

## Written evidence submitted by the British Psychological Society

### **British Psychological Society response to the Education Select Committee**

#### **The impact of COVID-19 on education and children's services**

The British Psychological Society, incorporated by Royal Charter, is the learned and professional body for psychologists in the United Kingdom. We are a registered charity with a total membership of just over 60,000.

Under its Royal Charter, the objective of the British Psychological Society is "to promote the advancement and diffusion of the knowledge of psychology pure and applied and especially to promote the efficiency and usefulness of members by setting up a high standard of professional education and knowledge". We are committed to providing and disseminating evidence-based expertise and advice, engaging with policy and decision makers, and promoting the highest standards in learning and teaching, professional practice and research.

The British Psychological Society is an examining body granting certificates and diplomas in specialist areas of professional applied psychology.

#### **Publication and Queries**

We are content for our response, as well as our name and address, to be made public. We are also content for the Committee to contact us in the future in relation to this inquiry.

#### **About this Response**

##### **The response was led on behalf of the Society by:**

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## British Psychological Society response to the Education Select Committee

### The impact of COVID-19 on education and children's services

The inquiry will look at how the outbreak of COVID-19 is affecting all aspects of the education sector and children's social care system and will scrutinise how the Department for Education is dealing with the situation.

It will examine both short term impacts, such as the effects of school closures and exam cancellations, as well as longer-term implications particularly for the most vulnerable children.

#### **Terms of reference:**

- The implementation of the critical workers policy, including how consistently the definition of 'critical' work is being applied across the country and how schools are supported to remain open for children of critical workers
- The capacity of children's services to support vulnerable children and young people
- The effect of provider closure on the early years sector, including reference to:
  - Children's early development
  - The early years funded entitlement and the childcare market
- The effect of cancelling formal exams, including the fairness of qualifications awarded and pupils' progression to the next stage of education or employment
- Support for pupils and families during closures, including:
  - The consistency of messaging from schools and further and higher education providers on remote learning
  - Children's and young people's mental health and safety outside of the structure and oversight of in-person education
  - The effect on apprenticeships and other workplace-based education courses
- The financial implications of closures for providers (including higher education and independent training providers), pupils and families
- The effect on disadvantaged groups, including the Department's approach to free school meals and the long-term impact on the most vulnerable groups (such as pupils with special educational needs and disabilities and children in need)
- What contingency planning can be done to ensure the resilience of the sector in case of any future national emergency

The British Psychology Society along with 152 organisations has urged the Prime Minister to put children at the heart of the recovery. The full statement can be read [here](#).

#### **The Effect of Cancelling Formal Exams**

A report by Young Minds (2017) found that 80 per cent of young people felt that exam pressure had 'significantly impacted' their mental health.<sup>1</sup> For those students who wish to sit formal examinations this year (and beyond) the Society recommends:

To help reduce test anxiety the government should fund or commission resources in the form of worksheets and toolkits to help students build assessment literacy – not just what is tested in assessments, but how it is tested. Monitoring and evaluation systems should be put in place.

The Department for Education should commission the development of accessible and practical resources for teachers on how to help students develop assessment literacy skills, through teaching revision skills and metacognition, as well as the psychological skills needed to help identify and

support students most at risk of test anxiety.

On the fairness of qualifications awarded research suggests that predicted grades are usually lower than actual grades awarded. Students from working class and BAME backgrounds are particularly disadvantaged by predicted grades. A [letter signed by 21 education and equality academics and experts](#) (led by The Runnymede Trust) highlighted concern that students from lower socio-economic backgrounds, especially higher-attaining students, where grades under-predicted in comparison with their more advantaged peers.

The Society supports the two recommendations from The Runnymede Trust:

1. Provide teachers with more guidance and support on how to ensure more accurate predictions in order to reduce inconsistencies across schools and pupils.
2. Provide teachers and schools with guidance on how to undertake Equality Impact Assessments of final grade predictions. This could involve schools disaggregating final predicted grades by protected characteristics, as well as SEND in order to monitor and reduce inconsistencies across different groups of pupils.

### **Children's and Young People's Mental Health**

Recent research from The Anna Freud Centre has reported upon the key mental health challenges for children and young people during the pandemic. Covid-19 has contributed to the onset as well as exacerbation of worry, fear, anxiety, depression, and posttraumatic stress. There are significant mental health challenges for those who have been hospitalised with the coronavirus. The stay-at-home measures and lack of social interaction is increasingly challenging as the pandemic continues. However, it should be noted, many are also enjoying time at home with their parents or carers and families.<sup>2</sup>

Improving mental health and psychological wellbeing in schools is one of the most important issues currently facing our society. The Society recommends:

The Department for Education and Ofsted should introduce new mental health and wellbeing measures into the school inspection regime that are accompanied by the provision of additional psychological support and guidance for schools.

The creation and implementation of Mental Health Support Teams (MHSTs) were a key element of 'Transforming children and young people's mental health provision: a green paper.' They have yet to make the anticipated impact in schools. Our policy briefing on MHSTs can be found [here](#). The Department for Education should ensure the roll out of MHSTs reaches 100 per cent of children. In the areas of the country where the MHSTs are not currently planned, the government and the NHS must ensure that effective mental health and wellbeing services are in place so the remaining 75–80 per cent of children who will not have immediate access to a MHST are not left behind.

The Education Mental Health Practitioners (EMHPs) and Senior Mental Health Leads should be trained on how to effectively map local needs and consider education settings' differing contexts.

To ensure rigorous evaluation and accountability for the effective and timely delivery of the MHSTs, we recommend establishing a baseline and 'control' sites, using a mixed methods approach and incorporating an embedding process into evaluations to appropriately inform and support effective roll-out in the future.

As well as the Mental Health Support Teams, additional mental health staff should be available in schools, through the provision of additional staff to schools, as well as schools being encouraged to

work together to deliver better support within a local area.

Schools should take a whole school approach to supporting pupils' mental health and wellbeing, including pastoral support, and direct schools to appropriate support services and tools, evidence-based programmes, and methods for supporting children and young people's mental health and wellbeing. A whole school approach to mental health must take account of pupils with specific additional needs, such as SEND.

To ensure good practice, mental health and wellbeing should be embedded throughout the whole school, with a particular emphasis in PSHE lessons.

Schools should 'create a learning environment that helps the whole school community understand the factors impacting on their own and others' present and future mental health and wellbeing.'

### **The Effect on Disadvantaged Groups**

Though the Department for Education introduced a shopping voucher scheme worth £15 a week per child in England, there have been numerous issues with the scheme and its delivery, which is already having adverse outcomes on children. A study by researchers, including a psychologist from the Society's Poverty to Flourishing Campaign's Expert Reference Group, found that 35 per cent of the children eligible for free school meals surveyed reported skipping at least one meal (increased from 25 per cent previously), while just over half had eaten no fresh vegetables in the same time.<sup>3</sup>

The 'digital divide' has been starkly highlighted by the pandemic. The Children's Commissioner and the Sutton Trust have highlighted the dangers of the widening attainment gap.<sup>4,5</sup> The Society welcomes the Department for Education's decision to supply 200,000 laptops and 4G routers to families with disadvantaged secondary school pupils in England. However, the lack of internet access and digital devices for younger children (primary) mean they may not be able to complete school work that is set for them, may cause family tensions and the risk of family conflict. This risks children in poverty falling further behind their more affluent peers. The Society's briefing on Poverty and Covid-19 can be found [here](#).

Psychologists are clear that schools must use the return to school to support children's emotional and social needs and that children are emotionally ready to engage with learning before targeted catch-up interventions are used for raising attainment.

The Society's recommends that, 'Despite the evidence of a widening attainment gap there is good evidence that the use of catch-up interventions can promote accelerated progress. Schools should be supported to identify pupils where this type of focused individual support will be beneficial and make this available.'<sup>6</sup> The Society's guidance, Back to school: using psychological perspectives to support re-engagement and recovery, can be found [here](#).

### **The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on local services for children and families**

The Early Intervention Foundation interviewed heads of early help services, lead practitioners, and head teachers, between March and May 2020. They concluded that, 'The impact of Covid-19 on vulnerable children and families is likely to be profound. It was clear from our research that school closures, social distancing and lockdown measures have seriously affected the ability of services to support children and families at the very time when these children and families are facing even greater challenges.'

Psychologists are concerned that with the easing of lockdown conditions services will face a Tsunami of need from families needing more support, and the impact of additional people seeking support post Covid-19. Accordingly Local Authorities be fully funded to meet their early intervention, prevention, child safeguarding, and SEND duties, thus preventing any problems from getting worse.

	References
	<p>1. Young Minds (2017). Wise up to wellbeing in schools. <a href="http://www.youngminds.org.uk/media/1428/wise-up-prioritisingwellbeing-in-schools.pdf">www.youngminds.org.uk/media/1428/wise-up-prioritisingwellbeing-in-schools.pdf</a></p> <p>2. Anna Freud Centre (2020)– Evidenced Based Practice Unit, Emerging evidence Coronavirus and children and young people’s mental health <a href="https://www.annafreud.org/media/11992/coronavirus-emerging-evidence-issue-2.pdf">https://www.annafreud.org/media/11992/coronavirus-emerging-evidence-issue-2.pdf</a></p> <p>3.The British Psychological Society (2020) Poverty and Covid-19 <a href="https://www.bps.org.uk/sites/www.bps.org.uk/files/Policy/Policy%20-%20Files/Briefing%20paper%20-%20poverty%20and%20Covid-19.pdf">https://www.bps.org.uk/sites/www.bps.org.uk/files/Policy/Policy%20-%20Files/Briefing%20paper%20-%20poverty%20and%20Covid-19.pdf</a></p> <p>4. Children’s Commissioner for England, Tackling the disadvantage gap during the Covid-19 crisis <a href="http://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/cco-tackling-the-disadvantage-gapduring-the-covid-19-crisis.pdf">www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/cco-tackling-the-disadvantage-gapduring-the-covid-19-crisis.pdf</a></p> <p>5. The Sutton Trust, Social Mobility and Covid19. <a href="http://www.suttontrust.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/COVID-19-and-Social-Mobility-1.pdf">www.suttontrust.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/COVID-19-and-Social-Mobility-1.pdf</a></p> <p>6. <a href="https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/projects-and-evaluation/projects/nuffield-early-language-intervention-1/">https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/projects-and-evaluation/projects/nuffield-early-language-intervention-1/</a> and <a href="http://maximisingtas.co.uk/blog/post.php?s=2016-10-30-the-magnificent-seven-the-compelling-evidence-on-ta-impact-andwhere-we-go-next">http://maximisingtas.co.uk/blog/post.php?s=2016-10-30-the-magnificent-seven-the-compelling-evidence-on-ta-impact-andwhere-we-go-next</a></p> <p>7. Early Intervention Foundation, Covid-19 and early intervention Understanding the impact, preparing for recovery. <a href="https://www.eif.org.uk/files/pdf/covid-19-services-impact-recovery.pdf">https://www.eif.org.uk/files/pdf/covid-19-services-impact-recovery.pdf</a></p>

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