely check in with students on progress and provide feedback on work they have completed which is not always possible for schools at the moment.

Feedback from parents

‘I am so grateful that you have carried on being here, even during the coronavirus. It has helped her to stay in a routine and she feels better about her work and Secondary school. It’s brilliant that she will still be able to come when she is in Year 7.’ Parent, IntoUniversity Kennington

‘I would just like to say a huge thank you for all the work and the effort you are your team are putting in. My wife and I highly appreciate the level of support you have offered my family. The [phone] calls are really appreciated and they are really helping my children’s learning. It is not easy to get this level of support and it is wonderful that you are continuing to call my children every week. In this time when everyone is home schooling you are not just helping with work but you are also checking how things are at home and how they are as individuals and for that my wife and I are very grateful.’ Parent, IntoUniversity Leeds South
**Medium Term**

When our centres reopen (which we anticipate in September 2020), our first priority is to help our students get back on track so that they can recover from the impact of the crisis. We will continue to work in collaboration with schools, universities and corporate partners to deliver our recovery programme, supporting students to catch up.

**Next academic year, support will include:**

**Academic Support** - We will work with over 3,000 students to support them in specific curriculum areas, pairing students in particular need with volunteers to work one-to-one with them where possible. Pastoral care, which is now more important than ever, will also continue to be an important element of the programme.

**Structured Workshops** - We will work with our Primary and Secondary partner schools to deliver our FOCUS programme to help over 40,000 young people recover learning and continue to develop their soft skills.

**Mentoring** - Our mentors will support over 800 young people with academic mentoring sessions on specific curriculum areas to help recover lost learning. This one-to-one support will also help our young people to continue developing their social skills, which will have been delayed due to a lack of socialisation during school and centre closures. Mentors will provide invaluable advice to students in preparing for their futures, such as guidance on the university process and support with CV writing.

**Careers Guidance and Support** - While our support with future aspirations and careers is provided throughout all of the above programmes, we will support over 2,000 young people through our Business in FOCUS, Careers in FOCUS and Student Enrichment programmes. These workshops and internships are designed to give students an insight into different career paths as well as experience to increase their employability.

**Long Term**

When the crisis has passed, we believe that our services will be needed more than ever. Disadvantaged young people are likely to have fallen even further behind. We will sustain our existing centres, keeping students on track and supporting them to access university, or another chosen aspiration, and to secure work in an increasingly competitive employment market.

We are also pressing on with our growth plan to reach new young people in order to address educational inequalities in high-need communities. By 2024 we aim to have added 10 new centres in social mobility cold spots across the UK.

**Learning Recovery Plan**

This coming academic year will be crucial in the lives of the most disadvantaged young people as they strive to recover from the severe impacts of the shutdown. As well as supporting them through the shutdown, we are looking ahead to their needs as young people are able to return to school. To be effective we need to assign specific responsibilities at each centre and across the charity as a whole.

Each of our centres will have a designated ‘Learning Recovery Lead’ who will be responsible for assessing the needs of the 3,500 young people in our Academic Support programme and ensuring
that they each receive the support required to put their learning back on track. To coordinate this work across the charity, we will appoint a new Head of Learning Recovery for the 2020-21 academic year who will be responsible for managing this area of work, ensuring standards and monitoring outputs and outcomes.

Conclusions

Higher Education should be a route open to all young people, irrespective of background. But we have a persistent social mobility problem in the UK which means young people from disadvantaged backgrounds are already half as likely to progress to Higher Education as their peers.

The pandemic and the national lockdown are creating an unfolding crisis for the young people we support which will result in this progression gap increasing. We know in the long term learning loss, availability of digital and tech support, and an increasingly competitive jobs market will all disadvantage these students further.

At IntoUniversity we are determined to support our students both now and in the long term, however we know we need to work together as an industry and alongside policymakers, to ensure that all students in the UK, regardless of background, can successfully progress into Higher Education and employment.

IntoUniversity is also able extend its service to high-need communities where young people are most likely to be the hardest hit by COVID and its economic and educational consequences. IntoUniversity has a strong track record, powerful evidence of impact and a tried-and-tested replication model. We continue to be focused on setting up new centres in local communities and believe it is now more important than ever to ensure our resources are properly directed and maintained so to ensure, as much as is possible, that we can minimise the impact of this pandemic on young people.

We believe it is essential, and call on the Committee, to highlight the importance of cross-sector collaboration such as the excellent new national tutoring initiative with Impetus and the Educational Endowment Foundation, which we hope to contribute to as part of our plans to support with young people’s learning recovery.

To conclude, we recognised the huge difficulties in dealing with the impacts of COVID-19, but we also believe that the government must develop more comprehensive plans to support the charity sector and ensure that the vital support we provide can continue with as little disruption as possible in the event of another national emergency.

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