

Written evidence submitted by Coram

Call for Evidence The impact of COVID-19 on education and children's services

Background

Coram is the country's oldest children's charity. We have a broad mission and operate on the front-line of many areas affecting children, young people and families - both developing policy and delivering services directly to those who need support.

As a group of specialist organisations, the Coram group addresses four key dimensions of children's services:

- **Children's rights and voice** – as the leading children's rights centre providing the national safety net for access to advocacy for children in and leaving care and specialist provider of legal information and representation in education, family, community care and immigration law.
- **Education and early years** – as the largest provider of external services to primary schools through volunteer reading help, PSHE curriculum and Shakespeare schools and specialist in access to childcare and early years entitlements
- **Adoption and permanent families** – leading adoption agency delivering a regional adoption agency in London, and the national community of practice through CoramBAAF
- **Insight and Innovation** – data analytics, impact evaluation and international research.

We work every year with hundreds of thousands of children, young people and families of every background, supporting the most vulnerable and those most in need of support and advancing the UK wide communities of practice. You can find out more at our website – www.coram.org.uk.

Towards recovery

While the challenge facing children's services was profound long before most of us had heard of Covid-19, our own day-to-day work makes us fully aware that - on a range of measures - this country was already falling short in its duty of care to its children and young people. The impact of Covid-19 has been to exacerbate those trends.

Coram believes that just as the government has mobilised with an unprecedented peace time effort to save jobs through the furlough scheme, we now need to galvanise and deliver an equivalent commitment to the next generation so that they are not the first in history to have poorer prospects than their parents.

Coram has endorsed and informed the recovery plan [statement](#) set out by 160 children's organisations on 30th June, urging the Government to put children at the heart of the nation's recovery planning.

Our policy experts have contributed to the recovery briefings papers that the sector has published covering a range of specialist areas, and our existing activity highlights areas to address that have been magnified by the impact of Covid-19. Key areas include:

- Coram Family and Childcare is calling for a new deal to break the cycle for parents facing no work without childcare and no workforce to provide the childcare by extending support to the fragile early years sector and contributed to the sector's [Early Years recovery briefing](#)
- Coram Ambitious for Adoption (our regional agency delivering adoption services for eight London boroughs) supports the evidence submitted by our membership body the Consortium of Voluntary Adoption Agencies (CVAA) calling for action tackle the delay and in adoption and to secure the resilience and capacity of the sector by restoring the inter-agency fee fund to champion early placement.
- In its [report](#) earlier this month Coram Children's Legal Centre called for an extension to the EU Settlement Scheme beyond 30 June 2021, amid concerns thousands of children's cases remain outstanding, a problem exacerbated by delayed processes caused by Covid-19.
- Coram's [Call for Change](#), published in March this year, set out calls for changes to policy, law and practice that will transform lives and create better chances for children, in areas that include rights and justice, education and families and early years. All of these calls remain valid - if anything the urgency is even greater than pre-Covid-19.

New deal for the next generation

The news has been dominated by the impact of the pandemic, making it easier to forget that many headlines last year highlighted worrying trends and outcomes for children and young people long before lockdown and the current crisis.

The reduction of youth services, lack of access to legal representation, the rise in numbers of children entering care or being excluded from school (highlighted in Coram's 2019 report to government [Unfair Results](#)), [stigmatisation of children in care and care leavers](#), lives lost and scarred due to knife crime and exploitation, and worrying trends in mental health were all causes of concern already. There is now real concern that these will all have been exacerbated by the impact of the pandemic.

We believe that the government, local authorities, charities and professionals now need to respond to three main challenges to mitigate the impact and address the longstanding trends threatening to blight the opportunity of the next generation.

- **Catching up** The first challenge for children's services is to "catch up" – to address the inevitable increase in referrals, and ensure open access support for children and young people at a time when the ecosystem on which they depend – after school activities, youth centres, and community services - are under strain.
- **Better wellbeing** The second challenge as schools re-open, is to champion a new focus on social wellbeing – so building young people's confidence, relationships, and cultural capital is as important as attainment, no matter where they live.
- **Resources** It is clear the sector needs more resources, but the 2019 [NAO report](#) 'Pressures on children's social care' underlined that service delivery levels and outcomes remained unacceptably varied across the country. So we call for more resources, but deployed more effectively, with best practice becoming the norm.

Conclusion

The government has mobilised with an unprecedented peace time effort to save jobs through the furlough scheme and measures that support the economy which will no doubt benefit children and young people too.

But this alone will not sustain or improve the life chances of the next generation. Children and young people now need the government to make an equivalent commitment to them so that they do not become the first generation in history to enjoy poorer prospects and a lower quality of life than the one before. Without such a policy commitment, this remains a clear and present risk, highlighted and exacerbated by the impact of Covid-19.

July 2020