

# Differences in learning loss between nations show effect of variation in lockdowns

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Pupils across the UK have lost out on a third of their learning time since the pandemic started, even once learning at home is taken into account, new research finds.

Researchers from the London School of Economics and Political

Science (LSE) and the University of Exeter, also find that learning loss varied across the four nations: pupils in England and Northern Ireland lost 61 days of schooling on average between March 2020 and April 2021. But in Scotland, pupils lost 64 days and in Wales, it was 66 days. The usual school year is 190 days.

The analysis also shows that in each of the four nations of the UK, poorest pupils lost more learning time than their richer peers. But differences in school closure policies meant that the poorest pupils in England lost 34.9 percent of their learning during the spring 2021 closures—less than the most affluent pupils in the rest of the UK, who lost 38.6 percent of learning time.

The report—*Learning Loss Since Lockdown: Variation Across the Home Nations*—published today by the LSE's Centre for Economic Performance (CEP) shows that the maximum number of classroom days lost over one calendar year were: 110 days (England); 119 days (Northern Ireland); 119 days (Scotland) and 124 days (Wales). This means most [school children](#) in the UK missed more than half of their expected days in the classroom between March 2020 and April 2021.

The report also finds:

- Just over half (53 percent) of 10,000 adults support extending the school day to make up for learning losses resulting from the pandemic and lockdown.
- Seven in ten (68 percent) respondents in England support allowing greater flexibility for pupils to repeat a whole school year so they can catch up on missed education. This falls to 58 percent in Northern Ireland.
- Attendance rates in England during school closures were around twice the level of attendance rates in the other nations, driven by the opening of all schools in England and [government policy](#)

permitting [vulnerable children](#) and children of key workers to attend school.

Lee Elliot Major, professor of social mobility at the University of Exeter and report co-author, said: "Our analysis reveals that pupils' learning loss varies between the four home nations, partly due to historical differences in school term times and partly as a result of school closure policies. This shows that ministers can make a difference—but quick action is needed."

LSE professor Stephen Machin, CEP director and co-author of the report, added: "Even a few days extra learning loss can have a large impact on educational achievement and life outcomes, and these are big losses of around 60-65 days. Learning losses suffered during the pandemic are manifested in stark gaps in attainment between children from poorer backgrounds and their more privileged counterparts, which is likely to cause a significant decline in social mobility for younger generations."

Andrew Eyles, CEP research economist said: "Rapidly rising absences in schools in June 2021 once again prompt discussion about potential policies that could address the learning loss suffered during the pandemic. Our survey responses show there is significant public support for two major policies—extending the school day; and allowing pupils to repeat a whole [school](#) year."

**More information:** Learning Loss Since Lockdown: Variation Across the Home Nations: [cep.lse.ac.uk/pubs/download/cepcovid-19-023.pdf](https://cep.lse.ac.uk/pubs/download/cepcovid-19-023.pdf)

Provided by University of Exeter

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