

**The disproportionate impact of lockdown and home learning for Art, craft and design**

There is a growing amount of evidence of the impact of school closures, home learning and covid measures in schools over the last two years. Investigations and research from a variety of bodies have presented some very clear and stark evidence of just who has been most affected and how. I’d like to take 10 minutes to share a round up of some of the evidence that we do have, and to reflect on what it might tell us about the disproportionate impact of lockdown and home learning for Art, craft and design

Before I do, I must just say that the survey that has been produced by this APPGs Research Group, building on the 2015-16 NSEAD (National Society for Education in Art and Design) survey is going to be a vital piece of work to give us much needed information about what is happening in schools across the UK specifically for ACD, and I’d urge everyone to do all they can to encourage as many teachers as possible to take part. Thanks to Prof Pat Thomson and Maddy Gilliam for leading that work.

The fact is that there has been limited investigation into the impact on learning beyond reading, writing and numeracy – this is true internationally. I would suggest that this reflects very skewed educational priorities, which are part of the bigger problem for art education.

**What has been said about our subject?**

Well, not surprisingly, the hands-on nature of art education proved to be an especially difficult discipline to translate to online instruction.

Many of you will have read the [TES article in October](https://www.tes.com/magazine/analysis/general/why-arts-subjects-were-hit-so-hard-pandemic) highlighting ONS (Office for National Statistics) data that gave insight into how badly arts subjects were hit by the pandemic.

– there are, immediate questions about the quality of learning, but also the quantity. The [ONS data](https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/educationandchildcare/datasets/remoteschoolingthroughthecoronaviruscovid19pandemicengland) tells us:

while all subjects had seen a decline in the amount of content taught, art and design subjects appeared to be disproportionately affected.

between April 2020 and June 2021, an average of just 60 per cent of the learning material for art and design and DT was successfully delivered to remote learners This compares with 73 per cent of the maths and science curriculum, 72 per cent of English lessons, and upwards of 70 per cent for other subjects.

Our own NSEAD VP (Vice President) Steven Berryman was quoted in the article as saying:

"The key thing is all these subjects rely on specialist spaces,"

if pupils do not have the tools or right spaces at home the lessons can never match being in class.

Steven hit the nail on the head. But it goes beyond limited access at home. [An NFER (National Foundation for Education Research) report](https://www.nfer.ac.uk/media/4614/recovery_during_a_pandemic_the_ongoing_impacts_of_covid_19_on_schools_serving_deprived_communities.pdf) published in September 2021 found that lack of access to specialist facilities continued when schools re-opened for the majority of pupils, as a consequence of covid safety measures.

The report also found that a sizable proportion of schools **did not** align with DFE’s 2021 guidance to teach a broad and balanced curriculum. Many focused on reading, writing and numeracy – an approach that was perhaps endorsed by the UK Government prioritising ‘core catch up’ over recovery, and funding tutoring programmes rather than widening opportunities.

Worryingly, the authors reported:

Senior leaders whose schools adopted a ‘narrow’ curriculum tended to regret that pupils were missing out and have concerns about staff becoming de-skilled. Some leaders noted that the reason for giving more time to numeracy and literacy was to ensure they met external accountability measures. On reflection, leaders were concerned that pupils were missing out on the wider curriculum.

And

less experienced teachers were said to have reduced opportunities to acquire wider subject knowledge and pedagogical experience, which was demotivating and counter-productive to their development.

An emphasis on core subjects at the expense of other subjects is also born out in the [Gov.uk research](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/learning-during-the-pandemic/learning-during-the-pandemic-review-of-international-research) and analysis published in July 2021.

So, though patchy, evidence is emerging that learning in our subject **has** been disproportionately impacted, with less time devoted to learning both at home and in school, and serious restrictions on access to specialist facilities. Along with this, the impact of teachers' lack of development and reduced confidence has yet to be seen. Beyond this, what do we know about the impact of lockdown and home learning generally, and what can we surmise about the implications for art, craft, and design?

Well, more than anything else - Inequality increased, with fault lines in the education system becoming entrenched – we can surmise that this would certainly be the case for Art and design, already a subject disadvantaged in the curriculum.

This week there has been a call for an inquiry into A level Grade inflation in private schools – up to 7 times increase in A/A\* in some schools. And we know that this applied to our subject.

In summer 2021 [NSEAD reported](https://www.nsead.org/news/newsroom/examinations-2021-results/) that Independent schools got more top grades in our subject than ever. The increase in the independent sector for A/A\* grades was much bigger than in all other educational settings.([source FFT Datalab](https://ffteducationdatalab.org.uk/))

The poorer a student, the more likely they are to have been disproportionately impacted on all measures, and to have had access to space, teaching and materials limited at home. The [IFS (Institute for Fiscal Studies) study of September 2021,](https://ifs.org.uk/publications/15592) tells us that poorer students are more likely to have missed more time in school and less likely to have access to material resources – something that is a key part of practical and technical learning.

We know that pupils from some ethnic heritage groups are statistically far less likely to be protected by vaccine, more likely to have missed time in school. Pupils have been more impacted by local closures, restrictions and infection rates depending on where they live – it is definitely not an even playing field.

All in all, ‘lost learning’ in arts likely to be much greater than that recorded for core, given what we know about challenges for practical learning.

**So what?**

Widening inequality based on poverty, ethnicity, geography have increased the gap between pupils (it is estimated that it would take 500 years at current rates to close the gap in GCSE for the most disadvantaged). This drains the talent pool and is the opposite of levelling up. Recovery programmes and resources have been directed to core catch up, we can expect the art gap to widen.

Across the board, we know that pupils have lost learning. But, [research evidence published by the IOE (Institute of Education)](https://www.ucl.ac.uk/ioe/news/2022/feb/inspections-should-recognise-schools-varied-pandemic-experiences) on 7 February 2022 warns that the impacts of the interruption to schooling that COVID has brought are multiple and on-going, and is very clear about what our priorities should be:

Some research is beginning to suggest that the initial estimates of impact on learning may have over-estimated losses and underestimated children’s capacity for recovery Positive right? Maybe we can calm down about core catch up? Because the research evidence on the economic impact of the crisis on children is much clearer: the number of children living in poverty in the UK has risen significantly and some studies conclude that the impact on children’s wellbeing, mental health and social and emotional skills is likely to be far more significant and complex than the impact on learning attainment.

The IOE report gives strong steer for inspection. Let’s hope that HMI Chief Inspector Amanda Spielman takes note, given recent signals about the need for schools to take “tough decisions” about what to prioritise. There is an excellent report from the Sutton Trust sets out pathway to recovery through the arts – it should be essential reading for inspection teams and policymakers.

The importance of art, craft and design is well understood by everyone here, I believe – and evidence and testimony has been presented and discussed at this APPG by hundreds of educators, learners, and cultural leaders over the last several years.

I suggest that we have entered a new era. We don’t need to make the case for art education supporting well-being, or even for the economic contribution that the arts make any more – there are a plethora of studies and high profile advocates for that. We now have to convince policy makers that the creative economy matters and is worth saving. (see the UNESCO 2022 Global Report - 10mn jobs lost globally in the Creative Industries in 2020 alone)

We now find ourselves needing make the case for well-being itself being important - that a society that is experiencing a mental health pandemic is not ok.

If we are serious about ‘levelling up,’ we need to challenge outdated, flawed thinking about education and economic prosperity. The Levelling up White Paper talks of equality - we should start there, right now, because the pandemic has widened the gap and shone a light on educational inequities that cannot be ignored. And they are especially acute for the arts education.

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