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CES Newsletter: Issue 24

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This newsletter should be of interest to all teachers, Because of the crisis it will be issued on a weekly basis from now on. This will hopefully mean I can pass on whatever useful information I find and, to be honest, because I am time rich, if income poorer. It will of course be shorter than the usual fortnightly edition.

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* Childminders can return to work (with one day’s notice)
* Which jobs are most dangerous in terms of dying from Covid-19
* Online course to help parents and teachers helps pupils during lockdown

**SNIPPETS**

**SCHOOLS**

**MANY PRIVATE SCHOOLS MAY GO BUST**

The TES has reported that as many as 30% of UK private schools could end up going out of business because of the coronavirus pandemic. They said that the number closing between now and September may be quite small, but "more will decide during the course of next academic year that they’re in an impossible position". Private schools are beset by various concerns:

**Fee Reductions**

Most schools need to pay teachers, as they could not be furloughed while preparing online classes, which means any remission in fees for parents this term could leave schools struggling financially. TES reports that one unnamed successful London private school has lost at least £4.5m by reducing its fees by 15% this term.

**Rising teacher pension and salary costs**

Many private schools were under severe financial pressure before the pandemic because of the need to pay more into [the Teachers’ Pension Scheme](https://www.tes.com/news/teachers-asked-sacrifice-pay-save-their-pensions), which has already forced some [smaller schools to close or merge](https://www.tes.com/news/exclusive-pensions-hike-forces-private-school-mergers). David Woodgate, head of the Independent Schools' Bursars' Association, said that the pressures wrought by the coronavirus outbreak might mean more schools could seek to leave the scheme to cut costs. He added that the higher starting salaries for teachers, promised by the prime minister earlier this year, would also put pressure on private schools to improve the pay of more experienced staff to maintain differentials.

**Existing financial problems**

TES reports that schools that were in financial difficulties have been the first to close during the current pandemic.

For schools that were struggling, "this event has simply pushed them over the edge." Chris King, head of the Independent Association of Prep Schools, said that schools which had "been poorly governed and managed and perhaps had a falling roll" were likely to suffer. He said that this did not mean small schools were more likely to close than larger ones, "in fact, you might even say larger schools are even more vulnerable."

**Pupils from overseas**

Boarding schools relying on pupils from overseas could face particular challenges. In the 2020 ISC census, 29,446 pupils with parents living abroad were recorded at ISC schools, making up 4.8% of total numbers, but in some schools the proportion will be much higher. One senior figure said, "I have spoken to agents in Hong Kong and China, and they are pretty confident that the situation will recover, but not until vaccination has been administered to the population and the health crisis is over." Mr King said, "There is a significant question mark hanging over boarding schools, which might have had a significant overseas membership on roll, will those children re-join in September, will they be allowed to even if they want to? So that is another level of uncertainty."

**Schools may not qualify for loans**

Schools may also not qualify for government-backed loans for small businesses. Government support includes allowing businesses to borrow up to £25,000 during the crisis, but this would not cover the bulk of private schools' costs in covering teaching salaries. While the hospitality and retail sectors can furlough employees, teachers who are still working to prepare online learning cannot be furloughed and therefore the bulk of school expenditure remains.

David Woodgate said: "Covid is a catalyst for change, to use a cliché, it’s a clear and present danger”. He predicted mergers and new investors, saying, "In the last two weeks, I’ve spoken to 22 investors in schools, some of whom are international, and some of whom are UK based, and these are investors who tell me that they are in it for the long haul, in that they are interested in running schools within a small group structure." Julie Robinson, ISC chief executive, said: “The majority of independent schools do not have significant reserves, large foundations or surpluses to fall back on. We know they have been hit hard by this pandemic, just like other SMEs. Fee-paying parents are suffering financially, too. Independent schools have proven their adaptability and resilience over the years and no doubt will again through the Covid-19 crisis. For the moment, their priority is delivering continuity of care and education for pupils and wider school communities. The impact of this pandemic will be felt across the months to come and it will be some time before we ascertain its full effects.”

**SOME CLARITY ON SECONDARY SCHOOLS REOPENING**

This article is based on the excellent SecEd bulletin. DfE guidance published on Monday states, “From June 1, we expect that secondary schools and colleges will be able to offer some face-to-face contact with year 10 and year 12 pupils. This will not be a return to full timetables or pupils back in school or college full-time, rather some support to supplement pupils’ remote education. In line with implementing protective measures and reducing contacts, schools and colleges should limit the attendance of the cohort and keep students in small groups.” Geoff Barton, head of the ASCL, said he is envisaging something akin to academic review days, whereby students have the chance to meet face-to-face with their teachers to gauge progress, next steps and to help teachers to plan learning going forward.

Mr Barton said the focus should be on year 10 ahead of year 12, given that there is more flexibility in the A level curriculum. He said, “The most important thing we really need to do with small numbers of young people in year 10 is initially to have an honest conversation with them, saying what work have you done in my English lesson, which bits can you do, which bits couldn’t you do. What are you stuck on? That notion of starting with an assessment of where the child is, because as teachers what we’re then going to have to be able to do is to plan what the curriculum will then look like and what resources and materials we could give to those young people to start building up their knowledge ready for when we get back into formal learning, that seems to me pedagogically really important.” He said that this would be “incredibly useful for the young person, very useful for the teacher who can assess where they are, but it also means that things like social distancing become more manageable”. He stressed, “That’s not the same as bringing all of year 10s and year 12s back in and trying to have some semblance of business as usual”.

**COMPETITION TO DESIGN AN OUTDOOR LEARNING CENTRE**

TG Escapes, in partnership with SecEd and Headteacher Update, has launched a competition to imagine and design an Outdoor Learning Centre of the Future, with the winning entries turned into fully rendered architectural designs.

Students are encouraged to consider a range of issues in their designs, such as technological innovation, effective learning spaces, environmental factors, good use of outdoor space, and issues relating to climate change, such as light and energy-saving and sustainable living. Each design must include an eco-building and an outdoor space.

Entrants can imagine themselves at any point in the future and include in their design new technologies or materials that they think might be available. Design should consider how buildings will help to protect the environment in the future, and how young people might stay connected with nature. The competition has three categories, KS2, 3 and 4 and schools are invited to hold their own internal competitions before submitting one entry per category for the final judging. The winner and two runners-up will receive a Tree Planting Pack with trees from the EcoMatcher global tree-planting initiative. This will include lesson plans, posters, badges, acorns to plant and 10 trees planted in Uganda for your school to adopt and track. The judging panel for the competition includes teachers and school leaders, architects and designers and the deadline for entries is June 30. The winners are due to be revealed in September.

**WE NEED A PROPER DEBATE ABOUT TEACHER SAFETY**

The government's chief medical officer Professor Chris Whitty has said that there needs to be a ‘proper debate’ about teachers' safety as schools reopen. He said that while reopening schools would pose a low risk to children, the government would be consulting with teachers over the risks they faced.

Prof Whitty said, "In a sense, there are three separate risks. One is risk to children, actually, it is extremely small, the one good thing about this virus, and it really is only one good thing, is it’s very, very low in children, which is in contrast to many other infectious diseases. The second is whether having primary schools come back will mean a significant upswing in the infection rate. The view is, if it’s done very carefully, if it’s done slowly, then it is very unlikely to do that. The third thing is that teachers and parents are understandably concerned about individual risk, and that’s something we’re consulting on with the profession. It is very important that we have a proper debate around that to make sure people understand that we can do many things to reduce the risk, and, as with all of society with an infectious disease, you can never reduce the risk completely to zero and that’s not a realistic aspiration, but we can reduce the risk very significantly."

The Boris assured teachers that the government would keep schools safe, as he was asked by a teacher why she could be expected to see many of her pupils but not her own family. Mr Johnson said that "new flexibilities" would allow people to see family members under certain conditions, and that he was going to make schools "as safe as possible". He pontificated in his usual flowery sub Trump patronising way but eventually got around to saying, "Natasha, what you’re doing as a primary school teacher, thank you for that. We will do everything we can to make sure that teachers, parents, children can have total confidence that we’re going to make those schools, your working environment, as safe as possible, and we’ll be publishing guidelines to make schools Covid-secure." He then called on Professor Whitty to add his comments, saying that the teacher "on the face of it has a legitimate question".

The government's chief scientific adviser, Sir Patrick Vallance, said that schools were a "relatively small part" of the overall spread of coronavirus, and that the government had not recommended that primary schools return now because "there’s got to be a bit more time to see that there’s room to be able to do that in terms of the changes". He said, "As the prime minister has laid out, that will be done in a very staged way, so it’s not all primaries coming back, it’s some classes, it’s reduced class sizes, that allows that to be monitored so the effect can be seen. So, it’s not as simple as to say everything comes back now, it needs to be done carefully, step by step."

**SUMMER CAMPS TO HELP DISADVANTAGED CHILDREN SHOULD BE OPEN TO ALL**

The Centre for Education and Youth think tank has said that summer camps to [help children catch-up](https://inews.co.uk/news/education/coronavirus-uk-retired-teachers-university-graduates-volunteer-army-tutor-disadvantaged-children-lockdown-2550886) on lost schooling should be open to all families to stop those from poorer backgrounds feeling they are being ‘punished’. While the Government has ruled out making schools open through the summer holidays, charities like Teach First have said summer camps could help disadvantaged children who are likely to have fallen the furthest behind

The think-tank’s report says that summer camps should have a ‘dual focus’ on supporting students’ wellbeing as well as academic outcomes. It said, “Activities should re-introduce pupils to school routines and, where pupils struggle to cope, they should receive additional, one-to-one support that should continue into the new school year.” Provision should be targeted at pupils moving between key phases, such as those starting in Reception and Year 1, and students going into Year 7 of secondary school or about to begin Year 12. They said that any government effort to roll out summer camps should include additional funding to pay qualified teachers, rather than relying on volunteers.

**OPENING UP SCHOOLS: VARIOUS PERSPECTIVES**

Teacher unions have said that schools must not reopen until a ‘test, trace and isolate’ scheme is under way and PPE is provided. An Opinium poll found that 53% of parents with a secondary aged child and 38% with a primary aged child feel anxious about reopening schools. Only 60% support schools being allowed to even partially reopen before other places such as shops and restaurants, while 16% would oppose any kind of partial reopening. A [separate survey](https://www.theguardian.com/education/2020/may/10/%5bhttps:/www.parentkind.org.uk/News/Major-new-Parentkind-research---over-a-quarter-of-a-million-parents-have-a-say-on-school-closures-and-coronavirus-fears) of over 250,000 parents, carried out by the PTA charity Parentkind, found that 1:5 said they would feel confident about sending their child back to school only when teachers said it was safe to do so. 1:10 said they would rather wait until all staff and pupils had been vaccinated against Covid-19, even if that meant their children would spend up to 18 months being home-schooled. An NAHT survey of members found that 83% of heads think an inability to implement appropriate social distancing measures would prevent schools from opening to more pupils.

The position in other European countries varies:

**Denmark**

Denmark became the first country in Europe to begin [reopening schools](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/may/01/children-as-likely-to-spread-coronavirus-as-adults-says-scientist) after a month-long closure, with nursery, kindergarten and primary classes resuming on [15 April](https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/05/coronavirus-countries-schools-education-covid19-reopen-classroom/), although many requested an extra week to adjust to strict physical distancing and health protocols. Two metres must be maintained between desks in classrooms; arrivals, departures and breaks must be organised in small groups; and hands must be washed frequently. Some parents were opposed, with 40,000 joining a Facebook group called [‘My child is not a guinea pig](https://en-gb.facebook.com/pg/mychildisnotaguineapig/posts/)’. Pupils aged 11-18 are due to return to class on 18 May following an agreement last week between Denmark’s political parties.

**France**

Up to 85% of schools have [reopened in a progressive way](https://www.connexionfrance.com/French-news/Brexit/French-government-announces-return-to-school-plans), with strict hygiene and distancing rules: frequent disinfection of classes and common areas, regular hand-washing or gel, mandatory masks for older pupils, no physical contact, a maximum of 15 per class in primary schools and 10 in pre-school. First to return were the final year of pre-school and the first and final years of primary school, with most remaining under-16s returning on 18 May. However, not in [‘red’ regions](https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-health-coronavirus-france-lockdown/red-zone-paris-under-watch-as-france-prepares-to-lift-lockdown-idUKKBN22J2A9), including the greater Paris area, where the virus is still circulating widely. A decision on whether senior high schools can reopen on 2 June will be taken at the end of May. Concerned parents are not obliged to send their children to school, and teachers can refuse to return on health grounds, although they must provide lessons online if they do not. Some municipalities, particularly in dense city centres such as Paris, are expected to open later because their school buildings make it more difficult to ensure the required physical distancing.

**Netherlands**

[Dutch primary schools](https://www.euronews.com/2020/04/21/dutch-primary-schools-to-reopen-part-time-on-may-11-in-easing-of-covid-19-restrictions) and pre-schools have started reopening. About [80%](https://www.dutchnews.nl/news/2020/05/most-primary-schools-opt-for-one-day-school-one-day-home-approach/) will open for whole days, with half of the pupils being taught in school and the other half online on alternate days. Around 10% have opted to teach two half-days instead. Some teachers are expected to stay at home, with up to a third saying it was too early to go back. Some families, particularly those with members in at-risk groups, are also thought likely to keep children at home for the time being. Secondary schools can begin preparing to reopen on 2 June.

**Spain**

Under the government’s [four-stage national strategy](https://www.euronews.com/2020/04/29/coronavirus-spain-reveals-four-stage-plan-to-de-escalate-from-covid-19-lockdown), most of Spain’s 8.2m pupils will not return [until September](https://english.elpais.com/society/2020-04-17/government-advisors-support-reopening-spanish-schools-in-september.html). However, children under six whose parents cannot work from home will be able to return from 25 May. The country’s 17 regional governments are debating how and when schools should reopen. The Andalucían regional government has said it aims to get admin staff back from [18 May](https://www.theolivepress.es/spain-news/2020/05/06/covid-19-spains-andalucia-plans-to-reopen-schools-on-may-18-for-face-to-face-teaching-despite-unions-coronavirus-fears/), although no date has been set for the resumption of classes.

**Italy**

Schools are not due to reopen until September, although the government is looking into possibly opening nurseries and daycare centres before the summer. Closures are causing problems for working parents, with many offices and businesses having reopened on [4 May](https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/may/04/the-guardian-view-on-italys-lockdown-no-storybook-endings). The government has passed measures to help working parents, including an [extra 15 days of annual parental leave](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/06/world/europe/italy-coronavirus-reopening-parents.html) and a [€600 childcare voucher](https://www.thelocal.it/20200318/coronavirus-the-financial-help-available-in-italy-and-how-to-apply), but some parents’ groups are lobbying for an earlier return to school if safety can be guaranteed.

**Germany**

Some primary school years have started to reopen, followed by kindergartens. Pupils aged 11 and 12 and those with final exams began returning in a staggered system from the 1 May, with classes split in two and groups alternating between lessons at school and at home. Some of the country’s 16 states, including [North Rhine-Westphalia](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/31/virologists-to-turn-germany-worst-hit-district-into-coronavirus-laboratory), which has one of the highest rates of Covid-19 infection, reopened on a voluntary basis in late April, [sparking protests](https://www.dw.com/en/german-students-fear-covid-19-as-schools-reopen-in-pandemic/a-53226795) and boycotts from older students alarmed not only by the possibility of contracting the virus but by being insufficiently prepared for exams that they will have to sit in difficult conditions.

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**HIGHER EDUCATION**

**CONFUSION OVER WHETHER US UNIVERSITIES WILL REOPEN IN THE AUTUMN**

Top US health officials are giving a mixed message about the prospects of resuming on-campus instruction, saying it depends on massively increasing the capacity to test. The much put upon Dr Fauci told a senate committee that as well needing to expand testing capacity, [sagging](https://whdh.com/news/video-shows-coffee-shop-customers-ignoring-social-distancing-guidelines-in-colorado/) public [commitment](https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/vox.com/2020/5/12/21252476/masks-for-coronavirus-trump-pence-honeywell-covid-19) to restrictions threaten to make conditions far worse. He said, “If that occurs there is a real risk that you would trigger an outbreak that you might not be able to control.” One of the largest institutions, California State University, has said that its classes will [remain largely online](https://www2.calstate.edu/csu-system/news/Pages/CSU-Chancellor-Timothy-P-Whites-Statement-on-Fall-2020-University-Operational-Plans.aspx). The chancellor, Timothy White, said that he did not want to begin classes and then have to suddenly switch back to online learning “if a serious second wave of the pandemic occurs, as forecast”. UC San Diego, is offering [free coronavirus tests](https://www.nbcsandiego.com/news/local/uc-san-diego-rolls-out-new-program-to-test-5000-students-for-covid-19/2323081/) to some of its students, hoping to make them feel safe enough to return in September. But leaders of the overall UC system have suggested that the idea is [premature for wider use](https://edsource.org/2020/will-others-follow-uc-san-diegos-plan-to-widely-test-for-coronavirus/631027). [Edmit](https://www.edmit.me/), a college advising company, estimate that around [345](https://www.bostonglobe.com/2020/05/08/metro/amid-pandemic-growing-list-colleges-financial-peril/) colleges and universities are now in financial peril because of the pandemic.

Dr Fauci told the committee that a vaccine or therapy for Covid-19 would not arrive in time for the autumn. Another expert, Dr Giroir, offered estimates of nationwide testing capacity in the fall ranging from 25m to 50m per month.

He admitted that this is not enough to regularly test a nation of 330m, or a US college population of 20m, Dr Giroir suggested trying early-warning strategies that could include using a single test on a collection of student samples, or [testing the sewage](https://www.health.com/condition/infectious-diseases/coronavirus/coronavirus-sewage-testing) from a dormitory or from a section of campus for tell-tale signs of coronavirus. Robert Redfield, director of the US Center for Disease Control and Prevention, said that even the best scientific and medical scenarios would require steadfast commitment to extensive [behavioural changes](https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2020/05/08/teacher-predicts-what-his-classroom-others-will-look-like-fall/) on campuses, and substantial increases in systems for tracing contacts of those found to be infected.

I would be very interested if anyone knows what (if anything) is planned for the UK system? Has any planning been done? Or has the Dom not thought that it is important enough for his attention yet.

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**EMPLOYMENT**

**PENSIONS AT RISK**

Many companies are expected to stop filling shortfalls in their pension schemes during the crisis. Regulators are permitting suspensions to help businesses survive. Debenhams has already missed a payment and the Arcadia group, which owns Topshop, plans to stop them. The pension schemes affected are the most valuable for staff because they guarantee a retirement income based on your salary while working, but there has to be a fund in place to back the promise. In many cases funds have huge shortfalls and the current crisis has made the situation worse. Employers are supposed to be making emergency contributions, in addition to their normal ones, to try to close the gap.

A leading pension consultancy firm, LCP, has estimated that more than 500 companies will take advantage of an emergency measure under which the trustees of pension schemes can allow them to put off paying for three months.

Jill Ampleford, a partner at LCP said: "The ability to agree with trustees a delay in making pension contributions will help firms to weather the present storm and continue their support to the scheme in the long-term. But it will be vital to get things back on track once the crisis is over, so that a realistic plan is put in place to deal with the shortfall." David Fairs, executive director of policy at the Pensions Regulator, said, "We are clear that the best support for a pension scheme is a strong employer. It is vital that we support businesses and trustees through this crisis while balancing the risks to members." However, LCP warned that if the economic damage from the virus is long-term, the security of retirement incomes will be weakened. The Pension Protection Fund does provide a safety net but if a scheme has to be rescued, pensions for many members, especially the younger ones, would be reduced.

**SOME SMALL COMPANIES ARE FRAUDULENTLY CLAIMING FURLOUGH MONEY**

The HMRC has said that it has received nearly 1,000 reports from worried workers about the Job Retention Scheme. Whistle-blower support charities say they have seen a "significant" number of calls. One said that up to 20% have been from people working in the care sector. Furloughed employees are not meant to do any work for their employer but many report being threatened with the sack if they do not return to work whilst still being paid by the government.

Protect, a whistle-blowers’ support group, said the majority of workers involved work for SMEs with fewer than 50 employees, and many are on small salaries. Their chief executive, Liz Gardiner, said, "We expect this is just the tip of the iceberg. In this time of unprecedented change, when people are really worried about their jobs. It's a really difficult thing to stand up and say 'I think you're committing fraud employer and I'm going to report you'." Georgina Halford-Hall, head of WhistleblowersUK, said that a large number of contacts have been from people working in the care sector. She said, "I'm sure employers are in a very difficult situation not knowing when an invoice might be paid. But to put their employees, who are really dedicated to those people they have got to know in the community, in a position where they're having to choose between committing a criminal act, or not having a job, or not look after the old people they're caring for, it really is a disgrace, a national disgrace." She said that most workers are too scared to come forward and that stronger protection for whistle-blowers would help, "Let's face it, if you've got a family and a mortgage and car repayments and who knows what else, what is the incentive to speak out under the current policy? There is none."

Experts say that given the scale of the scheme, and the speed at which it was set up, the furlough scheme has been a remarkable success. Karen Teago, a leading employment lawyer, said, “We have to remember that millions of people are receiving pay which they might not otherwise be getting, the alternative for many of them would be redundancy. Certainly, in employment law, many new regimes, many new pieces of legislation when they come in they have difficulties in them. It would be impossible to design a perfect scheme and certainly not in just a month. By and large the scheme seems to be getting money to people who would otherwise not be being paid and, in those terms, it can be regarded as a success."

The HMRC said it is "committed to ensuring the tax systems we operate are used fairly and efficiently and where necessary will take action to ensure compliance with the relevant rules, regulations and legislation that govern the UK taxation systems". It added: "We value all the information provided to us by members of the public aimed at helping us achieve that goal." It said any employee reporting furlough fraud would be "entirely anonymous".

**YOU MUST MAKE YOUR PREMISES SAFE FOR EMPLOYEES**

Companies are being threatened with prosecution if they do not make premises ‘COVID secure’ for workers. Ministers have stressed firms should ensure social distancing and best practice plans have been drawn up by the government for businesses, such as remaining two metres apart, being given face masks or provided with hand sanitiser. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE), is to do spot inspections to make sure firms are keeping people safe, it said that any that don't follow the new rules could face legal action. Their chief executive, Sarah Albon, said: "Inspectors can require businesses to do certain things, enforcement notices, requiring them to take particular kinds of action. In the most extreme circumstances if there is a risk of serious injury to an individual employee they can issue a notice which prohibits certain activities from taking place. Breach of those kind of enforcement notices is essentially a criminal offence and we can prosecute people who fail to do the right thing."

TUC general secretary Frances O’Grady has said that the government plans are a "step in the right direction". She said, "All employers must now carry out and publish risk assessments in consultation with unions and their workforces. After the confusion of the last few days, working people will only feel confident if government and employers act now to make safer working a reality in every workplace." The HSE has been granted a 10% budget increase to spend on equipment, hiring more call centre staff and carrying out more inspections.

I know a bit about the construction sector and am sure that the only time social distancing takes place is when a TV crew is interviewing a pious manager who explains how he (it is always he) is going to make his site safe. After the crew has gone most sites will facilitate as much social distancing as you will find on a rush hour tube journey.

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**MISCELLANEOUS**

**LEARNING A NEW SKILL**

There has been a proliferation of apps and websites enabling you to learn new skills. The Guardian has published a list of recommendations.

* [**Anchor**](https://anchor.fm/): (Android/Apple – free)  
  This app is owned by Spotify, but focuses on how to make podcasts, including recording and editing shows, adding soundtracks and then publishing them to various podcast services. The app will also give you data on your listening figures. Also see: [Podcast Studio by Spreaker](https://www.spreaker.com/).
* [**Blinkist**](http://go.theguardian.com/?id=114047X1572903&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.blinkist.com%2F&sref=https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2020/may/09/20-apps-to-up-your-skills)**:** (Android/Apple – free + optional subscription)

Condenses non-fiction books into 15-minute audiobooks. A subscription opens up its full library and offline listening. Also see: [StoryShots](https://www.getstoryshots.com/), MicroBook.

* [**Brilliant**](https://brilliant.org/)**:** (Android/Apple – free + optional subscription)  
  Enables catch up on maths and science: it covers the basics up to advanced topics such as neural networks. Also see: [Math Brain Booster Games](https://www.educationalappstore.com/app/math-brain-booster-games).
* [**Calm**](https://www.calm.com/)**:** (Android/Apple – free + optional subscription)  
  Offers guided (spoken) meditations, relaxing music and even stories read by the likes of Stephen Fry and Matthew McConaughey to get you to sleep. Also see: [Headspace](https://www.headspace.com/?%243p=a_google_adwords&%24always_deeplink=false&gclid=EAIaIQobChMI3JP1z4D_6AIVUO7tCh33_g_vEAAYASAAEgKux_D_BwE&gclid=EAIaIQobChMI3JP1z4D_6AIVUO7tCh33_g_vEAAYASAAEgKux_D_BwE&lpurl=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.headspace.com&~ad_set_id=51529951612&~campaign_id=917256451&~channel=g&~keyword=headspace&~placement=&_branch_match_id=781901907479450054), [Insight Timer.](https://insighttimer.com/)
* [**Candide Gardening**](https://candidegardening.com/GB/): (Android/Apple – free)  
  Includes identifying plants, providing an archive of gardening guides and help in finding people who can answer your questions. Also see: [Grow Your Own](http://go.theguardian.com/?id=114047X1572903&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.rhs.org.uk%2Fadvice%2Fgrow-your-own%2Fapp&sref=https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2020/may/09/20-apps-to-up-your-skills), [Homefarm](https://homefarm.club/).
* [**Coursera**](http://go.theguardian.com/?id=114047X1572903&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.coursera.org%2Fcollections%2Ftop-courses-2019-uk&sref=https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2020/may/09/20-apps-to-up-your-skills)**:** (Android/Apple – free + in-app purchases)  
  Offers programming, art and design, sciences and business and other subjects across 3,500 online-learning courses, complete with video lectures and instructors, with fellow students to chat to. Some courses are free, while others must be paid for – and will award you certificates. Also see: [Udemy](http://go.theguardian.com/?id=114047X1572903&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.udemy.com%2F&sref=https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2020/may/09/20-apps-to-up-your-skills), [edX](http://go.theguardian.com/?id=114047X1572903&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.edx.org%2F&sref=https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2020/may/09/20-apps-to-up-your-skills).
* [**Daily Yoga**](https://www.dailyyoga.com/)**:** (Android/Apple – free + optional subscription)

Taking you through the initial yoga positions to more advanced classes, complete with a ‘smart coach’ that recommends what to do every day. Also see: [Yoga Studio](https://www.yogastudioapp.com/), [Yoga Down Dog](https://www.downdogapp.com/).

* [**Driving Theory Test 4 in 1 Kit**](https://apps.apple.com/gb/app/driving-theory-test-4-in-1-kit/id829581836)**:** (Android/Apple – £4.99)

Also see: [Official DVSA Theory Test Kit](https://www.dvsalearningzone.co.uk/shop/car-theory-kit).

* [**Duolingo**](https://www.duolingo.com/)**:** (Android/Apple - free + optional subscription)
* [**Elevate: Brain Training**](https://www.elevateapp.com/): (Android/Apple – free + optional subscription)  
  Brain training app designed to keep your wits sharp with short daily exercises that test your memory, maths and other skills. You can play for free or subscribe to unlock lots more exercises. Also see: [Peak](https://www.peak.net/), [Lumosity](https://www.lumosity.com/en/).
* [**Google Arts & Culture**](https://artsandculture.google.com/)**:** (Android/Apple – free)  
  Provides virtual tours of more than 2,000 cultural institutions around the world, using photos, videos and virtual reality. Also see: [DailyArt](https://apps.apple.com/gb/app/dailyart/id547982045).
* [**Khan Academy**](https://www.khanacademy.org/)**:** (Android/Apple – free)  
  Khan Academy is an American not-for-profit organisation that calls itself the global classroom. Offers courses on maths, computing, science and economics through to arts and humanities, with a blend of videos, articles and quizzes to test your learning. Also see: [TED](https://www.ted.com/recommends?gclid=EAIaIQobChMI8eTLroH_6AIVCbrtCh0B8QorEAAYASAAEgIgmfD_BwE), [MasterClass](http://go.theguardian.com/?id=114047X1572903&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.masterclass.com%2F&sref=https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2020/may/09/20-apps-to-up-your-skills).
* [**Learn Cryptic Crosswords**](https://www.learncrypticcrosswords.com/)**:** (Android/Apple – free + in-app purchases)
* [**Mimo**](https://getmimo.com/)**:** (Android/Apple – free + optional subscription)  
  A site for adults that teaches programming. Several popular programming languages are supported, while a subscription unlocks its full library. Also see: [SoloLearn](https://www.sololearn.com/), [Swift Playgrounds](http://online.swiftplayground.run/).
* [**Simply Piano**](http://www.joytunes.com/)**:** (Android/Apple – free + optional subscription)
* [**SketchAR**](https://sketchar.tech/): (Android/Apple – free + optional subscription)

Uses augmented reality to teach you to draw, as you hold your device over the paper. You can start from scratch or choose various topics to explore, such as animals or graffiti. Also see: [Da Vinci Eye](http://www.davincieyeapp.com/).

* [**Skillshare**](http://go.theguardian.com/?id=114047X1572903&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.skillshare.com%2Fbrowse%2Fapp-development&sref=https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2020/may/09/20-apps-to-up-your-skills)**:** (Android/Apple – free + optional subscription)

Covers drawing, photography, graphic design and other creative disciplines. There are also business-focused courses in topics such as marketing. A single subscription unlocks its catalogue. Also see: [CreativeLive](http://go.theguardian.com/?id=114047X1572903&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.creativelive.com%2F&sref=https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2020/may/09/20-apps-to-up-your-skills).

* [**Steezy Studio**](https://www.steezy.co/)**:** (Android/Apple – free + optional subscription)  
  Offers 500+ video dance classes in styles such as hip-hop, dance hall and breaking. Also see: [Dance Reality](https://www.dancerealityapp.com/).
* [**Yousician**](https://yousician.com/): (Android/Apple – free + optional subscription)  
  Learn to play guitar (or ukulele) with bite-size lessons based on familiar songs, with constant feedback. A subscription removes the free version’s restrictions. Also see: [Fender Play](http://go.theguardian.com/?id=114047X1572903&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.fender.com%2Fplay&sref=https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2020/may/09/20-apps-to-up-your-skills), Simply Guitar.
* [**Yummly**](https://www.yummly.co.uk/)**:** (Android/Apple – free + optional subscription)  
  Helps you develop your improvisational skills in the kitchen. Offers guided recipes and helping you find ideas based on the ingredients you have. Also see: [Tasty](https://tasty.co/), [SuperCook](https://www.supercook.com/" \l "/recipes)

**THE COVID 19 CRISIS SHOWS THE NEED TO INCREASE PEOPLE’S NUMERACY**

Andy Haldane, chief economist at the Bank of England, has written an article in which he says that the Covid-19 crisis has brought home the importance of increasing the level of numeracy. He says that surveys suggest more than half of all households are working fewer hours, over 6m have [been furloughed](https://www.theguardian.com/business/2020/may/04/over-a-fifth-of-british-employees-furloughed-in-last-fortnight), almost a quarter of all employees, and over 1.5m may have lost their jobs, judging by new universal credit claims. This means about a third of the UK workforce are currently either under-employed or unemployed. These are historically unprecedented levels of inactivity and millions of households are facing a cut, often a significant one, in their take-home pay. That is despite the cushioning effects of the government’s furlough scheme, the [mortgage holidays extended by banks](https://www.theguardian.com/money/2020/mar/17/uk-banks-set-out-details-of-covid-19-mortgage-holidays) and other important initiatives to support household incomes. He says that the hardest hit will be the lower-paid, including young people and women. These groups also tend to have smaller savings on which to draw to cushion the financial blow.

Mr Haldane then says that “This hit to household finances is being compounded by a second crisis”, which is, “much longer-lived and risks making a precarious financial situation treacherous for many households. This is the UK’s numeracy crisis”. He says that about half of the adult population have [numeracy skills that are no better than those of a primary school child](https://www.kcl.ac.uk/news/research-reveals-how-poor-maths-skills-are-holding-the-uk-back), and “worse still”, number skills across the UK appear to be deteriorating over time. The UK is the only OECD country where levels of numeracy among people aged 16-24 are lower than those aged 55-64.

He says that “it is well-evidenced that numeracy and financial literacy are intimately interlinked. Without confidence in numbers, it is very difficult for people to navigate their finances, whether it is drawing up a weekly balance sheet of incomings and outgoings or understanding the annual percentage rate (APR) on their loans. In my travels across the UK, it is clear the numeracy crisis is adding greatly to levels of debt and depression”. He notes that the half of the population least confident with numbers are also most likely to suffer the largest hit to their income, and “As the twin crises have collided, the poor, the young and the most vulnerable households are left facing double jeopardy”.

Mr Haldane says, “Yet, at the same time, these twin crises may also present an opportunity to improve people’s number skills in a way that would in turn help them navigate the financial rapids they are currently facing”. He then talks about ‘National Numeracy Day’ which is run by the charity National Numeracy, which he is chair of. He says that it offers tools to improve people’s number skills and confidence including [the National Numeracy Challenge](https://www.nnchallenge.org.uk/), which is a short test that checks if your maths skills match your expectations, and if not you can get practical advice. He stresses that “It is about understanding percentages, spotting best-buy deals and making the most of your money, not algebra and trigonometry”. He says, “there is no such thing as having a ‘maths brain’. We all do; it just needs the tools and the time to make it tick.”

Mr Haldane says, “In normal times, with demanding jobs and lives, it is hard for people to find the time (and the inclination) to brush up on their number skills, and there is evidence some people may systematically overestimate their ability with numbers, but these times are anything but normal. Facing stretched finances, and with at least some people having a larger-than-normal amount of time on their hands, a window of opportunity may have opened to invest just a little bit of that time in number skills”. He says that “This could help households steer a safe course through the current financial rocks. It would develop the workplace skills useful for jobs and pay rises, and, for those with school-age children, it might even help alleviate the daily stress of acting as a part-time maths teacher”. He concludes, “We are often told never to waste a crisis. Facing twin crises, we should use one to help ease the stress on the other. After your daily Joe Wicks, what better time to give your maths brain a quick workout”.

**CHILDMINDERS IN ENGLAND CAN RETURN TO WORK (with one day’s notice)**

Childminders have been told they can return to work if they are looking after children from a single household, following confusion over the government's position on [childcare](https://www.independent.co.uk/topic/childcare). Nannies and childminders can work in people's homes as long as they are not showing symptoms of [coronavirus](https://www.independent.co.uk/topic/coronavirus), in a move which the government has said will help some parents return to work. The Early Years Alliance (EYA) said it received a ‘last-minute change of guidance’ from DfE just after 6.30pm on Tuesday. The EYA has advised its members that, “The government has amended its guidance to clarify that paid childcare can be provided to the children of one household in any circumstance. This would include nannies, for example, and childminders may also choose to provide childcare on this basis if not already providing care for vulnerable children and children of critical workers.” It added that registered childminders and nurseries were already able to look after vulnerable children and the children of key workers.

Neil Leitch, EYA chief executive, said it was ‘unacceptable’ for the government to change its guidance with less than a day’s notice. He said, “This is already an incredibly difficult and stressful time for early years providers, and they have frankly had enough of last-minute, contradictory guidance from the government. Childminders have been told three different things about plans to re-open in a matter of days. Bottom of Form

To inform them that they are able to open for children from a single household with less than a day's notice is simply not acceptable.”

Liz Bayram, chief executive of The Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years said that early years providers were “stuck between a rock and a hard place” on the issue of reopening. She said, “Whether they open now or in June, they are struggling to decide not only if it is financially viable to reopen, with what is likely to be reduced demand from parents, but whether they can do so without placing their own families at too greater risk. The mixed messages and confusion from government make this all the more difficult to decide, especially when told you can still not mix with family members but you can bring minded children into your own home.” She also called for the government to be clear on what financial support will be available to childminders who reopen with less children, either due to safety concerns or reduced demand for childcare.

**WHICH WORKERS ARE MOST AT RISK OF DYING FROM COVID-19**

Male security guards, chefs, taxi drivers, bus drivers and construction workers are amongst those most likely to die from Covid 19 according to ONS figures. Healthcare workers do not have a higher mortality rate than other workers of the same age and sex, but care home workers have significantly higher mortality rates. Male care workers are much more affected than female, with a mortality rate of 23.4 per 100,000 compared to 9.6. The highest mortality rate was 45.7 for male security workers, followed by 35.4 for male drivers and chauffeurs. Overall, for males aged 20-64 the rate is 9.9 compared to 5.2 for women. The figures are based on data up to 20th April.

**ONLINE COURSE FOR PARENTS/TEACHERS ON HOW TO HELP PUPILS DURING LOCKDOWN**

A free online course is available for parents and teachers offering practical advice and tips to help them “be the adult children need during lockdown”. The 9-module course has been developed by Dr Pooky Knightsmith, the author of many books and a regular contributor to magazines on issues of mental health and wellbeing. She said: “At a time when everything feels uncertain, children of all ages are looking to the adults in their lives for guidance and reassurance. That can be difficult when we are also struggling to come to terms with a new normal and have no idea quite what the future holds. However, there are simple steps we can take to support the children in our care and protect their wellbeing. These ideas are evergreen and are a good focus to support children at any time, but right now they’re more important than ever.”

The course tackles issues such as flow and creativity, accomplishment, comfort, and fun. It is available by an on-demand video course, content is delivered in bite-sized videos that will take less than an hour to watch in total. At the end there is a short activity to help you reflect on what you have learned and consider how to take it forwards. Dr Knightsmith has other free courses available, including; supporting a safe and successful return to school, making a success of remote teaching, using simple self-soothe strategies, and staying mentally well during Covid-19. For more information, see : <https://elearning.creativeeducation.co.uk/courses/be-the-adult-a-child-needs-during-lockdown/> Knightsmith: Mental health & Covid-19: Be the adult that your child needs, SecEd, April 2020: [https://bit.ly/2LpbBa5](https://www.sec-ed.co.uk/best-practice/mental-health-coronavirus-lockdown-covid-19-wellbeing-young-people-teachers-schools/)

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**SNIPPETS**

* P&O Ferries is to cut 1,100 jobs, over a quarter of the workforce. However, the firm’s owner, the Dubai-based DP World, found enough money to pay its investors £270m in dividends.
* The Central Careers Hub has issued a number of webinars on topics ranging from IT apprenticeships through to the future of predicted grades. You have to register to access them.
* TUI is to cut 8,000 jobs worldwide
* All McDonald’s branches with drive-throughs are to resume business in June.
* MPs have been told they should be working in Westminster at the start of June to "set an example" to the rest of the country as lockdown is eased further.
* Teacher unions have advised teachers and support staff not to “engage with” preparations for a 1 June return.
* According to a [TE](https://independentschoolscouncil.cmail19.com/t/t-l-ppuudl-kuaykiil-h/)S survey of more than 19,000 UK school staff, just 39% of respondents in England believe this year's teacher-assessed grades will be fair for all.
* TES reports that the DfE will not be running its free school meals voucher scheme over the May half-term.
* The Christian[**Liberty University**](https://www.thenewcivilrightsmovement.com/?s=%22Liberty+University%22) in the US has closed its entire philosophy dept and given notice to staff.
* The University of California President, Janet Napolitano, has recommended suspending the requirement that undergraduate applicants take either the SAT or ACT.