



THE
BUCHANAN
INSTITUTE

The Forgotten Generation: How Covid-19 Has Impacted Today's Youth

[February 2021]



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About the Authors

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3rd Year Economics

“I am truly honoured to have worked on a project as pressing and important as protecting youth social mobility and welfare. As a student, being able to contribute in a meaningful and material way to public policy is a remarkable opportunity and I am looking forward to seeing the continued engagement of students within public policy.”

Chloe Asquith



2nd Year Social Anthropology and Politics

“I have really enjoyed my time working in this team looking at youth recovery from the pandemic. It has been great to be able to do something more practical with my degree and actually be able to have an impact on policy. I am looking forward to seeing how communication of social policy can be improved to young people in particular and how we can ensure everyone can access support.”

Andrew Roythorne



2nd Year Economics and Politics

“Being part of the Buchanan team, this year has been both fascinating and rewarding. All of us have separate passions in terms of social policy but we have worked together as a team to articulate how we best feel the UK can recover from the current pandemic”

Paula Back



2nd Year French and History

“Signing up to Buchanan has been one of the best decisions I have made this year. I have learnt so many skills through this project and it has made me want to pursue a career in social policy.”

Ashley Bublick



Masters in Social Work

“It has been such an honour to work on a policy regarding social mobility and welfare. As a student, this has provided an incredible opportunity to have a direct impact on public policy. I am looking forward to seeing how further developments in social policy, particularly regarding opportunities to young people, fulfil and promote the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.”



Executive Summary

The Covid pandemic has created the very real possibility that there will be a forgotten generation of 18-24-year-olds. In this paper, we propose the UK and devolved governments begin to consider the impact the past year has had on young adults as we begin to ease lockdown restrictions. This includes young adults who are in employment, education or training (NEET).

The government needs to ensure young people know where to access resources for both well-being and income support. This includes creating communication resources on their website and a social media campaign. This will allow young people to understand more about which income support schemes they may be eligible for as the unemployment rate continues to be high. Equally, this will mean young people will not feel isolated by knowing where to access mental health support.

As the economy slowly begins to reopen, we propose the government creates opportunities across the whole of the United Kingdom. The pandemic has shown us that job opportunities for young people can be spread across the UK by being more flexible about where people work. The government can lead the way in this by making this the case when employing young people in the public sector.

The pandemic has increased the levels of inequality in the UK. This is true for young people who often are on lower pay than older colleagues doing the same work. So, when young people were more likely to be on furlough (House of Commons Library, 2020) they did not receive the same level of support as older colleagues. This puts young people at a significant disadvantage as rent and the cost of living are generally not adjusted based on age. In light of this, we propose the government adopts a Universal Basic Income (UBI), at the living wage, for all people of working age.

Another area that has seen increased inequality is the gendered impact of the pandemic. In order to ensure young women are not left behind as we begin to leave the pandemic, this inequality must be addressed. We propose the government implements gender quotas within opportunities targeted at young people and enact a gender equality plan for the future.

This paper will set out in detail how the pandemic has affected young people and ways the government can prevent our generation becoming forgotten.

Policy Proposals

The government refers to Westminster and the devolved UK governments, but these policies could be rolled at a regional level by the councils.

The Government Should:

1. Implement a minimum furlough and statutory sick pay of £300 per week for any full-time worker placed on the scheme, regardless of age.
2. Allow all students studying in the UK access to the full student maintenance loan of £9,203 (or £12,000 if studying in London) without having to be means tested.
3. Implement gender quotas across government funded traineeships and apprenticeships as well as its Kickstart scheme allowing for gender desegregation.
4. Enact a gender equality plan within these schemes to combat wider gender inequality issues.
5. Conduct further research into long term mitigation strategies to counter young women's disproportionate long run impact from Covid-19.
6. Remove geographical limitations by spreading job opportunities, training and apprenticeships more equitably across the country.
7. Create a dedicated website for support schemes specifically aimed at young adults with clear eligibility criteria.
8. Launch a social media campaign targeting young adults' access to wellbeing support.





Introduction

The outbreak of COVID-19 has led to severe problems in the UK and around the world. Since March 2020 multiple lockdowns have occurred, crushing the economy, people's livelihoods and their mental health. Social distancing measures mean that the hospitality industry has been hit the hardest, which is a sector that employs many young people. Students have had to deal with the stress of online learning and not having the in-person support they need from peers and seniors. Through our research we have found that the youth have been severely affected by the pandemic, and not enough measures have been put in place to cope with this. In our discussion section we will outline the current failures of our government when it comes to inadequate and unjust support schemes and addressing rising levels of long-term youth unemployment and inequalities. We will propose new policies to bring opportunities to young women who face inequalities in apprenticeship schemes, stop the concentration of employment in large urban areas, and reach out to young people to make sure they are all informed of where they can access help.



Research Methods

This policy was conducted in two key ways, each shaping the development of our overall policy proposals. First, our primary research was reviewing countries' responses to the Covid-19 pandemic, particularly in relation to young adults. In doing so, we examined each country's cumulative Covid-19 cases, days in lockdown, economic contraction over the previous year, whether the country offered a stimulus check and the country's Covid-19 response in relation to benefits. Each country was analysed and examined based on their implementation and economic consequences. In doing so, we gained different perspectives over which responses worked well, and which did not. This allowed for comparisons of how which aspects of these responses could work for Scotland, based on the similarities between Scotland and the country used for comparison. These comparisons helped in the selection over which responses worked best, economically, helping to provide the backdrop for our proposals to help 16–24-year-olds from becoming a lost generation.

In addition, we used a survey, distributed through social media and email, to gain insight and data over the direct effect Covid-19 had on Young Adults in the United Kingdom. We gained insight from participants from the 13th of February to the 2nd of March 2021. We wanted to understand whether young people understood the income support schemes, how the pandemic had affected them over the last year and whether they knew where to access wellbeing or financial support. We had 71 responses, mainly from students in university as being students ourselves, this was a group we could access easily through sharing the survey on our personal Facebook pages. This survey impacted the development of our proposals by utilizing the people's voice over what would benefit them, and what they believe would help them to achieve financial stability. Mental health and wellbeing were also at the core in the development of these proposals, due to the direct correlation between mental health and wellbeing and wealth.

Our secondary research was reviewing existing literature, both academic, and by think tanks and the government concerned with universal credit, youth unemployment statistics, current benefits, and different unemployment and income support schemes. Additionally, we reviewed and analysed the consequences, both intended and unintended, of the different schemes that helped



young people boost their career perspectives. We utilized news reports and parliamentary hearings over the past year to help guide the identification of the main areas which our policy proposals need to address, building off the strengths and weaknesses of current government schemes and Covid-19 response implementations. Our team heavily focused on analysing the consequences of how the pandemic was handled differently in the different parts of the United Kingdom, specifically regarding economic implications and employment opportunities for young people. These examinations provided perspectives for what was and was not currently working regarding benefit, financial and work opportunities.



Discussion

The Covid-19 pandemic caused unprecedented socio-economic ramifications across the whole of society, with young adults particularly hard hit. The following discussions will lay out the timeline of major Covid-19 policies to contextualise the following discussion around how Covid-19 has affected young adults and the policies which have so far been implemented to mitigate these effects.

All testimonials included in the following discussion have been anonymised to protect the respondents right to privacy and anonymity; basic information such as their age range and occupation status have been included in place.

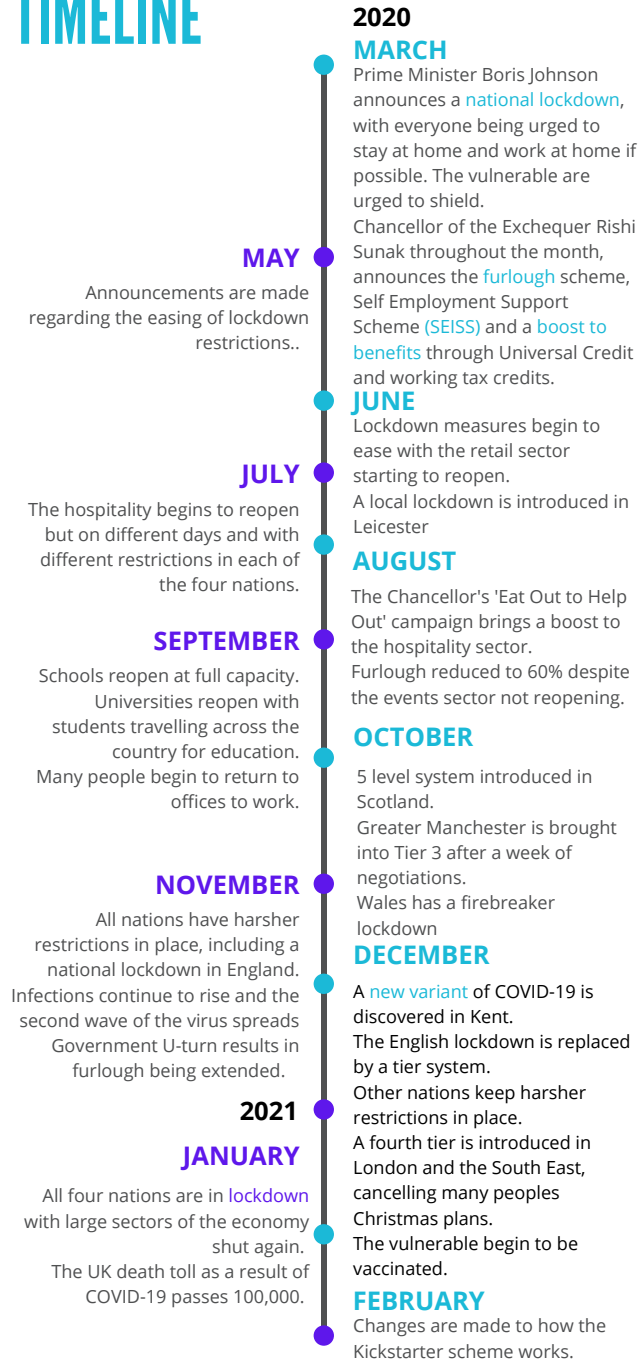
Covid-19 Policy Timeline

In an attempt to manage a pandemic that was constantly and rapidly evolving the government implemented and amended an extraordinary number of Covid-19 related policies. To add clarity to the background of this paper, Figure 1 outlines key events that occurred throughout the Covid-19 pandemic within the UK.



Figure 1 - COVID - 19 timeline

COVID-19 TIMELINE





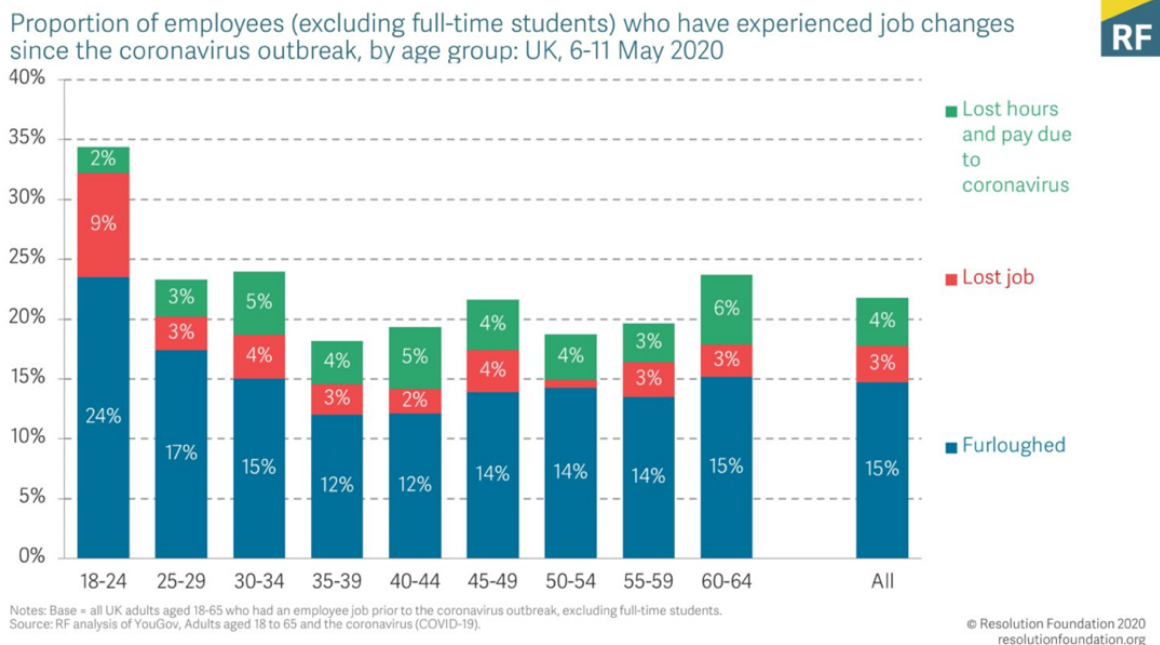
Youth Unemployment

When the Prime Minister announced a national lockdown on the 20th of March 2020, many people were unsure of what to expect from the ‘stay at home’ orders. When the lion's share of sectors within the UK were shut down, it left a large proportion of the UK workforce unable to do their jobs. This had a disproportionate impact on young adults who make up a considerable proportion of the hospitality, retail and events industries. All sectors which were shut down to minimise the spread of Covid-19.

Before the Covid-19 crisis began there were approximately 750,000 young adults not in employment, education or training (NEET). The Resolution Foundation has forecast that there will be 600,000 more unemployed young adults, with a further 500,000 expected to become NEET over the next 18 months (Resolution Foundation, 2020). Due to the nature of jobs young adults are concentrated in, workers under the age of 25 are two and half times more likely than those aged 25 and older to work in sectors that have been shut down (IPPR, 2020).

However, despite the disproportionate impact young adults have faced, many feel that measures have been inadequate to tackle the severity of the situation. 54% of young adults say it is harder to ask for employment help as “everyone needs it at the moment”, showing how society prioritises the needs of older generations (Youth Employment UK, 2021). Reflecting the stigma surrounding claiming benefits, making it harder for young adults to admit that they also need help. With increasing uncertainty 48% of young adults say they “can’t see an end” to their unemployment (ibid).

Figure 2: One-third of 18-24-year-olds have lost work due to furloughing or job loss
(Findings from the Resolution Foundation's coronavirus survey, May 2020)



Income Support Scheme

To try and mitigate the effects of Covid-19 related unemployment, Chancellor of the Exchequer Rishi Sunak announced the furlough scheme, later renamed the Job Retention Scheme, on the 20th of March 2020. Under this scheme the government would pay up to 80% of an employee's wages with a cap of £2,500 a month (Bruce and Fisher, 2020). This allowed many young adults to follow stay-at-home orders whilst having job security, as their employer could afford to keep them on their books despite the uncertainty of the pandemic. While young adults were eligible for the Job Retention Scheme, allowing them to continue to receive an income; many young adults receive a lower wage than their older colleagues in the same job, as the minimum wage is based on age (UK Government, 2021). This means they are being paid less to stay at home than their older colleagues are, leaving many young adults struggling financially despite access to the Job Retention Scheme.

"My furlough pay is significantly less than I would be paid if at work due to being at university prior to furlough periods as my furlough pay is worked out as an average amount of



hours worked over a number of weeks and I had not been at work in most of these weeks because I was at university"

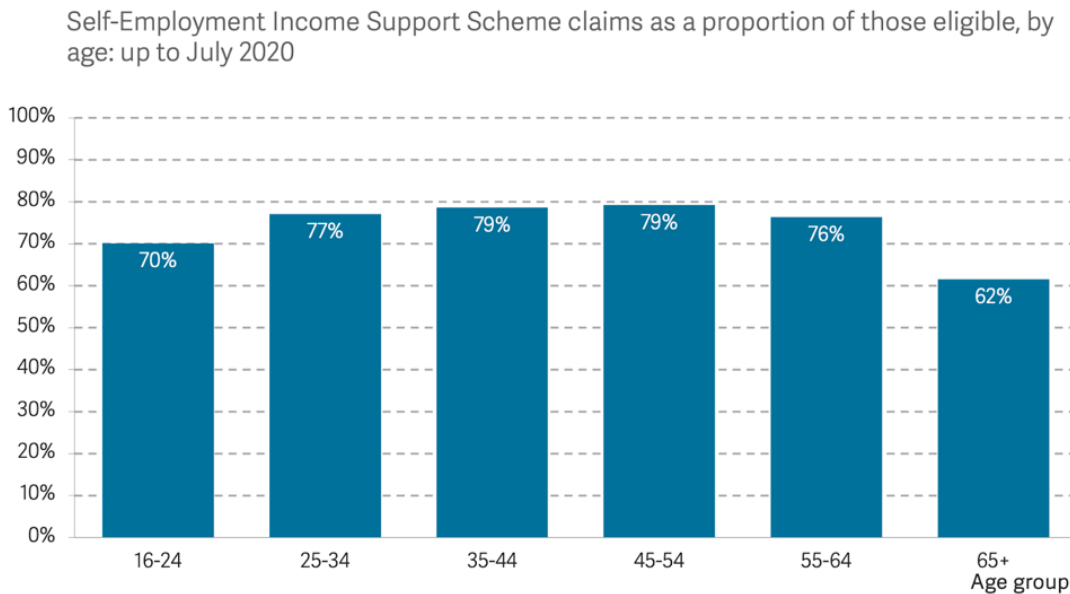
21–24-year-old, Student

"I receive 2/3 of what I use to earn working full time, but all my bills and rent have continued to increase."

+29-year-old, Student

Additionally, the Treasury introduced the Self Employment Income Support Scheme (SEISS) on the 26th of March (HM Treasury and Sunak 2020) allowing those who are self-employed to retain a stable income. However, young adults who were eligible for SEISS were less likely to receive support through the scheme than older eligible people as seen in Figure 3.

Figure 3 - (The Resolution Foundation, 2020 : 11)



SOURCE: HMRC, SEISS statistics.

"I'm a self-employed cleaner with places unable to open. I've been put out of work with £60 every 2 weeks coming in. This is meant to feed me, 2 others and a dog plus bills."

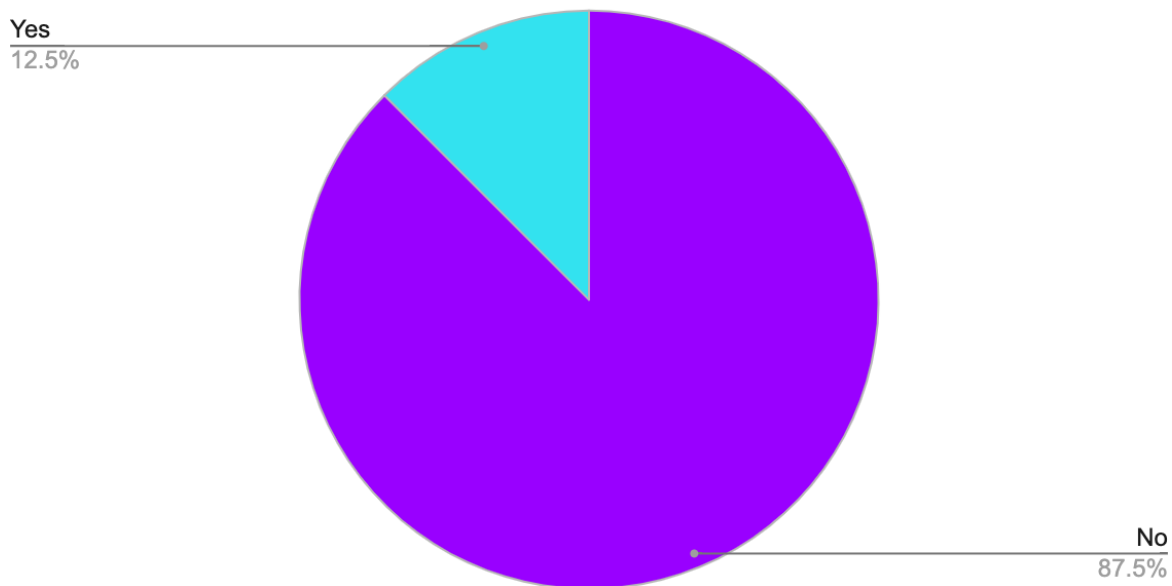
18-20-year-old, Unemployed



The lower take-up rate of SEISS seen in young adults indicates that the absence of clear communication surrounding support schemes has led to a lack of awareness among young adults as to what support schemes they are eligible for. When surveyed, of those who income support schemes are applicable, 87.5% said they did not know what support schemes they were eligible for based on government websites as seen in Figure 4.

Figure 4: Awareness of Eligibility for Support Schemes (generated from author collected survey data)

Do you know which support schemes you are eligible for based on the governments website?



The many young adults who were ineligible for income support schemes were left without government assistance during the lockdown.

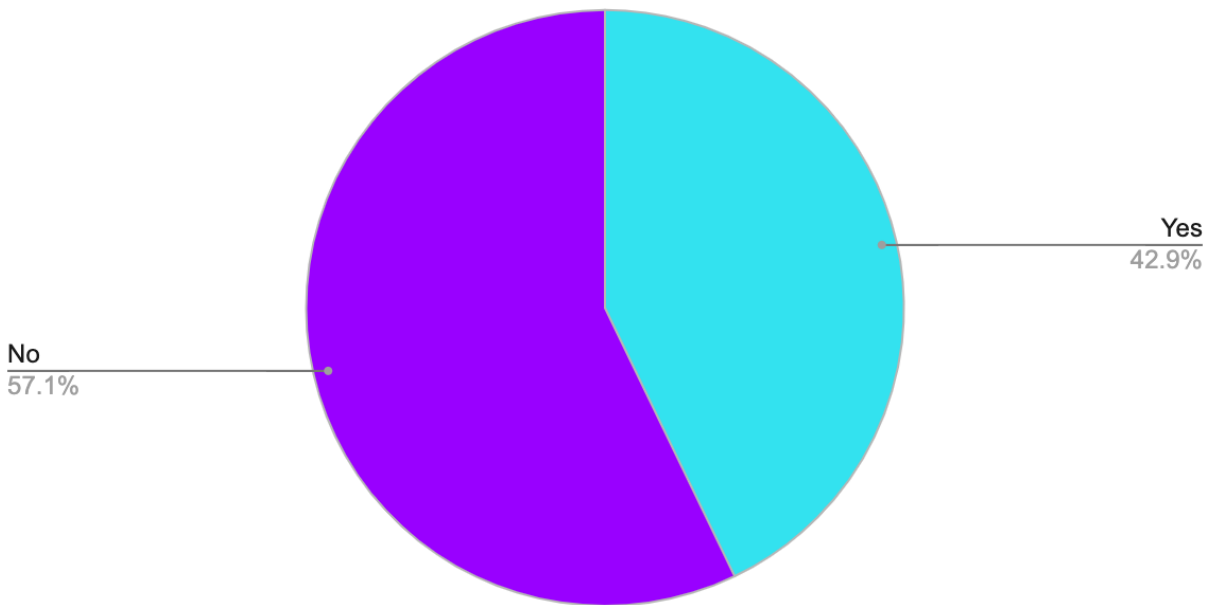
"I got a job in February 2020 and because of the restaurant closing I didn't qualify for furlough."

21–24-year-old, Student

When surveyed, of those who were aware of what income support schemes they were eligible for were only 42.9% were able to access said income support scheme shown in Figure 5.

Figure 5: Ability to access eligible support schemes

Have you been able to access support through government income support schemes e.g (JRS, SEISS)?



Young adults' access to income support schemes is vital as the hospitality and gig economy is set to be the last to reopen in the roadmaps set out by the government (22nd & 23rd February), young adults will therefore need to rely on income support schemes for longer than most.

The Kickstart Job Scheme

In addition to the high rates of youth unemployment caused by Covid-19, many young adults had their apprenticeships, work experience, internships or graduate schemes delayed or cancelled due to the pandemic, as companies tried to shed their financial liabilities during a period of such economic uncertainty. This led to the government announcing the Kickstart Job Scheme in September (CBI, 2020). This aimed to get young adults into work placements or apprenticeships



with companies such as the National Rail Network. So far 19,000 people have been able to take on placements through the scheme (gov.uk, 2020).

However, at the onset of the scheme there were large barriers to entry with companies needing to provide a minimum of 30 places which they had to prove were all new jobs. The confusing criteria for the scheme barred many independent companies from joining the scheme as this would involve them teaming up with up to 30 other companies (FSB, 2021). This barred a significant number of SMEs from being able to join the scheme, reducing the number of potential positions which could be offered. However, this has been changed as of the 3rd of February (gov.uk, 2021).

For many young adults who had been searching for jobs in an oversaturated market for months to no avail, the scheme appeared exciting. However, as the scheme only paid minimum wage, with the opportunity for employers to top this up on a discretionary basis, many were disappointed. To ask a university graduate to take on a minimum wage job which can only last a few months without guarantee of a future job is onerous and unreasonable; especially when considering the significant amount of time and money invested into a university education by students. This only delays the economic uncertainty faced by university graduates by a couple of months.

University Students

While the government has attempted to implement support schemes for those who were in employment or training, the majority of young adults are university students still in education and university students are a demographic which has been failed by the government in its response to the pandemic.

The start of the university term in September 2020 was nothing short of calamitous, with many students feeling they had been lied to. Universities promised 'blended learning' and were insistent that students needed return to campuses (Johnson, 2020). This led to thousands of asymptomatic carriers travelling across the UK causing a spike in infections. However, it was only when students arrived that they were told they would receive limited face to face teaching



and be expected to stick to very strict quarantine rules without any financial compensation to their tuition or accommodation fees.

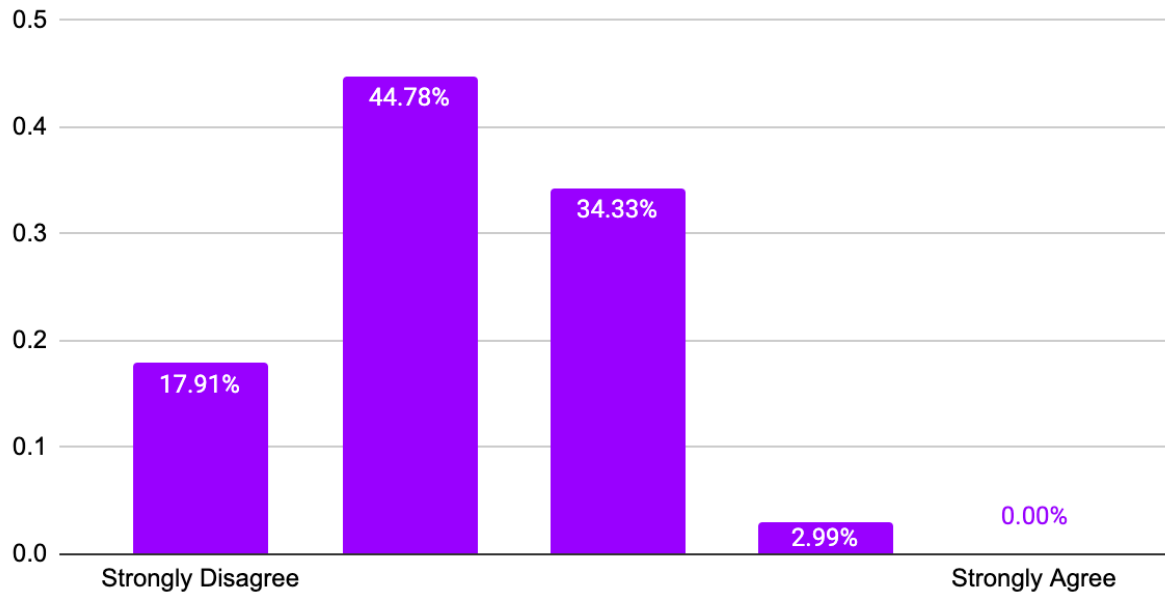
"Having to legally stay at home during the lockdown has not only worsened my University experience, but also meant I am away from my Uni house for which I am paying rent. No government or Uni recompense has been discussed for rent or academic study, the latter of which I, and many other students, have paid the full price for, but received a largely online degree."

21-24-years-old, Student

The dire situation was exasperated by the minimal and insufficient pastoral care offered by universities to counteract the isolation and loneliness faced by students, as many students had yet to build a support system at their university after newly leaving home. Several universities took extreme measures which disregarded their students' wellbeing; among them Manchester Metropolitan University which erected fencing around their student accommodation in the middle of the night, with no warning to keep students enclosed, that was later torn down during a mass protest (Kennelly, 2021). Another example involved a Muslim student at the University of Edinburgh who received a ham sandwich as part of her food package while she was isolating (Smith, 2020). When surveyed, 63% of students said that their university did not offer adequate pastoral care with regards to the pandemic, with only 3% feeling like they receive adequate pastoral care shown in Figure 7.

Figure 7: Pastoral care offered by universities

The University has offered adequate pastoral care in regards to the pandemic.



This was not a singular incident however, with universities across the country being accused of profiteering from those isolating. Instead of students being provided with care and support, they were scapegoated for causing a second wave. The unfortunate consequence of this has been a huge increase in mental health problems amongst students and a significant number of suicides (Mental Health Foundation, 2021).

"My general mental health and wellbeing has been terrible. I feel very dissociated with life and my university work. I've lost all motivation and have no will to achieve well in my studies."

18–20-year-old, Student

"It has more affected my mental health, and my daily motivation to get up and do my uni work. I was coping alright but after this third lockdown happened. I have had enough."

18–20-year-old, Student



The negative effect on students' mental wellbeing was compounded by additional academic pressure. In January 2021, the Russell Group announced that they would not be reinstating a “no-detriment” policy for the current academic year. In the 2019-20 academic year, universities took steps to make sure that students' final grades would not be affected if they did worse than expected in exams that they took during the pandemic. Students sitting their final exams this year have seen the majority of their honour's studies take place online, without access to practical resources or the ability to discuss what they have learned in in-person tutorials and alongside the stresses of the pandemic. However, they are still expected to produce the same quality of work as they have in previous years when they had access to these resources. With the cancellation of graduate schemes and internships coupled with spiralling unemployment figures and uncertainty about the future, the prospect of having to search for a job scares many students.

"I haven't been able to see the people around me who are my support system, constant cycle of bad news, expected to complete a degree without adequate support, paying for a degree I can't do."

18–20-year-old, Student

Moreover, for many students, the financial pressures of the Covid pandemic have already started. Thousands rely on part-time jobs over winter and summer so that they can afford their overpriced rents, which student loans often do not cover (NUS, 2020).

"I would have usually found a part time job in hospitality to do alongside my studies but that has not been possible."

21-24 years old, Student

However, by summer 2020, a third of all 18-to-24-year-olds had been placed onto furlough schemes or were left unemployed. Many students rely on casual part time jobs and so often do not receive a level of furlough pay equal to what they would usually earn are ineligible to receive any money at all. Then when a student is left unemployed, they cannot even claim universal credit. With insufficient money coming in, the financial pressures on students are greater than they have ever been.



Getting financial support from university is incredibly difficult and demeaning for students. There are multiple layers of bureaucracy to go through, in which students have to negotiate the disparaging process of revealing significant amounts of personal details, such as bank statements and rental agreements, so they can receive enough money to support themselves. Although campaigns for rent strikes and fee reductions have been organized by student groups, universities have refused to budge on the vast majority of issues.

The poor university experience caused by the pandemic and subsequent inadequate response will have lifelong impacts for students; despite entering into over £50k worth of debt, a lack of jobs means that many will remain unemployed or only be able to obtain low paid, casual work. Many of these students will also have to deal with the significant mental health problems as a legacy of the pandemic.

Mental Health

Mental health problems can be experienced by anyone, irrespective of socio-economic classes, nationality, gender, etc. However, those who face the most disadvantages in life have the highest risk of negative mental health impacts (Mental Health Foundation, 2020). Generally, those who are experiencing financial hardships are at an increased risk of having a lower mental wellbeing and have a higher chance of experiencing mental health problems. Therefore, employment is one of the strongest determinants in relation to one's good or poor mental health. Lack of employment, including access and good quality, can decrease one's self-esteem, quality of life, achievement of goals, and social status (Mental Health Foundation, 2020). There is continual damage the longer one is unemployed (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2020).

The pandemic, and the restrictions that have been put in place as a result of the pandemic, are profoundly impacting young people's mental health. With many young people cut off from their support system of close friends who lived in different neighbouring tiers, young adults remain isolated at a vulnerable time in their lives. Given the lack of support from the government



regarding their mental wellbeing, this could accelerate the mental health crisis we are already seeing across the country.

“I haven't been able to see the people around me who are my support system, constant cycle of bad news, expected to complete a degree without adequate support, paying for a degree I can't do.”

18-20-year-old, Student

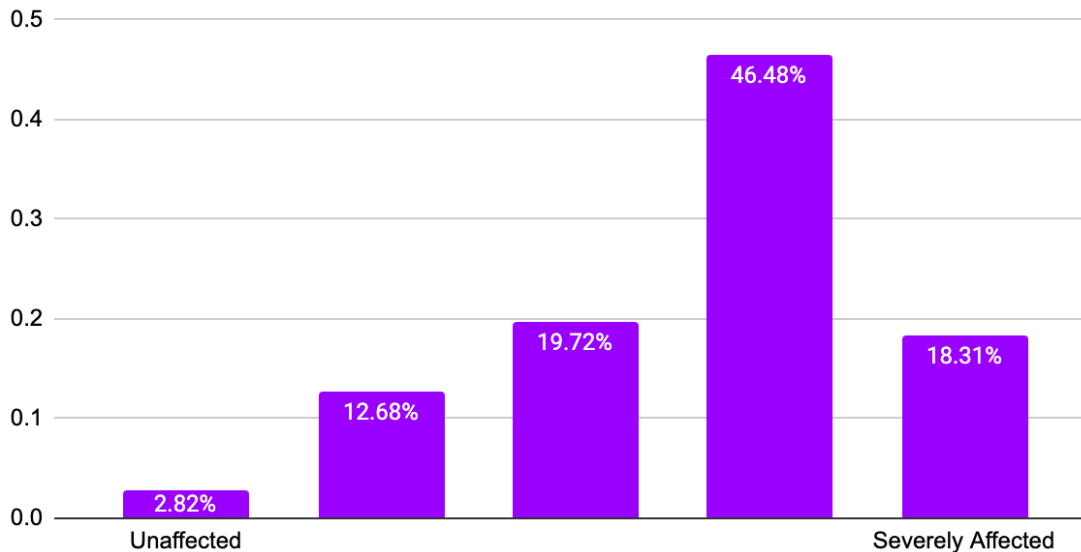
“Both are kind of related. Being in lockdown has affected my wellbeing as I am alone now and my work and classes at uni that offered me some socialisation I can't have right now. I've been sad for no reason, sleeping a lot, anxious about the future and about getting the virus. My income being really low I had to be way more careful with the groceries and some days it has limited my interaction with my flatmates as I was “too poor” to order a takeaway with them. “

25-28-year-old, Student and Works Part Time

Around 74% of young adults aged 18 to 24 expressed that their mental health became worse during lockdown, with young people more likely experiencing poor mental health than adults during lockdown (Mind, 2020). We found similar results in our survey with 65% of those surveyed mental health being impacted by the lockdown as seen in Figure 8.

Figure 8: How has mental health been impacted by lockdowns

Rate on a scale of 1 - 5 how your mental health has been negatively impacted by lockdown



Additionally, young adults (18-24) had worse mental health than all other age groups during lockdown (Mind, 2020). Overall, those who are experiencing unemployment and seeking work during the pandemic are more likely to have worse mental health and wellbeing scores than those employed, with almost 50% reporting their mental health as poor and 81% having a lower-than-average well-being score (Mind, 2020). The long-term socioeconomic impact from Covid-19 has the potential to deepen the financial inequalities that contribute to poor mental health amongst young adults.

Inequalities

As we have already seen, the government's response to the pandemic in the UK has not been equally beneficial for everyone. With an unequal distribution of benefits for different age groups, those under 25 are placed on a lower equivalence scale, resulting in them receiving 20% less in benefits compared with older groups (gov.uk, 2020). This puts an added strain on young adults, as the difficulty they already face coming to terms with seeking help is exacerbated by the low financial aid they receive due to their age. Some justify these reduced benefits by arguing that



young adults do not have families to look after and can rely on their parents' money to get by. However, this is an unfair assumption as there are many young adults who care for dependents or have been financially cut off from their families. With the price of necessities such as groceries or rent being equal regardless of the age of those paying for them, the reduced benefits given to young adults are unjust. This shows how government policies are not created with young adults in mind, as they are often prioritising families and older age groups.

Additionally, the Covid-19 response has been unequal in its gendered nature. Male dominated industries such as manufacturing have been allowed to continue operating during the lockdown whereas female dominated industries such retail and hospitality were forced shut.

The government has subsequently concentrated their 'build back better' plans in male dominated industries such as construction, despite a Women's Budget Group report highlighting that the same level of investment into 'caring' industries would produce twice as many jobs. (Women's Budget Group UK, 2016)

Moreover, there is a massive regional divide in terms of a Covid-19 recovery, with northern regions of England having often been an afterthought in the government response. Highlighted in the autumn of 2020 with cases surging in the northern regions of the UK, the government attempted to shut hospitality venues in these regions without offering an adequate support package to those left unemployed. However, when cases then began to rise in southern regions and the capital, the furlough scheme was extended as a national lockdown was announced. The centralised nature of the pandemic's response has only served to enforce regional inequalities further exemplified by the imposition and lifting of tiers throughout the UK.

Additionally, as we have transitioned in and out of multiple lockdowns, different rules and guidance were applied and lifted to different areas of the UK at different times. This was seen as Greater Manchester had to follow tier 3 restrictions whilst areas in southern England were not similarly restricted, alongside unequal restrictions placed by the devolved bodies in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland to those imposed in England. Young adults' ability to access employment opportunities were dependent on their regional location. This meant that in some



areas, non-essential retail and hospitality were able to be open whilst in others they remained shut.

Many young adults, such as young women or young adults in the northern regions, are therefore at the intersection of multiple disadvantaged groups which have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic. However, despite the compounding impact of co-occurring inequalities, there has been a lack of government action to help those doubly disadvantaged.



Next Steps

Following on from our research, our policy proposals can be categorised into reducing age inequality, a gender-neutral recovery, furthering the benefits of remote working and clearly communicating what policies have been made available.

Reducing Age Inequalities

Policy Proposals:

1. The government should implement a minimum furlough and statutory sick pay of £300 per week for any full-time worker placed on the scheme, regardless of age.
2. The government should allow all students studying in the UK access to the full student maintenance loan of £9,203 (or £12,000 if studying in London) without having to be means tested

Young people need to be funded as fairly as older adults. There are not separate prices for rent, food and transport for people simply because they are under 25. Young people tend to be on lower wages than older adults doing the same job and therefore their pay on furlough is a lot less. Therefore, we propose that there should be a minimum furlough pay of £300 per week for any full-time worker placed on the scheme, regardless of age.

University students have also been financially impacted by the pandemic and many of them have not been able to access financial support schemes. Therefore, we also propose that all students studying in the UK should be able to access the full student maintenance loan of £9,203 (or £12,000 if studying in London) without having to be means tested, until the economy has sufficiently recovered.

Finally, self-isolating after contracting the virus is one of the most vital methods that we have of stopping the spread. However, many people simply cannot afford to self-isolate if they are ineligible for any job support schemes. Therefore, we also propose that anyone who has to legally self-isolate (whether after testing positive or being contacted by track and trace) be able to access a grant of £600, regardless of age, employment or background.²



This should still apply following the pandemic in any public health emergency. Statutory sick pay in the UK is only £95.54. This needs to be increased to £300 a week so people can be allowed to properly recover and not be forced to work when they are unwell.

Gender Neutral Recovery

Policy Proposals:

3. The government should implement gender quotas across government funded traineeships and apprenticeships as well as its Kickstart scheme allowing for gender desegregation.
4. Additionally, the government should enact a gender equality plan within these schemes to combat wider gender inequality issues.
5. The government should conduct further research into long term mitigation strategies to counter young women's disproportionate long run impact from Covid-19.

Women have been disproportionately hard hit by Covid-19. Not only have they faced disproportionate economic impacts (due to the fact that they are over 30% more likely to be employed in 'shut down' sectors such as retail and hospitality) but they are also more likely to work part-time, on zero-hour contracts or be in insecure employment leaving them ineligible for sick pay. All of this compounds the effects of the existing pay gap. (Housing and Social Justice Directorate. 2020.)

Young women are therefore at the intersection of two groups especially hard hit by the pandemic. The chancellor has provided over £3 billion to be invested in apprenticeships, traineeships and the Kickstart scheme to help mitigate impacts of youth unemployment. (House of Commons, 2021) However, these government schemes have prioritised male-dominated industries such as STEM and construction. The historical underrepresentation of women within modern apprenticeships will create further gender segregation within these sectors. (ibid)

The government should implement gender quotas across government funded traineeships and apprenticeships as well as its Kickstart scheme. This quota should be implemented within both male and female dominated sectors, allowing for gender desegregation. Additionally, the



government should enact a gender equality plan within these schemes to combat wider gender inequality issues such as unequal pay and a reduced probability of progressing onto full time employment faced by women during these schemes.

Following on from this, the government should conduct further research into long term mitigation strategies to counter young women's disproportionate long run impact from Covid-19.

Furthering the Benefits of Remote Working

Policy Proposals:

6. The government should remove geographical limitations by spreading job opportunities, training

One major lesson from Covid-19, throughout the world, is that people and children do not have to be physically present in a classroom or company for learning or work and productivity. As long as one has adequate equipment and the internet, they can learn or work from anywhere in the world. Lockdowns have proved multiple times that education and many jobs can take place virtually, with many companies now creating a hybrid model for post-pandemic life. As COVID-19 restrictions continue and extend, companies and universities are extending remote learning and working, with some informed not to expect to enter the office until 2022.

Additionally, COVID has shown that specific jobs do not need to have big city locations, as many employees have been able to successfully work remotely. A percentage of these workers do not even live in their job's big city, with many commuting in every day, some for over an hour each way. As a result, opportunities have been created for those who cannot commute to city centres because of a disability or those who cannot financially support themselves in these cities. These opportunities benefit the company because positions can be filled by the best candidate. This also boosts productivity for the company as well as current and future workers.

Therefore, we propose there should be a renewed focus on making sure that employment opportunities aren't concentrated in major cities. This should specifically focus on increasing



opportunities to those who live in rural areas and those with disabilities and away from the South-East.

The pandemic has allowed young people to embark on new opportunities and open doors because of the remote learning and working aspect. If it were not for the pandemic, some of these young people would never have had these opportunities. However, for many young people, it takes time to figure out what kind of work you want to do the rest of your life. After finishing school, young people currently receive limited guidance to help them to determine what career path to choose. Also, there may be no opportunities in their local area for those who did not attend university or complete an apprenticeship. As a result, these situations can create the feeling of being 'left behind' which can have a significant negative impact on mental health.

It is therefore important that policies aimed at levelling up young people are implemented. There should be increased investment in training, apprenticeships, and jobs across the country through the Kickstarter scheme. It is also vital that training opportunities are offered to young people who are not in education and on benefits, especially now it has been proven that skills and training opportunities can take place remotely.

Clear Communication

Policy Proposals:

7. The government should create a dedicated website for support schemes specifically aimed at young adults with clear eligibility criterions.
8. The government should launch a social media campaign targeting young adults' access to wellbeing support.

For many young people who are undergoing transitions in their lives such as leaving school, graduating university or moving out, it is difficult to know where to turn to for support.

As children are not taught about the UK's social security system in school, it may feel intimidating as to where to begin to look for financial support. The website pages on benefits are confusing and difficult to understand if you do not know whether you are eligible. Equally, as



COVID-19 restrictions continue, it is harder for young people to ask for assistance and guidance on these issues.

There are not enough resources being circulated relating to where young people can turn to in order to access economic or wellbeing support. The past year has had a huge impact on young people's mental health as they have not been able to see friends or achieve milestones in the way they normally would. This combined with an oversaturated job market has meant many young people have had their mental health negatively impacted due to the pandemic.

Furthermore, as the government currently does not have a dedicated website outlining who is eligible for each income support scheme, resulting in people who are struggling being unaware of how to attempt to access the support that they are eligible for. In addition to the confusion surrounding the benefits claims requirements to accessing the Job Kickstarter scheme. Alongside this, many businesses have not known if they can help support young people through the scheme. It is therefore important that there is a greater degree of communication with businesses on how they are able to support young people.

Students have also been hit hard in this pandemic, as many have not been able to take on part time work that usually would help fund their lives whilst studying.

However, many have not known where to go when facing economic hardship despite the increase by the government of the hardship funds available.

In light of these findings, it is clear the government needs to take immediate action to inform young people of support available. We propose that the government create a dedicated website for young people about support they can access. This should clearly explain what requirements are needed to be eligible for these schemes as for many young people this may be a new process to them. This should include income support schemes available (furlough, SEISS, Universal Credit, hardship funds in further education) and how to access them.

This should also be accompanied by a social media campaign about where young people can access wellbeing support. This should be across platforms and should include information as to



how young people can improve their mental health as periods of isolation continue. This can be short infographic advertisements but also dedicated accounts such as YouTube channels as this is how a lot of young people find out information.

Further Research

While we have looked at many issues throughout this paper, there is no question that further research could be done.

A key area that must be addressed further is the effect of lockdown on young people's mental health. This is significant as current figures show an alarming deterioration of mental health in young people, however these figures only present the short-term impact of lockdown, as we are only just emerging from another lockdown now. Schools have been closed on and off for a year, students have faced isolation doing online university, and many have been unemployed. Young people should not have to wait until their health is in a critical condition to receive support.

Research into mental health resources in places of education and work should be conducted to ensure that young people are supported as much as possible.

Another long-term issue that we will not know the full consequences of is the gendered impact of the pandemic in the UK. Unfortunately, we still do not live in a society in which men and women are fully equal, despite continuing efforts to combat this. Covid has been no exception, as women have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic. Not only have they suffered economically as we have seen, but lockdown has been especially isolating for young women. It has been harder to reach out to those suffering from domestic violence and young mothers have not had the support from schools they would do usually. Further research into young women's experience in lockdown and what men must do to promote change must be done to continue the struggle for gender equality, and to make sure that when another economic or health crisis occurs, women are not the ones who suffer the most.

As we have seen, Covid-19 has also exacerbated regional inequalities due to the tiered system in the UK, causing more deprivation in already deprived areas. The centralised nature of the UK political system has meant that London's economy was prioritized as it was regarded more



important than northern economies, which was deeply unfair. While these different regulations in different areas had negative effects, the stay-at-home rule has allowed more remote work meaning that young people in rural areas have been less cut off from the opportunities available in city centres. Further research into online platforms and job recruitment for young people should be conducted, because as much as online zoom calls can be dull, there is potential for them to further benefit young people in rural areas.



Conclusion

In conclusion, we believe a more holistic approach is needed to give the youth the full support they deserve. Opportunities can no longer be restricted for those in urban areas or the south east. Significant investments should be made for different areas in the UK to ensure that young people never feel excluded due to their place of birth. The new familiarity of remote learning and work should be used to our advantage to educate and communicate with young people on how they can be supported, and which schemes they are eligible for. While we may not know the long-term impact of COVID-19, we can be sure that it has and will further exacerbate existing issues of gender and regional inequality, and the prospects for young people's future employment. Improving the wellbeing and future prospects of young people today will help not only our current generation, but subsequent generations as well. The inequalities and insecurities that exist amongst our youth are felt across wider society, so tackling this would benefit the whole of the UK. We hope that change will be made and that our generation does not lose hope despite the current uncertainties that exist as a result of the pandemic.



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