Covid's impact on young people's post-18 plans and access to higher education outreach

How Aspire to HE can support pupils from the Black Country and Telford and Wrekin following the pandemic

Billy Huband-Thompson, Vanessa Joshua and Ellie Mulcahy

'Society should ensure that all children and young people make a fulfilling transition to adulthood'

Billy Huband-Thompson is a Junior Associate at The Centre For Education and Youth. Billy tracks new policy developments and helps ensure the organisation's reports and campaigns are driven by the best available evidence. He has worked on a range of research, policy and evaluation projects. Prior to CfEY, Billy worked in Teach First's research team, where he managed evaluations of the charity's Early Years Training and Careers Leader programmes. He also co-authored the Thriving Schools report, which focused on schools achieving high student outcomes and positive working conditions. Billy holds a BSc from the University of Bristol and an MPhil from the University of Cambridge.

Vanessa Joshua is a Junior Associate at The Centre for Education and Youth. Vanessa has recently worked on an evaluation of a programme focused on reducing harm from gambling addiction, a project exploring cross-service collaboration in Rochdale and a report for Kings College London, exploring university participation among young people with insecure immigration status. Previously, she worked as a teaching assistant in primary and secondary schools. Vanessa holds a BA in History, and is currently completing an MA in Global Ethics and Human Values.

Ellie Mulcahy is Head of Research at The Centre for Education and Youth. She has carried out research into a wide range of education and youth issues including widening participation, youth homelessness and the impact of literacy interventions in prisons. She is a co-author of CfEY's recently published book with Routledge, 'Young People on the Margins' as well as a number of high-profile research reports including three previous reports in this series on inequalities in higher education. She previously worked as a reception teacher having joined the founding cohort of the Teach First Early Years programme and worked alongside Teach First to develop the Early Years Programme and as a researcher for Teach First and the Behavioural Insights Team.

'Society should ensure that all children and young people make a fulfilling transition to adulthood'

1   Executive Summary

Background and rationale

While young people are less likely to be affected by the health implications of Covid-19, they are much more likely to suffer its educational and economic consequences. The pandemic has shaken the educational landscape, providing challenges across all parts of the sector. School closures threaten to widen the 'attainment gap', with 'learning loss' highest among pupils in high-FSM[1] primary and secondary schools (Van den Brande & Andrews, 2021; EEF 2020). This is concerning for those interested in widening participation, as academic achievement is the key predictor of higher education (HE) participation (Chowdry et al., 2013).

A shift from in-person to online information, advice and guidance (IAG) has also posed considerable challenges, in terms of both digital access and effectiveness of online provision. Furthermore, there are concerns about a potential squeeze on university places, fewer apprenticeship offers and a challenging labour market. This combination of factors has the potential to change the post-18 aspirations and destinations of young people in the Black Country and Telford and Wrekin.

Methodology and research questions

Aspire to HE, the UniConnect partnership at the University of Wolverhampton, seeks to better understand these shifts and any changes to pupils' needs in order to support them in the future. Therefore, this report draws together findings from a literature review and qualitative fieldwork including interviews and focus groups with pupils, a pupil survey, and interviews with teachers to address the following research questions:

1. Have the needs of young people in the Black Country and Telford and Wrekin changed as a result of the pandemic? If so, how?
2. How does virtual delivery of HE outreach compare to in-person delivery?
3. What are the implications for Aspire to HE's future delivery/activities?

Findings

We found that the pandemic had impacted Aspire to HE's target pupils' access to information about HE as well as their attitudes, future plans and aspirations, in the following ways:

- **A lack of access to IAG during the pandemic means pupils are less informed about their options.** During school closures, young people were less likely to access IAG about their post-18 options and more reliant on family and friends for information. Disadvantaged young people were less likely to access high-quality information, in part due to the digital divide, and therefore teachers feel pupils are less likely to be well equipped to make decisions about their futures.
- **Young people are generally more uncertain and less positive about their futures and the HE options available to them, compared to before the pandemic.** Pupils are worried about the number of university and apprenticeships places available and what educational disruption might mean for their ability to thrive in higher education.
- **Young people were aware of the context of the labour market and the impact of the pandemic on HE students' experiences and graduate**

---

[1] 'High' refers to those schools with more than 25% of pupils eligible for FSM (*ibid.,* p. 34)

opportunities, leading to more negative attitudes towards HE. With a considerable rise in youth unemployment and use of the furlough scheme during the pandemic, many young people had become more concerned with receiving an income as soon as possible, which led some to question the merits of university. Moreover, with remote teaching forming a key part of university life over the last two academic years, many were concerned that university was not a good investment. On the other hand, the 'earn and learn' model of apprenticeships was increasingly attractive to some pupils.

- **Young people had a number of concerns about their next steps and in some cases had adjusted their aspirations as a result.** Worries about obtaining part-time work while studying, lack of knowledge around Student Finance, and longer-term concerns about vulnerable economic sectors led many young people to rethink their options and adjust their aspirations.
- **The pandemic also affected young people's needs in other ways, including a negative impact on their mental health and an increase in social concerns regarding HE.** As reflected in the literature, young people we spoke to reported mental health concerns among their peers, with anxiety surrounding disruption to assessment methods. In addition, many young people were worried that a lack of social interaction over the last year would make it harder for them to make post-18 transitions, which could affect HE retention.

The fieldwork also revealed a number of barriers to engagement with online outreach, including digital poverty, poor home learning environments, reduced opportunity for active participation and accessibility issues with online resources. That said, there were some benefits to virtual delivery, particularly around flexibility and cost, which could support Aspire to HE's outreach offer in the future.

The findings provide clear guidance on the type of outreach and the content of IAG that Aspire to HE should prioritise in the next year. Target pupils had clear recommendations for the topics and activities they felt would be most beneficial after the pandemic:
- Pastoral support and advice on moving away
- Financial support
- Curricular ties
- Understanding a range of universities
- Navigating processes
- Interaction with people that have experienced different routes
- Trips to potential post-18 destinations
- Connecting post-18 destinations to careers
- Alternatives routes

Online practice has many limitations but, with good implementation, it could bring some benefits to Aspire to HE's WP offer. Aspire should, therefore, implement the following recommendations to incorporate elements of best practice in virtual delivery to their future offer:
- Ensuring digital access and compatibility
- Taking good pedagogical practice online
- Integrate online elements to in-person events to make use of the flexibility of online provision while retaining the benefits of in-person
- Develop pupils skills to navigate online information independently
- Share good practice across the HE outreach sector.
- Work with external partners

'Society should ensure that all children and young people make a fulfilling transition to adulthood'

2   Introduction

While young people are less likely to be affected by the health implications of Covid-19, they are much more likely to suffer its educational and economic consequences. The pandemic has shaken the educational landscape, providing challenges across all parts of the sector. School closures threaten to widen the 'attainment gap', with 'learning loss' highest among pupils in high-FSM[2] primary and secondary schools (Van den Brande & Andrews, 2021; EEF 2020). This is concerning for those interested in widening participation, as academic achievement is the key predictor of higher education (HE) participation (Chowdry et al., 2013).

A shift from in-person to online information, advice and guidance (IAG) has also posed considerable challenges, in terms of both digital access and effectiveness of online provision. Furthermore, there are concerns about a potential squeeze on university places, fewer apprenticeship offers and a challenging labour market. This combination of factors has the potential to change the post-18 aspirations and destinations of young people in the Black Country and Telford and Wrekin.

Aspire to HE, the UniConnect partnership at the University of Wolverhampton, seeks to better understand these shifts and any changes to pupils' needs in order to support them in the future. Therefore, this report addresses the following three research questions:
4. Have the needs of young people in the Black Country and Telford and Wrekin changed as a result of the pandemic? If so, how?
5. How does virtual delivery of HE outreach compare to in-person delivery?
6. What are the implications for Aspire to HE's future delivery/activities?

---

[2] 'High' refers to those schools with more than 25% of pupil eligible for FSM (*ibid.,* p. 34)

'Society should ensure that all children and young people make a fulfilling transition to adulthood'

3   Methodology

This report addresses three research questions:
1. Have the needs of young people in the Black Country and Telford and Wrekin changed as a result of the pandemic? If so, how?
2. How does virtual delivery of HE outreach compare to in-person delivery?
3. What are the implications for Aspire to HE's future delivery/activities?

It draws together a literature review of studies published following the first Covid-19 lockdown in March 2020, a pupil survey and additional qualitative research conducted in spring 2021.

To address the above research questions, the literature review and all elements of the fieldwork consider young people's:
- aspirations;
- attitudes towards higher education and careers;
- understanding of the changes to the labour market, and,
- concerns about their education or their future.

The literature search included grey and academic literature published since the start of the pandemic in March 2020.

The pupil survey consisted of a yes/no question about participation in outreach activities and three open response questions:
1. What did you think about doing these activities online compared to doing them in-person?
2. Do you have worries or concerns about what you are going to do when you finish school or college?
3. Aspire to HE is an organisation that works to improve access to university for young people and provides them with the knowledge to make informed decisions about their future. In the future, what should Aspire to HE do to help you plan your next steps after school/college?

The qualitative fieldwork with pupils and teachers included:
- Nine semi-structured interviews with teachers across four schools/colleges in Black Country and Telford and Wrekin
- Four semi-structured interviews with year 12 pupils across two schools/colleges
- A focus group with six year 10 students
- A qualitative pupil survey completed by:
  o year 12 pupils (n=29)
  o year 10 pupils (n=6)
  o year 13 pupils (n=2)

Survey responses were coded and interviews and focus groups were transcribed and coded thematically, before triangulation. The literature review and fieldwork components are brought together to address the research questions thematically.

4 Changes to pupils' needs during the Covid-19 pandemic

4.1 Access to IAG and HE outreach

There was a consensus among teachers we spoke to that young people had been less able to access information about their post-18 options during the pandemic and this had a detrimental impact on their knowledge of HE opportunities.

"They are nowhere near as equipped with knowledge as our students would have been two years ago in the same position"

<div align="right">Teacher</div>

Teachers noted that since the start of school closures in March 2020, pupils received reduced careers provision, meaning they had missed out on opportunities to learn about the labour market, university, apprenticeships, and other IAG.

Reliance on family support

With a reduction in school and college support, several teachers and pupils felt young people had often been reliant on family and friends for IAG. Previous research suggests that adults surrounding young people, such as parents and teachers, can play a mediating role in decisions about their futures (Harrison & Waller 2018). However, teachers highlighted concerns that pupils in Aspire to HE's target cohort were least likely to have the support they needed at home. Echoing this, pupils spoke of peers who would be the first in their family to go into HE finding it difficult to access information and support.

"She's one of the first to plan to get to uni, and so she's found it really hard to figure out who to go to about it. Obviously her family and friends haven't really gone to uni...that information is quite valuable, and would help a lot of people."

<div align="right">Year 12 pupil</div>

In April 2020, The Sutton Trust reported that parents with undergraduate and postgraduate degrees felt more confident supporting remote learning than those with A Level or GCSE level qualifications. This possibly extends to parents' confidence regarding post-18 IAG and support, whereby those with first-hand experience of HE feel in a stronger position to explore HE opportunities with their children. Indeed, in a survey of widening participation staff in spring 2020, one practitioner notes that children who do not have a relationship with a parent or other adult who has knowledge of HE are particularly vulnerable to the consequences of missed outreach (Mountford-Zimdars and Moores, 2020). One teacher we interviewed cited concerns that misconceptions, such as those surrounding student debt, may have been passed on through parents during the pandemic and there was less opportunity for schools and colleges to dispel these misconceptions.

The digital divide

Although schools and outreach organisations made efforts to transition outreach online during school closures, teachers reported that issues around digital access meant that many of the young people who could benefit most from IAG missed out on it. This aligns with a wealth of recent research which suggests many economically disadvantaged

'Society should ensure that all children and young people make a fulfilling transition to adulthood'

pupils have struggled to access remote learning, often due to lack of an appropriate device and/or a stable internet connection (The Sutton Trust 2021).

Impact of reduced access to IAG

Reduced access to IAG could adversely affect young people's post-18 decision-making. While some young people we surveyed were clear on their future pathways, the majority had worries about their futures. Many felt they lacked knowledge and were fearful of the long-term consequences of 'getting it wrong'. One year 12 interviewee had recently become interested in university but felt she did not have much knowledge of this pathway. Another year 12 survey respondent worried that their post-18 decisions might limit their ability to switch profession, were they to discover a more appealing job in the future.

4.2 Young people's attitudes to their post-18 options

Pupils and teachers reported that young people's attitudes towards post-18 options had been affected by the pandemic. One teacher described a sense of helplessness among students in regards to their post-18 decision-making, following school closures, changes to Covid-19 measures and alterations to examinations. Another said that the pandemic had delayed their pupils' post-18 decision-making processes. Moreover, responses to the pupil survey revealed great levels of uncertainty, with pupils holding concerns about course choices, course eligibility, and the trade-offs of different post-18 options. One year 12 pupil explained that they were now likely to scale down their plans, or not make plans at all, due to the uncertainty created by the pandemic:

"I think that's one thing that's happened because of the pandemic; I'm trying not to plan too far ahead just in case something happens along the way ... If more plans get knocked down, it's just kind of a little bit disheartening. So I'm sort of like trying not to plan too far ahead, just so I can have much smaller goals."

<div align="right">Year 12 pupil</div>

Even where the pandemic had not altered young people's plans, some reported less positive attitudes towards their post-18 options. One year 12 explained that they were previously excited about university but now it was a more functional step, rather than a rite of passage or a transition to be proud of.

While it is not possible to determine whether regular IAG would have neutralised pandemic-related concerns entirely, numerous comments about the loss of IAG, outreach experiences and other forms of support suggest young people connect the loss of these opportunities with the uncertainty they now feel about their future.

Indeed, teachers believed that the attitudes of their pupils may be particularly affected by a loss of IAG, which had previously served to dispel commonly held misconceptions or challenge narrow aspirations. One school leader described their local area as a university cold-spot, with an inter-generational legacy of industrial work. Others noted gendered decision-making, with men opting for construction and women caring roles. HE outreach work in these schools had been tailored to pupils' circumstances and addressing place-based, social, financial and other barriers they may face. For example, a teacher explained that some of the post-16/18 and careers work they did with their pupils centred on dispelling myths about 'posh' elite university students being inherently cleverer than them. Teachers worried that the loss of these sessions during the

'Society should ensure that all children and young people make a fulfilling transition to adulthood'

pandemic would affect disadvantaged pupils' post-18 attitudes, while more affluent pupils would likely maintain a favourable view of HE.

The pandemic also appeared to have shifted pupils' attitudes to HE as they held Covid-specific concerns. These concerns appear to have flourished in the absence of access to IAG with friends, family, media and other outlets strongly shaping HE attitudes in several ways. Concerns included:

- **Post-16 disruption**: Some young people were concerned about disruption to post-16 pathways and what this could mean for post-18 destinations. One pupil, for instance, worried that certain courses at sixth form or college would not be available due to Covid-19, which could affect their ability to access their desired post-18 pathway.
- **University experience:** Teachers noted that many pupils had mentioned negative perceptions of university, partly as a result of media coverage of universities and reports from older siblings who felt short-changed by their university experience during the pandemic. One teacher explained that this Covid-related disruption and uncertainty had led many pupils to want take a break from education altogether, putting any plans to attend university on hold.
- **Job prospects:** One year 12 interviewee was sceptical of university, having had graduate family members work in non-graduate jobs. A teacher felt this narrative was commonplace prior to the pandemic, with pupils feeling that they could end up in what they saw as undesirable jobs (such as fast food), even with a degree. However, there is a danger that these narratives may be reinforced as result of the pandemic, given the further saturated graduate jobs market.
- **Attractiveness of graduate jobs:** Attitudes to different careers also appeared to have been affected by the pandemic's impact on specific sectors. One teacher recalled a year 12 telling them that they would not consider being a teacher (a graduate role) as they had seen how difficult it had been. In contrast, she felt that the pandemic had led some pupils to view careers in healthcare more favourably.
- **Desire for 'practical' jobs**: Several teacher and pupil interviewees felt young people increasingly wanted to leave the school environment, with more opting for college and to study more vocational subjects, rather than A-Levels, than in a typical year. A teacher felt this may have been due to being confined indoors during lockdown, struggling with online schooling in academic subjects and wanting a clean break from that experience.

4.3 Changes to post-18 plans and aspirations

Surveys conducted around the time of the first lockdown suggest young people's attitudes towards their futures may have changed as a result of the pandemic:

- More than a quarter of young people (aged 16-25) felt their future career prospects had been damaged by the pandemic, with just under half saying it will be harder than ever to get a job (The Prince's Trust & YouGov, 2020).
- 58% of young people surveyed in late March and early April 2020 said that "Covid-19 has left them unsure about their futures" (National Youth Trends 2020, p.13).
- Public First (2021) polling suggests the pandemic continues to cause uncertainty surrounding young people's futures: 30% of 18-24 year olds agreed with the statement that "I have lost all hope for the future as a result of Covid" (*ibid*).

- A quarter of parents expect that the pandemic will negatively impact their children's attitudes to education and their future while only 16% expect it to have a positive impact (Public First, 2021).

The literature raises particular concerns about disadvantaged pupils. A survey of 230 young people aged 16+ in England found that more than three-quarters of pupils reportedly had plans in place for the future but this figure was only two-thirds among Free School Meals pupils (Yeeles et al. 2020).

Reflecting these findings, the majority of young people (30) we surveyed reported worries about their next steps. Over a third of year 12s were unsure what they wanted to do once they left school/college, while others did not know which courses they should take and what options would be available to them.

However, teacher interviewees noted that while they were concerned about the impact on aspirations among pupils at the cusp of their post-16/18 decision-making, for younger pupils there was sufficient time to broaden their outlooks in terms of future pathways. They highlighted that even in typical circumstances pupils' aspirations are subject to frequent change.

"Kids are quite transient with their aspirations (…) when we're looking at those key stage three students. And they're also quite easily influenced, so I feel like we've got enough time to help to broaden their horizons a little bit"
Teacher

Nevertheless, teachers generally felt that many young people's aspirations and/or post-18 plans had been negatively influenced by the pandemic, either due to a lack of IAG and in-person outreach or changes in opinions and priorities. As discussed in section 4.1 teachers felt that pupils from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds with parents who have no experience of HE would be most severely affected.

Our research found that young people's concerns about their post-18 plans and changes to their aspirations centred around three main themes:
1. Unemployment and income
2. Educational disruption
3. Bargaining power in the labour market

These themes are explored in detail below.

Youth unemployment and income

The young people we spoke with were mindful of the current economic context. Indeed, research carried out since the beginning of the pandemic highlights that young people are, now and in future, most likely to experience negative economic impacts:
- In the space of a year, the youth unemployment rate rose from 11.3% to 14.4% in October-December 2020, compared to an unemployment rate of 5.1% for the whole population (Francis-Devine, 2021).
- As of May 2020, one third of 18-24 year-old employees (excluding students) had lost their jobs or been furloughed (Gustafsson, 2020).

- There is a danger that high rates of youth unemployment could lead to pay scarring[3] for young people, as has been observed following previous recessions (Cominetti et al., 2021).

Moreover, with young people tending to be less represented in low vulnerability jobs[4], young people's economic situation may be worsened by the four-week extension to Covid restrictions in summer 2021 (Office for National Statistics, 2021). Young people appear aware of these trends; 81% of 14-18 year olds fear the pandemic's impact on their education, exams and qualifications, whilst have 73% expressed concerns about its impact on their future career (Leavey et al., 2020).

Pupils and teachers in Aspire to HE's local area mirrored these concerns. In addition, teachers observed that current pupils seemed to place greater emphasis on income than previous cohorts. One teacher, for instance, noted that some pupils were increasingly dismissive of university, in favour of jobs and apprenticeships, to ensure they can earn money more immediately. This trend may be particularly pronounced among economically disadvantaged pupils. One teacher interviewee noted that income was a key motivation for their pupils, almost half of whom were on free school meals. With many pupils suffering due to household poverty in the last year, she felt pupils had a heightened awareness of money's importance to pay for food and other essentials, leading to less interest in career fulfilment. This issue was raised in research conducted early in the pandemic with WP practitioners raising concerns that in light of school closures, some young people "who don't have a family background in higher education" might be "under pressure to support the family economically" (p.6, Mountford-Zimdars & Moore,2020).

On the other hand, some teachers suggested that current labour market conditions may have encouraged pupils to attend university and hope for better outcomes once the economy had begun to recover. Indeed, despite the popularity of the 'earn as you learn' approach, some young people were aware of the constraints that the pandemic had placed on apprenticeship places:
- the pandemic has led to a 23,400 fall in the number of apprenticeship starts in 2019/20 versus 2018/19 (Foley, 2021).
- The number of apprenticeship starts in the first two quarters of 2020/21 was 18% lower than that of 2019/20 (*ibid.*).

Young people have been unable to access the opportunities they otherwise would. One year 12 had regularly been checking the apprenticeship website to assess their options and found that since lockdown the number on offer had decreased. Similarly, a year 12 survey respondent wrote about being concerned about accessing a good apprenticeship. With a growing 18-year-old population, there will likely be longer-term pressure on university and apprenticeship places, with disadvantaged applicants, who are far more likely to have lower qualifications, potentially missing out (UCAS, 2021).

The pandemic also appears to have impacted the area of study or employment pupils want to pursue. For one year 10 pupil, the economic context had led to a dramatic change of plan. During a focus group, they explained that they had previously been interested in pursuing performing arts but experienced a 'reality check' during lockdown, leading them to pursue a STEM course instead. These changing attitudes outline the

---

[3] Where a period of unemployment can result in a longer period of employment and/or reduced earnings.
[4] Low vulnerability jobs are defined in the report as "jobs that can very likely be done from home or are likely to be key worker roles" (Office for National Statistics, 2021)

'Society should ensure that all children and young people make a fulfilling transition to adulthood'

need for IAG to addresses the relationship between different post-18 pathways and the labour market.

In summary, young people were aware of the impact of economic changes on their future opportunities and many, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, were eager to begin earning, leading to some changing their plans. However, this often led to further issues as apprenticeship opportunities are limited. This could potentially lead either to young people choosing university courses based on employment prospects rather than interests or to pupils abandoning HE aspirations altogether to enter the labour market to begin earning.

Educational disruption and teacher-assessed grades

The pupils and teachers we spoke with also expressed concerns about what schooling disruption could mean for post-18 aspirations and plans. Teachers voiced concern about pupils who were disengaged from learning and not enjoying school, which could ultimately thwart their long-term aspirations and ambitions. Two teachers emphasised the need to address this through early intervention, stressing the importance of engagement with different academic qualifications early on. Similarly, another noted that while current sixth-formers may have accessed organisations like the Brilliant Club earlier in their school life, those in earlier years could be adversely affected if this IAG gap is not immediately addressed.

Young people appear to be particularly concerned about the impact of educational disruption on their exam grades and how their qualifications will be perceived. During the first lockdown in spring 2020, young people reported a range of fears about their disrupted education.
- A survey in April 2020 found young people (aged 16-29) had concerns about uncertainty surrounding exams and qualifications, effects on the quality of their education and the transition to home-schooling (Office for National Statistics, 2020).
- Small-scale qualitative studies highlight issues associated with exam cancellation, including fears about "how their grades might impact their university options and future careers" (p.14 Day et al., 2020; Larcher et al., 2020).

These concerns were shared by the pupils we interviewed. Older pupils who did not sit exams were concerned about the legitimacy of their awarded grades, while younger pupils were worried about sitting exams in the coming years having faced significant educational disruption and relying on remote learning.

For younger pupils, there are widespread concerns in the sector that disadvantaged pupils will suffer the worst impacts on their grades once normal examinations resume due to the impact of the digital divide and poverty during lockdown on their online schooling. Teacher interviewees felt pupils had had their confidence knocked by educational disruption, with a drop of year 11s wanting to stay to sixth-form, as they have found the last year very difficult.

For disadvantaged pupils in older year groups who did not sit exams, the picture is more complex. Analysis suggests that among last year's exam cohorts the disadvantage gap narrowed at GCSE level (Nye 2021)[5] and with 2020/21 grades based on teacher assessment, this may be the case again in the summer. 2020 admissions statistics show

---

[5] Based on data submitted by 1,216 schools.

'Society should ensure that all children and young people make a fulfilling transition to adulthood'

an increase in acceptances to high-tariff universities, with "the highest rates of increase among the lowest participation groups" (Millward, 2020, p.10). Further, The Office for Students (2020b) report that 18 year-olds living in the most underrepresented areas experienced the largest proportional increase in placed applications in 2020[6].

However, a study of Oxbridge students in Autumn 2020 found that some Oxbridge students from under-represented backgrounds felt they needed the confirmation of national examinations before feeling they were suitable to apply to their institution (Stubbs & Murphy, 2020). Reflecting this, year 12 pupils we interviewed had concerns about their GCSE grades and how seriously their qualifications would be taken, regardless of how good their grades were.

"Our grades were sort of made up. A couple of my friends, I remember them saying they don't feel like they've earned their grades. Because it was just sort of like awarded to them after three months of nothing. It just sort of felt a little bit disconnected"

– Year 12 pupil

One year 12 interviewee emphasised, that not sitting exams felt like missing out on a 'rite of passage'. If next year's year 12s and 13s feel that their GCSE grades do not hold the same legitimacy as in previous years, this could reduce academic purpose and/or higher education application.

Sitting exams in the coming years following lockdown's disruption to learning, and having grades awarded without sitting exams, could both negatively impact pupils' confidence such that they are less likely to progress to HE and/or be less likely to cope with the rigours of HE study.

Bargaining power in the labour market

Pupils' concerns about exams and legitimacy of centre assessed or teacher assessed grades carry over into fears about future labour market opportunities. Research conducted over the course of the pandemic revealed that young people are concerned that employers will not view them as attractive applicants, with a fear that "employers might look at their grades differently than other years because they did not sit exams" (Public First 2021, p. 45).

Some of the young people who took part in our fieldwork, particularly survey respondents, voiced similar concerns.

"I haven't been able to do anything or get a job or have any work experience. So when I do go down that pathway to get a job, I'll be less likely to be able to do so and probably a bit more nervous"

Year 12 pupil

In addition, one year 12 was worried about not having gained work experience since year 10 due to the pandemic and felt this could limit future employment options. Elsewhere, one year 10 pupil highlighted that without their school's support to gain work experience in their field of interest (science) they had been unable to find opportunities on their own as no one in their family had experience in related sectors. This again

---

[6] Though the largest absolute difference was for those living in POLAR4 quintile 5 areas (least underrepresented areas). This pattern also holds for high-tariff providers.

'Society should ensure that all children and young people make a fulfilling transition to adulthood'

highlights the disproportionate effects of missed in-school opportunities on disadvantaged pupils. One teacher highlighted that more needed to be done to fill the void of missed work experience opportunities, while another noted that many of her year 10s had decided to opt out of virtual work experience, as they did not see the point in it. She feared that this would affect their aspirations. In addition, one pupil was concerned about the competition for university places, particularly given it had not been possible to access the extra-curricular experiences valued by post-18 destinations.

Alongside concerns about a lack of work experience and extra-curricular activities, teachers also worried that reduced IAG during the pandemic could make it harder for young people to navigate the labour market and find work. For instance, one teacher felt that his pupils lacked knowledge about how to access the jobs market and apply for work, particularly in competitive fields. These concerns were echoed by the year 10s we spoke to, who wanted greater information about the career pathways available to them and the steps they need to take to access particular sectors.

4.4 Other changes to young people's needs

Beyond young people's access to IAG and the impact of the pandemic on their aspirations and attitudes, the past year has had a negative impact on pupils' wellbeing more generally, with potential impacts for their HE progression or the support they will require from HEIs.

Mental health

Young people's mental health has been a key, well-documented issue over the course of the pandemic.

Year 12 interviewees spoke about peers struggling with mental health and some finding it difficult to access support.

"Quite a few of my friends are struggling with their mental health. A few of them are seeking help, going to the counsellors that the school are offering, going to the student support manager (…) But I feel like some other people don't really want to reach out because, say, before the pandemic, they weren't struggling with their mental health, so, coming back, they might be finding it a little bit awkward to reach out for that"

Year 12, interview

These concerns align with a recent qualitative study, where most of the 50 senior leaders that were interviewed reported some pupils suffering from Covid-related anxiety (Sharp and Nelson 2021). Issues with mental health could lead some pupils to narrow their post-18 options. If young people do not feel that they could cope with the demands of university or an apprenticeship, or believe they could not access sufficient support during HE participation, they may discount these options.

Social concerns

Along with long-term career concerns, a common worry among young people surrounded their post-18 transitions. Some pupils said that the pandemic had made them more determined to meet new people, but some reported lockdown making them less sociable and many were worried about what the pandemic might mean for friendship groups and future social interactions.

'Society should ensure that all children and young people make a fulfilling transition to adulthood'

There were related concerns around adapting to new surroundings, starting at university, meeting new people and settling into a routine. One year 12, who was still ultimately determined to attend university, felt that the pandemic had made them afraid of lifestyle change associated with university, with a preference for being in a familiar environment. Another year 12 was still planning on attending university but worried about interacting with other people and living in shared accommodation.

These trends could have implications not just for HE progression but also for retention. Further, given that young people with non-graduate parents and those from lower socio-economic backgrounds are already more likely to drop out of university (Social Market Foundation, 2017), these social concerns could thwart widening participation efforts if left unaddressed.

5   What HE outreach support do young people want in future years?

This section examines pupils' experiences of virtual delivery and the information, advice and guidance they would prioritise. Drawing these findings together we make recommendations on pupils' preferred mode of delivery and content for future HE outreach.

5.1 Mode of delivery

Over the course of the pandemic, schools and many HE outreach organisations have shifted to online delivery. While online provision presents opportunities to scale attendance and give flexible access to resources, access can be difficult, particularly for hard-to-reach pupils and those living in 'digital poverty'. There are also substantial issues surrounding pupil engagement in online WP provision. Teachers and pupils highlighted benefits and barriers to virtual delivery, as well as noting how there were aspects of in-person delivery that cannot be replicated online, all of which are explored in this section. The section concludes with findings on the key features of effective virtual outreach.

Given the numerous access and engagement issues associated with online WP support, it might be tempting to create a binary distinction between in-person (high impact) and online (low impact) provision. However, this depends on the type of support, the content covered, quality of delivery, and the aim of the provision.

5.1.1   Benefits of virtual HE outreach and effective practices

The online HE outreach pupils have accessed has varied between schools. Teachers and students noted a range of remote provision, delivered by schools, Aspire to HE and other organisations. This includes virtual work experience, talks, university access programmes and other activities. There was an appetite among some participants for online provision to cultivate its own place in the IAG offer, rather than simply seek to replicate in-person activities. Although there were some barriers to engagement with virtual delivery, explored in the following section, online provision was viewed as having some benefits, including:

- **Logistical benefits:** The logistical benefits of moving assemblies online saved a lot of time and teachers highlighted that this could facilitate further IAG events in the future. Another school managed to secure external speakers to attend in-person sessions via Zoom, without the logistical challenges associated with in-person visits. A year 12 pupil also mentioned their appreciation of the lack of travel costs when accessing WP support online.

- **Greater independence:** Several pupils in the survey noted a range of benefits to online WP practice, including greater independence and lower stress levels. Moreover, one year 12 interviewee felt that audio-recorded feedback, which they could revisit helped them clear up areas of uncertainty when it came to post-18 decision-making.

- **Flexibility:** Teachers and pupils emphasised the importance of having resources that young people could revisit at different stages of their post-18 decision-making and planning process. This would allow pupils to return to recordings, PowerPoints or other resources later down the line in their post-18 considerations. One year 12, for instance, said they liked being able to take screenshots of presentations and the fact that they could revisit them later with friends and family.

- **Variety of content:** Some teachers reported that universities had produced more WP-related content during the pandemic. They felt that this would allow them to reach far more prospective students, provided access issues are addressed.

- **Quizzes and feedback:** Several teachers documented the efforts they made to make online IAG more engaging and impactful, through low-stakes tests and feedback. One teacher argued that the chat function, quizzes, voting and other modes of interactive participation could be more effective and inclusive online. Some of these methods can be conducted with cameras off, which could also allay teacher interviewees' fears about young people being self-conscious about what their backgrounds look like on video calls.

5.1.2 Barriers to engagement with virtual delivery

Teachers and pupils highlighted numerous issues which affect pupils' ability to engage with online HE outreach, including digital poverty, unsuitable home learning environments, a lack of opportunity for active participation and the accessibility of online resources.

Digital poverty

Notwithstanding the efforts of schools, outreach staff and others, there was a consensus among teachers and pupils we spoke to that a move to online provision for much of the last two academic years had compromised the IAG young people were able to receive. Part of this was explained by issues of digital poverty, which tends to be concentrated among disadvantaged pupils (The Sutton Trust 2021). One teacher noted that those from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds were more likely to have to access online IAG via their phones and to be sharing a weak broadband connection with other family members.

Home learning environments

'Society should ensure that all children and young people make a fulfilling transition to adulthood'

There were also wider concerns about pupils' home learning environment. Teachers reported that pupils were struggling with the effects of poverty and often were not in an environment conducive to engagement and learning, even though they were ostensibly 'logged on'. Those we interviewed also talked about examples of pupils with challenging home lives who were disengaged from post-18 activities at home but were motivated once schools reopened. Just as the move to remote learning and online provision had proved challenging in terms of academic schooling, engagement in HE outreach was also negatively affected.

Reduced opportunity for active participation

Throughout Aspire to HE's impact evaluation prior to the pandemic, pupils have reported that they prefer activities where they are participating actively or seeing something first hand, compared to only listening to adults. Given that it can be difficult to implement effective pedagogical practice without pupils physically present, our fieldwork suggests this has had a negative impact on remote learning.

There was a strong consensus among staff and students that online provision meant missing out on individual and group rapport. One teacher noted that one of their external speakers had moved online and that, whilst he was engaging, the event would have been better in-person. Another teacher reported similar feedback from an Aspire to HE event, where the session leader said pupils listened but asked fewer questions, which she attributed to lack of face-to-face interaction.

Generally, teachers felt that the lack of variety across all forms of online delivery including schooling and outreach mean that pupils were less likely to engage in IAG and outreach activities.

"Because so much has been virtual, you're going to get people switch off, ultimately, when they're just rooted in front of a screen (...) Particularly when all their lessons have been in front of a screen, it's not been enticing for them, really"

- Teacher

Accessibility issues with online resources
Pupils also raised concerns about being unable to independently understand the digital IAG resources made available to them by HE institutions. Pupils themselves highlighted that deprived pupils would be less likely and less able to access information. One year 12 interviewee felt that the language in such resources was often not very accessible and that for young people in the "pretty deprived" area she lived, it might be difficult to understand such content. Another year 12 said they felt less able to access help when using online resources, which resulted in outreach having less impact on their decision making. One teacher also said that some of the online content they had been offering was not as applicable to BTEC pupils as it was to A-Level pupils.

5.1.3   What does in person outreach offer that virtual outreach does not?

Despite noting some benefits to virtual delivery (explores in section 5.1.2) pupils and teachers generally felt that in-person events offered something that online provision could not, including:

'Society should ensure that all children and young people make a fulfilling transition to adulthood'

- **Demystifying higher education**: Many teachers and pupils felt in-person visits to higher education institutions allowed young people to see themselves attending the destinations they were considering. Indeed, The Commissioner for Fair Access in Scotland has highlighted that in-person outreach sessions have historically helped "demystify higher education", particularly surrounding universities but this type of support has become "very difficult, if not completely impossible" (Scott, 2020. p.7).

- **Inter-personal connection**: Pupils valued opportunities to engage in-person with external speakers, former pupils, outreach officers and others. Being face-to-face reportedly made them feel more comfortable asking questions.

- **Informal check-ins**: In-person provision facilitates informal meetings. A teacher noted that she and a colleague would often speak with sixth-formers about steps such as student finance and this spontaneity could not be replicated online. Elsewhere, a year 12 interviewee felt that an informal, offline atmosphere can be more conducive to discussing post-18 options with a trusted adult.

- **Attendance and issues with pupils 'opting opt':** Teachers across different schools noted that pupils were able to opt out of accessing online events about HE that were shared via email. Moreover, there were significant issues relating to the ability of staff to track participation and engagement. For instance, one teacher noted that it was often the hardest to reach students that would be less likely to access information for themselves. The school sent notification texts but they could not ensure all students had accessed the materials. In contrast, they felt it was easier to encourage attendance at in-person sessions as part of students' timetables. One teacher estimated that about 65% of students attended their 'HE activities week' sessions.

- **Parental involvement:** Some teachers felt that parent-accompanied in-person visits to colleges and other destinations have a key role in post-18 decision-making. However, parental communication had proven a great challenge for many teachers during the pandemic and there were now a lack of opportunities for parents and young people to visit institutions or meet with staff to discuss options.

> ### Best practice in virtual HE outreach
>
> **Combined, the findings on barriers to engagement and the benefits of online provision provide a set of good practice guidelines by which practitioners can attempt to capitalise on the benefits and mitigate the barriers associated with virtual HE outreach.**
>
> - **Ensuring digital access and compatibility:** This is not just a case of ensuring that broadband is sufficient and devices are appropriate but also that there are clear instructions on how to navigate resources. Some resources, like podcast discussions about future options, may be appropriate for mobile phones but other activities require access to laptops to support pupil engagement. It is important that the resources themselves are adapted for different groups of pupils. For instance, some information may be applicable to A-Level pupils but not to those studying for BTECs.

'Society should ensure that all children and young people make a fulfilling transition to adulthood'

- **Taking good pedagogical practice online:** Principles of effective pedagogical practice, including quality instruction, can support effective online practice. One teacher mentioned using Mote, which allowed pupils to receive voice recorded feedback, which can go some way to emulating an in-person classroom experience.

- **Promoting active participation:** Teachers reported that participation in online events was often limited, particularly when it came to Q&A sessions with external guests. Having clear 'Means of Participation' in the online classroom may help pupils feel more engaged. Different forms of participation, such as cold calling, using the chat function and whole-class discussion should be signalled clearly and consistently across sessions.

- **Parental engagement:** Teachers noted that pupils' online engagement was often shaped by parents' ability to help their children access support and that this had been difficult during the pandemic. Practitioners should therefore consider how online content can involve parents and allow them to support their children.

- **Integrating online elements into in-person sessions:** Pupils suggested that there may be opportunities for in-person events to have online components, such as guest speakers. This blended approach might make the most of the flexibility offered by online provision while retaining the engagement and personalised benefits of in-person delivery.

- **Develop young people's skills to navigate online information:** Young people would benefit from help navigating the plethora of online outreach-related material available. This support should be provided in small groups or one-to-one so that pupils are supported to develop the skill necessary for independently accessing information.

- **Working with external partners:** Virtual outreach can present further opportunities to collaborate with external partners, who may make a valuable contribution to young people's post-18 decision-making. For instance, one teacher had invited pupils to events from university partners, third-sector organisations, companies and others, allowing them to access support from home and at school.

5.2 Content

Pupils voiced a range of topics they wanted to explore in future outreach and the types of activities they want to access.

Financial support

Several survey respondents mentioned uncertainty surrounding the costs of HE and the support they were eligible for, particularly concerning student finance and the cost of university accommodation.

In addition, one pupil was concerned about moving away and starting university while also needing to secure a job. A teacher noted a similar concern from a low-income

'Society should ensure that all children and young people make a fulfilling transition to adulthood'

Oxford candidate, who felt he would not be able to attend should he not find part-time work. Another teacher explained that because their borough is among the most deprived in England, that financial concerns were key to pupils' post-18 decision-making.

Outreach should help young people understand and access part-time roles available to them, but also assistance in seeking out financial support, such as means-tested scholarships, at the destinations they apply to.

Pastoral support and advice on moving away

There were several references to more pastoral help, such as mental health support and coping strategies for moving away from home.

"On behalf of teenagers I think we're all quite anxious about university"
– Year 10 pupil

Alongside concerns raised in the survey and focus group, one year 12 interviewee reported that many of their peers were struggling with confidence. They emphasised the need for pupils to be assured of their abilities by teachers and other professionals, which could increase their likelihood of applying to HE. Another interviewee felt that the pandemic may produce a culture shift in terms of the importance of mental health in universities and their consideration of students' individual circumstances. An emphasis on mental health support available through HE institutions may help allay pupil fears about their post-18 transitions.

Trips to potential post-18 destinations

In the pupil survey, there was a particular demand among year 12s for university visits, to help pupils understand what their future experiences might be like.

"Trips to universities would be valuable as we could get a valuable insight into university life to prepare us for our own experience"
– Year 12, pupil survey

While some had found virtual university tours useful, there was a consensus that it was not as effective as actually visiting the institution. Others in the pupil surveyed wanted trips to institutions offering degrees and apprenticeships, while one expressed a desire to get some experience with companies to aid their post-18 decision-making.

Introducing pupils to a range of universities

Several year 12s had specific questions about universities. One asked about the courses and facilities different colleges have access to. Another wanted to better understand collegiate universities (e.g. Oxbridge) and what this structure means in practice. Two teachers noted that the inability to visit universities may have had a particular impact on young people considering Oxbridge or Russell Group universities who may have a less clear idea of what the universities are like. One pupil also specified a desire to learn more about local universities. This could be particularly important for underrepresented and disadvantaged pupils, who may have a preference for accessing university whilst living at home.

Interaction with people that have experienced different routes

'Society should ensure that all children and young people make a fulfilling transition to adulthood'

Pupils outlined the importance of receiving personalised, one-to-one support, to help them ensure their chosen course or pathway was right for them. This came not only in the form of teachers and outreach professionals, but also external speakers who had some experience of the post-18 route pupils might consider. A range of year groups were interested in participating in Q&A sessions, and teachers gave a range of examples of graduates convening Q&A sessions with pupils. One teacher felt that case studies of people that attended HE and then went in to different work sectors could help pupils make connections between different academic/vocational routes and jobs. They felt that this felt that this could aid pupils' post-18 decision-making.

Processes

Alongside further information about post-18 options, there was an emphasis on the processes that young people needed to navigate to achieve their goals. This included a need for support surrounding personal statements, CV writing, UCAS applications and interview practice. Pupils emphasised that they wanted to practice tasks and receive feedback, rather than be given information on how to complete these processes.

Apprenticeships

Several year 12s felt they needed more information about apprenticeships and how to apply for them. Generally, as found in Aspire to HE's evaluations in previous years, pupils tend to have a better understanding of university compared to apprenticeships leaving them feeling underinformed when making decisions about post-18 options. One teacher noted that pupils often had poor understanding of the structure of apprenticeships and/or did not appreciate how difficult it could be to access such programmes.

Curricular ties to life skills

Among the year 10 pupils we spoke to there was appetite for connecting school subjects with knowledge that would help them transition to adult life, for examples connections between mathematics and taxation. These curricular ties could be helpful in ensuring young people feel confident in making post-18 transitions, as well as supporting them at their future destinations.

Connecting post-18 destinations to careers

Young people also wanted to know more about the connections between post-18 destinations and their future careers. One year 13 was worried about their post-university plans and a lack of support in finding a graduate job. Another did not share what their post-18 plans were but was concerned about the job they would end up with. A teacher noted that many high-attaining pupils would opt for a narrower range of careers – like medicine, engineering and teaching – without knowledge of the full range of jobs available to them. There was a sense that a clearer understanding of how different pathways way map to careers could support young people's post-18 decision-making, with year 10 focus group pupils wanting more granular information about jobs within each sector.

One teacher mentioned that conversations about the graduate earning premium could be an effective way of encouraging pupils to consider HE, given their focus on income following the pandemic. Similarly, another felt that young people needed more information about the opportunities university can lead to. However, she cautioned against giving pupils a purely instrumentalist view of university, where a course was solely a means of securing a particular job, rather than also being an end in itself.

'Society should ensure that all children and young people make a fulfilling transition to adulthood'

Alternative routes

While the vast majority of young people wanted access to further information about university and apprenticeships, others wanted to know more about alternative pathways, such as traineeships, work and starting a businesses.

6   Implications for Aspire to HE's future delivery

Our findings present several implications for Aspire to HE's future delivery and activities, which are detailed below.

Resuming in-person outreach: There was a strong desire for the resumption of regular outreach, both through the school and external organisations, such as Aspire to HE. Here, there was emphasis on the importance of pupils having access to a mentor that is not their teacher, who they can speak to about their future planning. Across all participant groups, there was a consensus that in-person events, such as university visits, graduate talks and trips to employers, could not be fully replicated online, and that it was important they resumed as soon as possible, restrictions permitting.

Supplementing in-person support with proportionate online provision: Whilst teachers and young people feel that in-person provision is more effective in some regards, there was some appetite for a blended approach. This could involve elements of flipped learning, where content is viewed or completed by pupils, before discussing material and asking questions in-person. This could also be beneficial in terms of teacher and WP practitioners' workload, with check-ins to ensure pupils had completed the initial work at home, before teachers and Aspire professionals use their expertise to navigate discussions.

Prioritising pupils most affected by the pandemic: All teachers interviewed highlighted the concern that certain groups of young people had been most affected by the pandemic, both in terms of their education and receipt of IAG. It should be noted here that many pupils will fall into more than one of these groups. Communication with schools will be key in ensuring that WP provision is targeted where needs are greatest after the pandemic.

Training in online pedagogical practices: Online WP provision has the potential to make a positive contribution to Aspire to HE's work with young people. However, through our fieldwork, we heard that many young people found it difficult to engage with online content, that instruction was more challenging for teachers, and that discussions and Q&A sessions were more difficult online. With this in mind, Aspire to HE should focus its efforts on effective online pedagogy. For instance, ensuring that all pupils know how they are meant to participate in lessons is important to effective in-person classes but may be, in some ways, more challenging to implement online. With careful, considered training for outreach professionals, Aspire to HE may be able to overcome some of the barriers associated with online practice, and realise some of its benefits, such as scaling.

Emphasis on content: Although mode of delivery affected pupils' experiences of outreach, pupils highlighted that the content of IAG is also important. Following the disruption of the last year, pupils wanted more information about finances, getting a job and navigating university life. In particular, many students wanted more IAG about apprenticeships as they felt they lacked knowledge in this area.

'Society should ensure that all children and young people make a fulfilling transition to adulthood'

Continuing to take a place-based approach: CfEY's previous research with Aspire to HE has shown that teachers have a strong awareness of the communities they serve. Teachers demonstrated an acute awareness of the challenges that many of their pupils face and the impact that the pandemic has had on their local area specifically. Aspire to HE should continue to take a place-based approach to their work. This might involve thinking about local opportunities, the challenges facing the area, labour market trajectories and other issues. To do this effectively, collaboration with local partners, like universities and businesses, will be essential.

Early intervention: Younger pupils involved in the fieldwork felt they could benefit greatly from outreach support. Whilst work in sixth-form will be essential to help pupils execute their post-18 plans, provision for earlier year groups will ensure young people are in a position to make informed decisions further down the line. Therefore, Aspire to HE should continue to work intensively with pupils in years 9 to 13 and progress with their plans to extend outreach to years 5 to 8. Some schools may request a focus on 'catch-up' for older year groups to compensate for lost IAG during the pandemic. While such pupils are closer to post-16/18 decision deadlines, Aspire should ensure this does not squeeze out early intervention, which is widely accepted as best practice in WP.

Longer-term tracking: To target support for 16-18 year-olds, Aspire to HE should consider what WP provision young people have received in the different schools/colleges they previously attended. This is particularly important now given that some teachers felt the pandemic had contributed to more year 11 pupils moving to other sixth-forms/colleges rather than staying on. One teacher also suggested that there could be room for post-18 follow-ups with pupils, which could potentially help address HE retention issues, which are most pronounced among disadvantaged pupils.

Parental engagement: Given the well-documented influence that parents can have on young people's academic achievement and post-18 destinations, Aspire to HE should strengthen ties with parents. One teacher noted that parental appreciation of teachers was greater in light of the pandemic, with improved communication via text and phone calls. Indeed, Wolf et al. (2021) note that parents trust teachers as professionals and have greater respect for them following remote learning. Aspire to HE should build on this goodwill to help parents support their children's post-18 decision-making.

7   Conclusions and recommendations

The pandemic has caused great disruption to young people's lives and threatens to exacerbate existing inequalities in HE participation. In the Black Country and Telford and Wrekin, young people's aspirations and attitudes regarding HE have tended to have been impacted negatively. Combined with reduced access to IAG during school closures many pupils do not feel equipped to make informed decisions about their futures.

Emphasis on catch-up had crowded out time for outreach work. This is concerning because older pupils are on the cusp of having to make life changing decisions having missed out on IAG and younger pupils, despite having longer before making decisions about their post-18 options, have found the education disruption challenging and will likely need additional support in coming years. It will be crucial therefore, to ensure that HE outreach is seen as a key component of 'catch-up'.

'Society should ensure that all children and young people make a fulfilling transition to adulthood'

Aspire to HE alone will not be able to wholly address the changes in pupil needs identified in section 4. However, being aware of such issues and the effects the pandemic has had on young people should help Aspire set a clear, targeted outreach agenda.

Working closely with schools, businesses, higher education institutions and other stakeholders, Aspire to HE should focus the content of its future outreach on the topics and activities that pupils feel would be most beneficial, including:

- Pastoral support and advice on moving away
- Financial support
- Curricular ties
- Introducing pupils to a range of universities
- Navigating processes
- Interaction with people that have experienced different routes
- Trips to potential post-18 destinations
- Connecting post-18 destinations to careers
- Alternatives routes

Despite its limitations, online delivery could bring benefits to Aspire's WP offer. To maximise the positive contribution of online delivery Aspire to HE should:

- Ensuring digital access and compatibility
- Take good pedagogical practice online
- Integrate online elements to in-person events to make use of the flexibility of online provision while retaining the benefits of in-person
- Develop pupils' skills to navigate online information independently
- Share good practice across the HE outreach sector

8 References

Andrew, A., Cattan, S., Dias, M. C., Farquharson, C., Kraftman, L., Krutikova, S., Phimister, A., & Sevilla, A. (2020). Inequalities in Children's Experiences of Home Learning during the COVID-19 Lockdown in England. *Fiscal Studies*, *41*(3), 653–683. https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-5890.12240

Chowdry, H., Crawford, C., Dearden, L., Goodman, A., & Vignoles, A. (2013). Widening participation in higher education: Analysis using linked administrative data. *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society: Series A (Statistics in Society)*, *176*(2), 431–457. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-985X.2012.01043.x

Cominetti, N., Henehan, K., Slaughter, H., & Thwaites, G. (2021). *Long Covid in the labour market*. 72. https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/app/uploads/2021/02/Long-covid-in-the-labour-market.pdf

Day, L., Percy-Smith, B., Rizzo, S., Erskine, C., Monchuk, L., & Shah, M. (2020). *To Lockdown and Back*. Nuffield Foundation. https://mk0nuffieldfounpg9ee.kinstacdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/To-lockdown-and-back-research-summary.pdf

Education Endowment Foundation. (2020). *Impact of school closures on the attainment gap: Rapid Evidence Assessment*.

Foley, N. (2021). *Apprenticeship Statistics*. 28. https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/sn06113/#:~:text=In%202019%2F20%2C%20there%20were,starts%20and%20146%2C900%20apprenticeship%20achievements

Francis-Devine, B. (2021). *Youth Unemployment Statistics* [Briefing Paper]. House of Commons Library. https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/sn05871/

Gorard, S., See, B., & Davies, P. (2012). *The Impact of Attitudes and Aspirations on Educational Attainment and Participation*. https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Stephen-Gorard/publication/265288552_The_Impact_of_Attitudes_and_Aspirations_on_Educational_Attainment_and_Participation/links/54ae6cd70cf24aca1c6fcf42/The-Impact-of-Attitudes-and-Aspirations-on-Educational-Attainment-and-Participation.pdf

Gustafsson, M. (2020). *Young workers in the coronavirus crisis*. Resolution Foundation. https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/app/uploads/2020/05/Young-workers-in-the-coronavirus-crisis.pdf

Harrison, N., & Waller, R. (2018). Challenging discourses of aspiration: The role of expectations and attainment in access to higher education. *British Educational Research Journal*, *44*(5), 914–938. https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.3475

Larcher, V., Dittborn, M., Linthicum, J., Sutton, A., Brierley, J., Payne, C., & Hardy, H. (2020). Young people's views on their role in the COVID-19 pandemic and society's recovery from it. *Archives of Disease in Childhood*, *105*(12), 1192–1196. https://doi.org/10.1136/archdischild-2020-320040

Leavey, C., Eastaugh, A., & Kane, M. (2020). *Generation COVID-19*. 13.

McIlwaine, C., & Bunge, D. (2016). *Towards visibility: The Latin American community in London* (Issue 2016). Trust for London.

Millward, C. (2020, September 30). Access to higher education before, during and after the pandemic – by Chris Millward, Director for Fair Access and Participation. *HEPI*. https://www.hepi.ac.uk/2020/09/30/access-to-higher-education-in-the-pandemic-by-chris-millward-director-of-fair-access-and-participation/

Mountford-Zimdars, A., & Moore, J. (2020). *Safety, food and well-being are a greater concern than attainment: The views from university widening participation staff in the context of Covid-19*. 12. https://www.exeter.ac.uk/media/universityofexeter/aboutusresponsive/wideningparticipation/CV-19_Implications_Widening_Partricipation_practitioners_14.05.2020.pdf

Office for National Statistics. (2020). *Coronavirus and the social impacts on young people in Great Britain: 3 April to 10 May 2020*.

Office for National Statistics. (2021). *Which jobs are most likely to have seen a drop in pay during the pandemic?* https://www.ons.gov.uk/visualisations/dvc1227/index.html

Office for Students. (2020a). *Coronavirus Briefing note: Supporting disadvantaged students through higher education outreach*. https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/624ae140-b26a-405c-8717-501ffce38d2e/coronavirus-briefing-note-outreach.pdf

Office for Students. (2020b). *OfS analysis of UCAS UK-domiciled 18-year-old placed applicants to higher tariff (OfS KPM2) providers in England 28 days after JCQ results day*. https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/8fd40c66-b147-40ca-bce4-c1934cd33575/polar4_ucas_day282020.xlsx

Public First. (2021). *The Other Pandemic: The Impact Of Covid-19 On Britain's Mental Health*. http://www.publicfirst.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/The-Other-Pandemic.pdf

Scott, P. (2020). *The Impact of COVID-19 on Fair Access to Higher Education*. 25. https://www.gov.scot/publications/impact-covid-19-fair-access-higher-education/

Social Market Foundation. (2017). *On course for success? Student retention at university*. https://www.smf.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/UPP-final-report.pdf

Sharp, C. and Nelson, J. (2021). *Recovering from Covid-10: What Pupils and Schools Need Now.* National Foundation for Educational Research. https://www.nfer.ac.uk/media/4593/covid19_what_schools_and_pupils_need_now_policy_briefing.pdf

Stubbs, J. E., & Murphy, E. C. (2020). 'You got into Oxbridge?' Under-represented students' experiences of an elite university in the south of England. *Higher Education Quarterly*, *74*(4), 516–530. https://doi.org/10.1111/hequ.12251

The Prince's Trust, & YouGov. (2020). *Young People in Lockdown*. https://www.princes-trust.org.uk/about-the-trust/news-views/young-people-in-lockdown

The Sutton Trust. (2021). *Remote Learning: The Digital Divide*. https://www.suttontrust.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Remote-Learning-The-Digital-Divide-Final.pdf

UCAS. (2021). *What happened to the Covid cohort?* https://www.ucas.com/file/411836/download?token=51eovdPq

Van den Brande, J. and Andrews, J. (2021). *Understanding progress in the 2020/21 academic year: Interim findings*. Department for Education.

Wolf, R., Simons, J., & Milland, G. (2021). *Lost Learning: How children can catch up after Covid*. Centre for Policy Studies. https://www.cps.org.uk/files/reports/original/210602205302-CPSLOSTLEARNINGREPORT7.pdf

Yeeles, P., Baars, S., Mulcahy, E., Shield, W., and Mountford-Zimdards, A. (2021). Assessing the early impact of school and college closures on students in England. https://www.exeter.ac.uk/media/universityofexeter/aboutusresponsive/wideningparticipation/Assessing_the_early_impact_of_school_and_college_closures_on_students_in_Engalnd.pdf

'Society should ensure that all children and young people make a fulfilling transition to adulthood'