

Written evidence submitted by Shaw Trust

Inquiry into the Impact of Covid-19 on Education, Learning and Skills and Children's Services

Submission by Shaw Trust

Executive Summary and Recommendations

- In one local authority area, where Shaw Trust delivers support for young people, at the height of the pandemic, the number of safeguarding referrals in to the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub reduced by over 40%, compared to the pre Covid position. This was not because children and young people were safer, but because agencies and schools were not seeing young people in order to register concerns.
- GDPR rules have it has been difficult to stay in touch with the young people during lockdown, where support takes place outside of their formal education setting.
- Some young people we work with have expressed fear about the impact of school closure on their grades, because of home learning challenges. There is also a fear amongst some (but not those in our Shaw Education Trust schools) about the subjective views of particular teachers having a potentially negative impact on their grades. The offer of an autumn exam series does not account for the personal and financial situations of disadvantaged young people and their families.
- Ofqual's approach to awarding grades without examination is the most disadvantaging Covid related action, and could have catastrophic consequences. Using historical school performance data will mean many, who have been educated in previously weak schools, will be unjustly affected negatively by the prior performance of others.
- The risk of transference of Coronavirus between students with disabilities and health conditions and staff in specialist provision is greater due to individual high needs and personal care requirements. Personal Protective Equipment is essential in such settings.
Recommendation: The government should issue high needs, specialist provision with the PPE they need.
- There has been a failure to acknowledge and provide children, young people and adult learners with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and other disadvantages, with the digital and Assistive Technologies they need to continue to effectively learn during lockdown. A number live in families that are not able to afford devices and the internet, and also do not have adequate, quiet space at home to learn. This has resulted in increased disadvantage and achievement gaps, which will be hard for them to recover from without additional, focused support over the summer and beyond.

Recommendations:

- Catch-up programmes should be funded long term and focused on SEND, disadvantaged and vulnerable children young and adult learners so the achievement gap does not widen even further. One to one tuition, coaching, fourth term provision and holiday hunger and family support initiatives are also needed.
- DfE should consider what additional 'at home' support children, young people and adult learners with SEND and other disadvantages, and their families need to alleviate learning, financial, accessibility and risk of harm challenges.
- The Pupil Premium rate should be increased to support long term Covid impacts, rather than short term pots of money being given to schools.
- School outreach support provision – joined up at national and local levels – is needed to ensure that every school has access to resources they need, and a channel through which they can be monitored and feed in requirements, as they re-open (e.g. PPE and ICT).
- Young people eligible for Pupil Premium should have an automatic right to funded examinations for the autumn series, directly funded by the government. Operational arrangements for the autumn series must also be released.
- Ofqual should urgently review their appeals process for 2020 results. They should consider, and publish, at speed, their arrangements for examinations in 2021. The criteria for moderation should be reviewed immediately.
- Covid apprenticeship flexibilities do not go far enough. While apprenticeships have been re-developed to be delivered online, many technical apprenticeships need work placements to both conduct training, and complete tests, assessment, and observations.
Recommendation: The Education and Skills Funding Agency and the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education should review, in consultation with the sector, what further flexibilities are needed by providers.
- In the event of spikes of Coronavirus, businesses may not generate enough income to pay the Apprenticeship Levy. We need an apprenticeship system and funding framework.
- **Recommendation:** The government should undertake a review of Apprenticeship Levy spend, so it can withstand pandemic surges, and in the light of any extra measures and spend by providers, support learners properly. We support the Business Services Association's call for the temporary relaxation of the minimum course duration of Apprenticeship Levy funded training, so funds can be spent on courses that are shorter than 12 months.

About Shaw Trust

Shaw Trust helps people improve their life outcomes, and be the best they possibly can. We do this through employment, education and care services. We primarily help

people with complex needs through a range of services, such as apprenticeships, careers advice and our children's homes.

Shaw Education Trust (SET), part of the Shaw Trust Group, is a multi-academy trust based in the North West and Midlands. The Trust supports 23 schools across all key stages; from foundation to key stage 5, in both special and mainstream sectors. The portfolio includes several outstanding academies; three teaching school alliances; an outstanding School Centred Initial Teacher Training provision and a Research School.

Each year, our Children and Families services work with thousands of children and young people helping to build the skills they need for the future. We work with some of the country's most vulnerable children and young people. They are often at risk of poor educational attainment, social exclusion, abuse, exploitation and substance misuse. By working with them from their early to teenage years, we can improve their life chances and support transition into adulthood.

Homes2Inspire Ltd, is also part of Shaw Trust. It is a medium size Children's homes provider based predominantly in the East and West Midlands. It currently has 27 registered children's homes, with 108 places.

Shaw Trust delivers learning and skills programmes across England which develops and provides a wide range of advanced learner loans, apprenticeships and traineeships.

Response to consultation questions

Implementation of the critical workers policy

From our Children's Services provision in Gloucestershire, we are seeing that some schools in this local authority area did not open and it is difficult for parents, whether working or staying at home, to get their children to the alternative on offer. In Gloucestershire, summer holiday childcare provision is down from approximately two hundred settings last year, to approximately a hundred this summer.

Across our provision, from February, schools were unable to allow our advisory teams to deliver Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) to pupils. From Easter, we were able to provide our services to their general school population via digital platforms.

There is more still to do to focus both face to face and digital support on the children of key workers, and disadvantaged and vulnerable learners, in the event of more school closures. Schools struggled to refer eligible learners because school staffing was not stable. Many teachers were on a rota, so it was difficult to get continuity and momentum to increase the delivery of services and projects for vulnerable learners, who most needed them.

Shaw Education Trust (SET) opened all of their 23 provisions, including holiday cover and foodbank provision for critical workers and vulnerable students/families.

SET worked with Principals to: complete risk assessments; provide PPE where needed; train staff; quality assure decision making; create a COVID taskforce; write new policy and procedural documentation; deliver a Covid strategy; and provide robust governance to enable schools to open during such a difficult time. SET adhered to all the guidelines as to who qualified as critical workers, even when definitions changed quickly.

Capacity of children's services to support vulnerable children and young people

In Gloucestershire, our contract with the local authority includes a substance misuse service, young people's housing advice service, youth crime prevention, youth offending service and youth work provision. Many of the young people we work with in the county have had difficulty in accessing education, with those in, or needing, Alternative Provision experiencing particular challenges.

Education providers may not want to take on young people who have been in the criminal justice system. For some of our looked after children, going into Alternative Provision, where they do not know the place or people, presents particular challenges. Alternative Provision has also not been widely available during the Covid-19 crisis.

We saw instances of vulnerable families, whose children should have been in school, sometimes refusing to send them back. Little can be done in such situation. It resulted in those most disadvantaged, and most behind in their learning, becoming more so.

At the 'height of the pandemic' the number of safeguarding referrals in to the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) in Gloucestershire reduced by over 40%, compared to the pre Covid position. This was not because children and young people were safer, but because agencies and some schools were not seeing the young people in order to register concerns. As lockdown eases, activity is rising and it is anticipated that referrals may increase and surpass previous reporting levels.

We are trying to continue to support children and young people on our provision, who are not in school during the current crisis, via phone, text messaging and social media. Because these contacts sit outside of the formal education setting, a number of schools did not pass on contact details for us to maintain contact with these young people, because of GDPR rules. For school leavers, this makes it more difficult for us to provide them support with transitioning from education to further education, training or employment.

SET has worked with all its local authorities to secure safeguarding for those not attending school during the pandemic. This has included staff completing face to face well-being checks and conducting care calls and referring to MASH. Vulnerable young people were strongly encouraged to attend schools and this was followed up by designated staff in each provision.

Effect of cancelling formal exams, including the fairness of qualifications awarded and pupils' progression to the next stage of education or employment

Where possible, Shaw Trust has made contact with Year 11 leavers on our provision, who are not able to take exams. We have provided a number of Year 11 leavers with advice and guidance and intend to support them through webinars and digitally delivered transition events, where students can speak with admissions tutors in sixth forms and colleges.

It is not easy for our Children's Services division to plan for a return to face to face services from September onwards (this is not the case for our SET provision). Asking schools to send us their risk assessments has been very slow. Some schools will stick with digital delivery, if we cannot be physically, accommodated, or we will run services after school hours, because young people have so much other work to catch up on.

Anecdotally, some of the young people we work with through our children's services division have expressed concern to us that their mock exams, which they did not work so hard to revise for, are now critical to their future. Fear has also been expressed about the potentially subjective view of particular teachers having a significant influence on the grade they are awarded. Those who are on 'borderline' grades are the most concerned about the outcome of the revised grading system. However, it is important to note that this has not been reported by pupils in our SET schools.

Some are unsure whether their September Offer is still valid. Some Year 11 have had significant contact from their school, but others have had none (again, this is not the case with our SET provision). Some fear making rushed course and career decisions. Some are confused about the possible re-sit options and what this could entail.

The chaotic, fractured education and home backgrounds of vulnerable young people can impede mock exam preparations and course work, and impact on grades. Children and young people in our Homes2Inspire provision may have experienced trauma, abuse and mental health problems in their lives, which makes it difficult for them to perform well at school and achieve good grades.

The approach Ofqual is taking to awarding grades without examination is the singular most disadvantaging Covid related action taken to date, and could have catastrophic consequences. By deciding that the historical performance data of a school is a key determinant in the moderation of Centre Assessed Grades will mean many young people, who have been educated in previously weak schools, will be adversely affected by the prior performance of others. The significant amount of support and intervention provided by schools and teachers, and remarkable effort by young people, will not be considered, when comparable outcome bell curves are applied. This will only serve to further repress the bottom, often forgotten, third of

young people, who will become even more disadvantaged through no fault of their own.

Ofqual should review, as a matter of urgency, their appeals process for 2020 results. They should consider and publish, at speed, their arrangements for examinations in 2021. The criteria for Centre Assessed Grades moderation should be reviewed immediately, and again in 2021.

The offer of an autumn exam series once young people are moved to the next stage of their education does not account for the situation of the disadvantaged. They will not have the money, means, or inclination to pursue their educational right of a fair examination of their skills, talents, and abilities. Operational arrangements for the autumn series must be released.

Support for pupils and families during closures

- PPE

In April, SET colleagues reported that no additional supply of PPE had been provided by the centre to specialist, high needs schools. This had to be addressed by the SET, as an essential component of opening safely, given the risk of transference of the Coronavirus between high needs students with disabilities and health conditions and staff in specialist provision. Without PPE, pupils would have not been able to safely attend school. The government should issue all such high needs, specialist provisions with adequate PPE supplies to help to make sure that colleagues and pupils can protect themselves during the pandemic.

Remote learning: ICT equipment and online classes

During the Covid-19 crisis, the supply and accessibility of digital equipment, the internet and online classes, has not always considered the specific needs of the children, young people and adult learners with SEND, or/and living in poverty, or with other disadvantages.

There was a failure to acknowledge and detail early enough how children, young people and adult learners with SEND and additional accessibility needs – and those living in poverty -- might access Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) tailored to their specific requirements, and the internet, and provide for this need.

A number of learners with SEND and other disadvantages live in families not able to afford ICT equipment and the internet. Many do not have quiet space at home to learn, because of financial constraints. These issues may be particularly acute for children in care. Our Homes to Inspire children's homes reached out to local authorities for tablets to support the education and contact of our looked after children and young people during lockdown. The majority responded positively, and the tablets issued have been very effective and appreciated. We have refreshed our staff training on online safe guarding, so we can highlight and monitor the dangers of online harm.

The government's initiative to issue laptops to young people with social workers is a crucial step forward but delivery needs to be fast. SET colleagues reported that equipment was not delivered until the second week in July.

Our Children's Services colleagues saw very variable, patchy provision of online classes from schools during lockdown. For some children, there was highly regimented regime of six hours of classes online every day, while for others there is a much less structured regime.

Young people in our Children's Services provision overwhelmingly prefer face to face interactions with services. Our Supported Interns really struggle with digital delivery only. They are missing the work experience aspects of the Programme. In a number of our Supported Internships that we run, commissioners have extended us/young people's stay by 3 months.

Children's and young people's mental health and safety outside of the structure and oversight of in-person education

As set out above, the lack of in person education provision has seen a direct reduction in referrals to the MASH regarding issues of concern. This leaves children and young people at greater risk of harm and physical and mental ill health.

In our Gloucestershire provision, lack of education and youth activity is a risk factor in terms of re-offending, for example. Also, the exploitation risk is higher with less services in place and less face to face contact with youth workers. Children in care may find lockdown rules particularly difficult, as they are separated from their family and friends.

The effect on apprenticeships and other workplace-based education courses

Shaw Trust has had to shift delivery online and front load the theory/knowledge aspects of our learning and skills courses and our Supported Internships, as opposed to on the job training, during the pandemic. This is until such time as work based activity can continue safely.

Current Covid apprenticeship flexibilities do not go far enough. While apprenticeships have been re-developed for online delivery, there are many technical apprenticeships that need work placements to conduct training, complete tests and assessment, and observations. The Education and Skills Funding Agency and the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education should review flexibilities going forward in consultation with the sector.

The financial implications of closures for providers, pupils and families

In the event of spikes of Coronavirus, businesses may not generate enough income to pay the Apprenticeship Levy. We need an apprenticeship system and funding framework. The government should undertake a review of Apprenticeship Levy spend, so it can withstand pandemic surges.

Furthermore, any auditing of Levy providers must take full account of measures and spend needed to support learners with SEND and other disadvantages or vulnerabilities. The government should undertake a review of Apprenticeship Levy spend, in the event of a second wave of Coronavirus, and in the light of measures providers need to take to support learners.

We support the Business Services Association's call for the temporary relaxation of the minimum course duration of Apprenticeship Levy funded training, so that funds can be spent on courses that are shorter than 12 months.¹ Neither Furlough nor Kickstarter currently work with Apprenticeship Levy Funding. This is a lost opportunity that could be remedied with this simple temporary adjustment.

The effect on disadvantaged groups, including the Department's approach to free school meals and the long-term impact on the most vulnerable groups

Free school meals provision during lockdown has been disjointed, delayed and reactive. SET took quick direct action to prevent vulnerable families from going hungry. In Great Barr in Birmingham, one of the most disadvantaged areas of the city, SET colleagues opened and staffed a food bank. Seven more SET school-based food banks have been set up. The Shaw Trust Foundation, the recently established charitable heart of Shaw Trust, has made a donation towards the cost.

The large attainment gaps faced by SEND and disadvantaged pupils and students is set to widen even further, as a result of the lockdown learning access issues highlighted in this submission.

We recommend catch-up classes should be focused on SEND, disadvantaged and vulnerable learners, and others in receipt of the Pupil Premium, so the attainment gap does not widen further. This should be based on one to one tuition, and the Pupil Premium rate should be increased to support it. In particular, the government should bring together universities, tutors, charities to work together to innovate in tackling the education gaps created by Covid-19. Young people eligible for Pupil Premium should have an automatic right to funded examinations for the autumn series, directly funded by the government.

Contingency planning to ensure future emergency resilience

School outreach support provision – joined up at national and local levels – should be established to ensure that every school has access to resources they need, and a channel through which they can be monitored and feed in any requirements, as they re-open (e.g. PPE and ICT).

The DfE should also consider what additional at 'home support' children, young people, and adult learners, with SEND and other disadvantages, and their families need to alleviate learning, financial, accessibility and risk of harm challenges. We welcome the government's announcement of grants for children with disabilities and

¹ <https://www.bsa-org.com/bsa-proposal-temporary-relaxation-apprenticeship-rules-response-covid-19-health-economic-crisis/>

complex needs and their families, but a comprehensive, long term system of grants and loans is needed.

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