

# COVID lockdown could leave disadvantaged children with 'learning loss' of six months

April 29 2020

---



Credit: CC0 Public Domain

School closures during the coronavirus lockdown could leave

disadvantaged children with "learning loss" of up to six months, leading social mobility experts have warned.

The academics have urged the government to support the idea of a national tutoring service, where graduates and undergraduates would support children. Research shows one-to-one tuition is one of the most effective ways of helping learners who have fallen behind to catch up with their peers. This "army of volunteers" would help to avoid a social mobility decline likely to be caused by the COVID-19 crisis.

Lee Elliot Major, Professor of Social Mobility at the University of Exeter and Stephen Machin, Professor of Economics and Director of the Centre for Economic Performance at the London School of Economics, reviewed existing research on the impact of learning loss over summer breaks to estimate a learning loss figure for children from poorer homes of four to six months. Their detailed analysis of the impact of educational and [economic inequality](#) will be included in their forthcoming book on social mobility.

Professor Elliot Major said: "We are concerned about the impact of [school closures](#) on disadvantaged families, and it is likely during this period of lockdown some middle class children will have benefitted from extensive use of private tutoring, which will exacerbate education gaps further.

"We are also concerned poorer pupils are under-predicted in GCSEs and A-levels, and students due to take exams next year will struggle with learning losses, and being unable to attend university access schemes in person.

"We believe there is an opportunity for government to back a coalition of tutoring charities, universities, students and schools who could work together to tackle stark education gaps in the wake of the COVID-19

school closures. A realistic aim would be to enrol 100,000 students into the service benefitting 100,000s of pupils."

A briefing paper prepared by Professor Elliot Major with teacher Emily Tyers and Robin Chu, CEO of CoachBright, for policymakers and politicians recommends teachers should decide which pupils would benefit from tutoring. It could be paid for from Pupil Premium funding and run by organisations with a track record in supporting schools, with a senior teacher in each school championing the support and helping with logistics. In time the service could run as a national model, but this would take time and organisations will have to take a pragmatic approach from the start to ensure minimum standards around the country. This would include ensuring tutors have a good understanding of English and maths, and providing adequate training and safeguarding arrangements. There should be external evaluations to assess the effectiveness of different models of tutoring.

The government could assess the tutoring needs across different regions in detail, and agree the list of charities that qualify for potential support.

Professor Machin said: "Of course it is right that schools are closed at this time, but COVID-19 has the scope to increase the toxic mix of rising economic and education inequality that hinders social mobility. Unless we tackle these inequalities, we face a dark age of declining opportunity which leaves long-term economic scars."

The estimate of learning loss is based on previous research about the impact of long school holidays on poorer pupils. Analysis shows some low-income pupils in the United States were as much three months behind their better-off peers in reading achievement after the long summer break. Similar learning slides were also observed for maths. Pupils will have already suffered a "COVID-learning slide"; the learning loss is likely to widen with more time spent at home.

Professor Elliot Major added: "This may also be a time to think about radical changes to the school year including shortening the summer holidays, and extending holidays at Easter or Christmas, so pupils return to [school](#) earlier in the autumn."

"What Do We Know and What Should We Do About Social Mobility?," by Lee Elliot Major and Stephen Machin, is due to be published by Sage later this summer.

Provided by University of Exeter

Citation: COVID lockdown could leave disadvantaged children with 'learning loss' of six months (2020, April 29) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2020-04-covid-lockdown-disadvantaged-children-loss.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.