

Written evidence submitted by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER)

1 Introduction

1. The National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) is the leading independent provider of education research and insights in the UK.
2. NFER has already submitted one response to the Education Select Committee's inquiry into the impact of COVID-19 on education and children's services, following its series of reports into this issue. This is an additional response following a separate report entitled 'Home learning during Covid-19: Findings from the Understanding Society Longitudinal Study', which relates to the Committee's interest in 'remote learning'.

2 Background

3. The report is based on analysis NFER has undertaken on data from Understanding Society (USoc), a longitudinal study of a representative sample of 40,000 UK households, tracked since 2009 (University of Essex, 2019).
4. In late April 2020, all adults in the USoc sample were invited to complete the first in a series of ad-hoc surveys about how the Covid-19 pandemic had affected them. Although the survey covered a range of topics, the report focused on content related to home schooling and remote learning.
5. It is based on the responses of the parents of over 4,000 school-aged children, and it provides a unique snapshot of home learning activities at a specific point in time – after the first month of home schooling.
6. It is possible that the picture provided will differ from early surveys during the first few weeks of school closures in March and early April. It may also differ from subsequent surveys, as families and schools may have become more familiar with remote schooling. Nevertheless, it contributes to documenting the home learning experience throughout the period of school closures. This can inform how the education system responds once children return to school.
7. Using USoc data, NFER's report describes the types and amount of remote learning provided by schools, the amount of time children and parents spend engaging in and supporting school work at home, and how this relates to household income. In addition, the report examines how many pupils lived with an adult classified as being at increased risk (clinically vulnerable or clinically extremely vulnerable) of serious illness should they contract Covid-19.

3 Key findings

8. NFER can draw the following key findings from its analysis of the survey data.
9. The USoc survey data suggests that during the period of school closures some pupils have spent little or no time engaging in remote learning, and that participation was, on average, poorest amongst those from lower income families and those whose parents had lower levels of education.
10. However, wide variation in the experiences of pupils over and above family income and education level is also evident, suggesting that family income alone will not identify which pupils have made most and least progress while they have not been at school.
11. Almost all pupils received some remote learning tasks from their teachers. However, almost half of exam-year pupils in Years 11 and 13 were not provided with work by their school.
12. Just over half of all pupils taught remotely did not usually have any online lessons, defined as live or real-time lessons. Offline provision, such as worksheets or recorded video, was much more common than 'live' online lessons.
13. Secondary and post-secondary pupils were slightly more likely than primary pupils to have online lessons. However, across all three phases, pupils had access to fewer online than offline lessons.
14. Most pupils spent less than three hours per day on remote learning activities in April 2020. Pupils from higher-income households, and whose parents had higher levels of education, spent the most time on school work at home, particularly at secondary level.
15. In contrast, parents from the lowest-income households spent the most amount of time supporting their child with school work. Parental education was largely unrelated to the amount of time parents spent helping with their child's school work. Parents of primary school children spent more time providing support than parents of secondary school children.
16. At least five per cent of pupils live with an adult who is at very high risk (clinically extremely vulnerable) of serious illness related to Covid-19. A further 19 per cent live with an adult who is at high risk (clinically vulnerable).
17. Pupils from a black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) background (defined as those with at least one BAME parent) and those whose households fall into the lowest income quartile are significantly more likely to live with an at-risk adult.

4 Recommendations

18. Based on analysis of the survey and reviewing the key findings from the reports, NFER drew the following recommendations on the issues of disadvantaged groups and remote learning.

19. Targeted interventions are needed to address the effects of school closures on pupil engagement and attainment. Schools and teachers are best placed to identify which pupils need the most intensive support when schools fully open in September.
20. Government should weight catch-up funding towards schools in disadvantaged areas, using the proportion of Pupil Premium pupils in the funding distribution model.
21. Government should consider what additional support could be made available for Year 11 students as they enter Key Stage 5 or Further Education.
22. Government should support schools in adopting a flexible approach to children from high risk and very high risk households. This could include delaying the enforcement of fines and schools continuing to providing remote or hybrid learning.

5 Full report

23. The full report can be found at:
https://www.nfer.ac.uk/media/4101/home_learning_during_covid_19_findings_from_the_understanding_society_longitudinal_study.pdf

July 2020