

The impact of COVID-19 on education and children's services - submission by IntoUniversity

Who we are

We are a national charity that runs 28 local learning centres in 13 towns and cities across England. Each year we support over 40,000 young people from some of the most disadvantaged communities in the country. Throughout the lockdown, we have continued to support our young people remotely, helping them to deal with the mental and educational difficulties they are facing as a result of the pandemic.

Summary of submission

- The online learning offered by schools has not been effective for many of the young people we work with, who have effectively lost a term of learning. Young people from disadvantaged backgrounds are likely to be disproportionately affected by this.
- Students at transition stages have been particularly badly impacted.
- We have seen an increase in safeguarding cases during lockdown.
- After partial reopening of schools, students from disadvantaged backgrounds seem to be less likely to have returned to school than other students.
- There is a risk that the progress made increasing university participation rates among young people from disadvantaged backgrounds could be undone as a result of the pandemic.
- Ongoing targeted support will be needed to support young people to recover from the consequences of the pandemic. We believe the third sector can play a key role here, bringing expertise and resources to support stretched schools.

Evidence

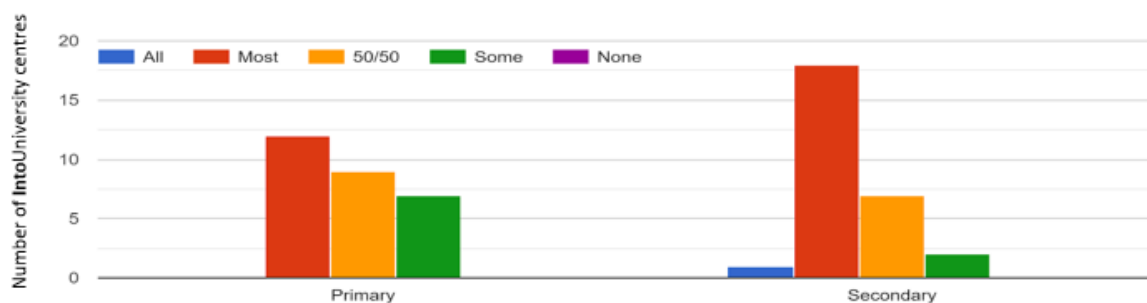
1. Note: much of the evidence in this section comes from a survey of the staff teams at our 28 learning centres. During lockdown, these teams have been providing weekly support to over 3,000 students and their families, giving them considerable insight into the problems the young people we work with are facing.
2. **Online learning has not been effective for many young people, who have effectively lost a term of learning**

Many of the young people we work with have been unable to access online learning regularly, due to lack of suitable devices and/or internet. The following quote from one of our centre staff describes a problem faced by many of our students:

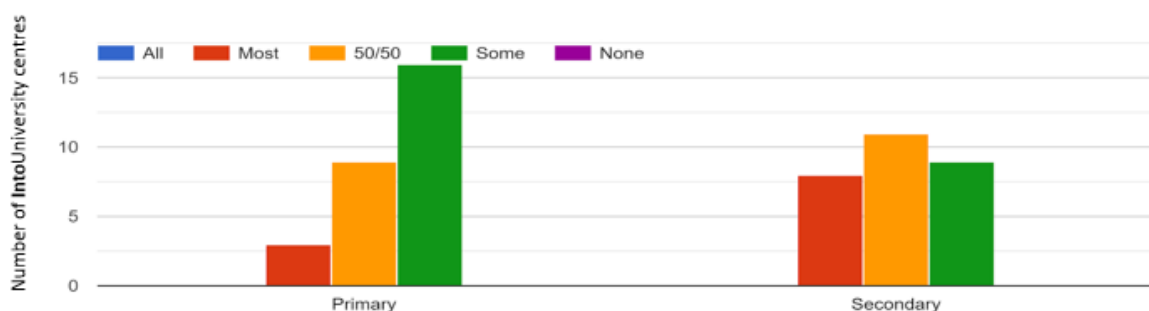
'We spoke with a family of six. The three older students all have to be online during the normal school hours (attending online lessons) and the youngest has been set Primary work online. They only have one laptop, so the older students had to share, meaning that they were not getting their work done and the family were getting calls from both schools saying that the students hadn't been logging on for the whole school day.'

3. Even where students are able to access work, remote provision from schools has been highly varied. While some students are being set appropriate work by schools, having it marked, and receiving feedback and direct support from their teachers, many are not. This is particularly true for primary students. Most of the work that has been set by schools is recapping rather than teaching new things, and so for many of our students a term's worth of learning has been 'lost'.
4. Furthermore, the young people we work with are likely to live in overcrowded conditions, which may mean they have nowhere quiet to study.
5. The following charts show data from a survey of the staff teams at our centres, supporting the points raised above:

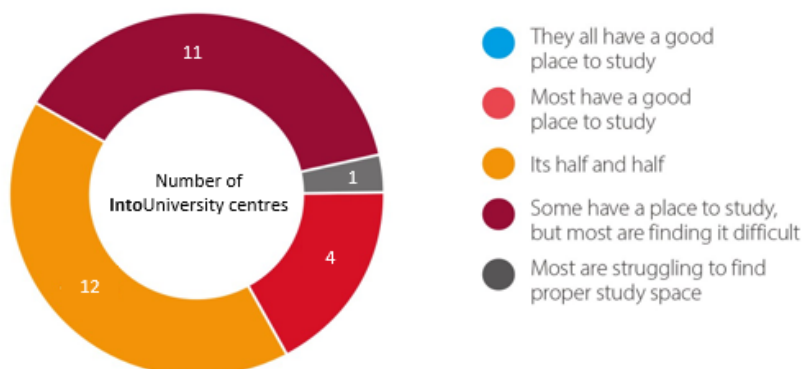
How many of your students are being set enough work by their school?



How many of your students are receiving feedback from their school on their work ?



What proportion of your students have a proper place to study at home?



6. Without action, the gap between the most and least disadvantaged is likely to widen as a result of the pandemic (see [this EEF report](#) for a summary of the evidence). How will the work missed be caught up? Will it be caught up? We are likely to be seeing the effect of this for many years.
7. **Students at transition stages have been particularly badly impacted**
Many of our Year 11 and 13 students have not been set any work by their schools. With their exams cancelled this means they have had no academic work to do since March. Not having to study for GCSEs means that they may have failed to develop the study and revision techniques that they will need for later education. They will effectively need to catch-up on developing these skills. Having not had to revise their GCSE learning, they are also likely to have a less sound grasp of the concepts they have been taught, putting them at a further disadvantage going into their next stage of education.
8. **Safeguarding**
We have dealt with far more safeguarding incidents than we would expect for this time of year (a 50% increase on the same period last year). The incidents that have been recorded this year are much more likely to relate to bereavement or a family in acute stress than during the same period last year.
9. **Students from disadvantaged backgrounds less likely to return to school following partial reopening**
Evidence prior to schools reopening suggested that students from disadvantaged backgrounds were less likely than others to return to school (29% of the poorest primary students, compared to 55% of the richest (see [IFS report](#))).
10. This fits what we have seen from our students - some centres have reported that only one or two of their Year 6 students have returned to school. As a result, we expect these students to fall further behind relative to more affluent students who have returned to school.

11. University access

At this stage it is unclear whether students due to start university this year will defer entry. If significant numbers of students do defer, places are likely to be more competitive next year and this could have a knock-on effect in subsequent years. Young people from less advantaged backgrounds, who tend to achieve less highly at school and are less well-equipped to navigate the application process, are likely to suffer as a result. The government should consider how this can best be ameliorated.

12. Another thing to consider is how accurate schools' predicted grades for Year 13 UCAS applications will be next year, when the students haven't seen their teachers for months.
13. There is also a risk that funding for university Access work will be cut as universities face financial uncertainty in coming months. The Office for Students recently removed the requirement for a minimum spending commitment from Access and Participation Plans, so cutting Access work may seem like an easy way for universities to make savings. The government should make sure that funding for Access work is maintained, so that there is not a backwards slide in this area.

Recommendations

14. There is a substantial body of evidence suggesting that young people from disadvantaged backgrounds are likely to be significantly further disadvantaged by the effects of COVID-19. Our on-the-ground experience of supporting these young people during the pandemic, as detailed above, supports this.
15. Both immediate action and sustained support over a period of years, targeted at the young people who need it most, will be needed. Schools, which are already stretched, are unlikely to be able to fully provide the necessary 'top-up' for students. Third-sector organisations can play a key role in providing this support going forward, bringing expertise and the opportunity to leverage additional funding and resources.

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