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CES Newsletter: Issue 19

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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.

Coronaquiz 2 is to be issued next Friday. If you want to form a team and have not already registered with me please send me your email. Gordon.ceslondon@gmail.com.

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**SNIPPETS**

**SCHOOLS**

**OFQUAL REVEAL MECHANISM FOR ASSESSING GRADES**

Ofqual has published guidance for schools, along with separate guidance for teachers and a letter to pupils.

1. Schools must provide a grade and rank for each pupil in each subject

This will be the grade that a pupil is most likely to have achieved if they had sat their exams and will be based on evidence held by schools and reviewed by subject teachers and heads of department. Schools must also provide a rank order of pupils within each grade. This is because the statistical standardisation process will “require a more granular scale” than grades alone. If a school had 15 pupils for GCSE maths with a centre assessment grade of 5, they should be ranked from 1 to 15, where 1 is the “most secure/highest attaining” and so on. Ofqual said schools won’t need to send this data to exam boards any earlier than May 29, giving them at least eight weeks to collect it. They expect results will be available no later than the usual dates in August, but potentially earlier.

2. Pupils should not be set extra work

Ofqual said it recognises that schools may have “incomplete evidence”. However, it is adamant that judgments should be made “on the evidence that is available”. This means there is “no requirement” to set additional mock exams or homework to help determine grades, and “no student should be disadvantaged if they are unable to complete any work set after schools were closed”. Where additional work has been completed since schools closed heads should exercise caution where that evidence suggests a change in performance. There is no requirement to send supporting evidence to exam boards, though schools should retain records of this in case exam boards ask about the data. Schools should also not ask pupils to complete any non-exam assessment work, and marks do not need to be submitted for this.

3. This is what grades should be based on

Ofqual says judgments must be objective and based only on evidence of performance. These include records such as progress review data, classwork, bookwork and participation in performances in subjects like music, drama and PE

* Performance in non-exam assessment, even if not fully completed
* Previous grades (for re-sitting pupils)
* AS-levels (for A-level pupils who took an AS)
* Performance in class or homework assessments, and mock exams
* Tier of entry (in tiered subjects)
* Previous results of the school in the subject
* Performance of this year’s pupils compared to those in previous years
* Any other relevant information

4. The role of exam boards

Exam boards will use a statistical model being developed by Ofqual to standardise grades across centres in each subject. This will combine a range of evidence, including expected grade distributions at national level, schools’ results in previous years and the prior attainment of pupils at school level. The process will not change the rank order of pupils within schools and won’t assume that the distribution of grades in each subject or school should be the same. However, if schools’ judgments are found to be more generous or severe than others, final grades for some or all pupils will be adjusted down or up (meaning those pupils at either end of the rankings per grade are most likely to be affected). Ofqual said, “We will do this to align the judgements across centres, so that, as far as possible, your students are not unfairly advantaged or disadvantaged this summer.” Ofqual said that they were not ‘ naïve’ that some schools may inflate grades but are confident the standardisation process will be able to level that out.

5. Home-schooled and other private candidates

Some schools will have accepted entries from private candidates. They should be included in the centre assessment process where the head of centre is “confident that they and their staff have seen sufficient evidence of the student’s achievement to make an objective judgement”. However, pupils who do not have an existing relationship with a school “may instead need to take exams in the autumn to get their grades”. Ofqual said it is “urgently exploring whether there are alternative options for those students”.

6. Ofqual will consult on excluding year 10s

Schools can only submit grades for pupils in year 11 and above, including those taking A-levels in year 12. They are proposing that grades are not issued for pupils in year 10 or below, and that schools withdraw any entries for them. A consultation on this will be launched ‘shortly’. Ofqual said, “We realise that, if the final decision is to exclude year 10 and below students, this will be disappointing for those students, but our objective in awarding grades based on teachers’ judgments is primarily to allow students to progress to the next stage of their education, or to employment or training. Students in year 10 and below will have the opportunity to sit exams in future exam series. We will make a final decision and provide further information before any data needs to be submitted to the exam boards.”

7. Don’t share your grades with pupils

Schools must not “under any circumstances” share assessment grades or rank orders with pupils, their parents/carers, or “any other individuals outside the centre” before final results have been issued. This is to protect the ‘integrity’ of teachers’ judgments and will avoid school leaders and staff being “put under pressure by students and parents, to submit a grade that is not supported by the evidence”. Schools are reminded that although pupils are allowed to request their personal data under GDPR, exam marks and other information used to determine results are exempt from disclosure under paragraph 25(2) of the Data Protection Act.

8. Grounds for appeal will be ‘narrow’

Ofqual says that the normal arrangements for reviews of marking and appeals “will not apply” and are considering what arrangements might be put in place “to allow an effective appeal” and says it will consult on proposals “shortly”. It said, “Centres should expect the possible grounds of appeals to be relatively narrow and based on application of the process. In submitting data to exam boards, centres should make sure that it is correct.” Pupils who are unhappy with their grades will be given the opportunity to take exams, either in autumn or next summer. If they choose to do this, “both grades will stand”.

9. Take disabilities and personal circumstances into account

Where disabled pupils who have had reasonable adjustments agreed (for example, the use of a reader or scribe), or where pupils have agreed access arrangements, schools’ judgments should take account of “likely achievement with the reasonable adjustment/access arrangement in place”. However, special consideration requests, in the event that a pupil is unable to take an assessment or suffers a traumatic event that might affect their performance, “will not apply this summer”. Instead, judgments “should reflect how the students would have performed under ordinary circumstances. Where illness or other personal circumstances might have affected performance in mock exams, centres should bear that in mind when making their judgments.”

**FREE SCHOOL MEAL VOUCHERS YET TO APPEAR**

Many families whose children are eligible for free school meals have not received supermarket vouchers as promised because of delays in the system. Heads say the problem was widespread, and many took to social media to complain about difficulties accessing the scheme and delays in delivering vouchers. Schools have said that Edenred, the provider selected by the government to supply the vouchers, does not have the capacity to deal with the demand, which was exacerbated when Michael Gove, unexpectedly announced that the scheme would be extended over Easter. Stephen Morales, chief executive of the Institute of School Business Leadership, said, “We are at risk of not being able to feed these vulnerable children. Emotions are high. People are tired. Families are desperate. These things need to work.”

To secure vouchers, schools have to upload data on children eligible for free school meals. A code is then given to parents, who can convert it into a weekly £15 voucher for each child, to be spent in the supermarket of their choice. Many are still awaiting their codes. Matthew Clements-Wheeler, director of support services at Bordesley Green girls’ school in Birmingham, said, “The problem is very widespread. It’s worrying our parents. They are having to ring up every day to ask, ‘Where are our vouchers?’ We are just having to say we’ve done what we can at school level. It’s just a case of waiting. We are not properly serving some of the poorest families in the country.” Paul Whiteman, head of the NAHT, said: “Many members are having real difficulties accessing the vouchers through the national scheme. It is imperative that the DfE work closely with the supplier in question to address this matter swiftly.”

The DfE said it was working ‘tirelessly’ with Edenred to resolve outstanding technical problems. A spokesperson said, “We know that the free school meal voucher system is working for thousands of schools and voucher codes are already being processed and distributed to families. We thank schools for their patience while we expand the system to meet the high demand.” Some schools are choosing their own alternatives to the voucher scheme, the costs of which the government has promised to reimburse. Zane Powles, assistant headteacher at Western primary school in Grimsby, carries 78 packed lunches in a large rucksack, leaving them outside front doors before having a quick chat with each family from a distance. For Powles, a fitness enthusiast, it’s just another part of his role. He said, “My job is the welfare of children and educating them, in these times I’m just doing it in a different way.”

**TEACHER RECRUITMENT HAS COLLAPSED**

Teacher recruitment by English secondary schools is down by 50-60% on last year according to an analysis of job advertisements by SchoolDash. Recruitment activity would normally peak in March-May, but it fell suddenly in mid-March, following the stepping up of social distancing measures including school closures. The analysis found “particularly large” reductions in maths, science and English. By April 3, there were around 2,000 fewer vacancy advertisements than would be expected.

A corresponding survey by Teacher Tapp found that half of secondary leaders said they had paused recruitment while they decided how to run an online interview system. Others cited a lack of time, uncertainty about staffing needs and a belief that teachers would not apply for roles in the current climate. The research paper says, “Overall, this suggests that more job adverts could appear soon after Easter, once leaders have had the time to establish a new interview process. It therefore seems likely that teacher turnover this year will be lower than usual, reducing the number of vacancies that schools have to fill.” Education unions have told schools to be ‘flexible’ over staff resignation dates to ensure there’s not a “deficit of teachers” unable to move this year, with leaders urged to conduct interviews online. Joint guidance issued by the NEU, ASCL and the NAHT says schools should not be conducting face-to-face interviews amid the coronavirus outbreak, and instead should consider managing applications and interviews virtually.

**WE WILL SUE OVER LACK OF ONLINE LEARNING FACILITIES FOR POOR PUPILS**

The Good Law Project has said that the reliance on online learning during the lockdown is illegally disadvantaging pupils who lack access to tablets, laptops or adequate broadband, and it intends to sue local authorities to push the government into action. Research by Ofcom in 2018 suggested that as many as 1m children and their families did not have adequate access to a device or connectivity. Jolyon Maugham, the Good Law Project’s founder, said, “Local authorities in England have a clear obligation to ensure that all children can access teaching, so there’s a very strong claim against them to ensure that they are doing so. Remember that the government hasn’t closed schools down, and because they are still teaching online then children who can’t access that teaching are missing out and likely to fall behind their peers. And that’s what we want to stop happening.”

The Good Law Project is to back action against Southwark Council as a test case. Maugham said, “I have sympathy for the position of local authorities, who have found themselves landed with a new set of legal responsibilities to educate children remotely without matching funding from central government. Southwark is an inner-city local authority with a high percentage of children eligible for free school meals who we know to be unable to effectively access education online.” The lawyers say the obligations under the Education Act are “buttressed” by national responsibilities under the [Human Rights Act](https://www.theguardian.com/law/human-rights-act) and the UN convention on the rights of the child, which establish access to education as a legal right. The group is being advised by specialist education solicitors and prominent human rights barristers, Caoilfhionn Gallagher and Adam Wagner of Doughty Street chambers, and is hoping to crowdfund an initial £25,000 to cover costs. Mr Maugham said the group would call for the government to step in with funding to avoid placing a further strain on local authorities, and would write directly to Gavin Williamson, asking him to consider the issue.

**WE MUST NOT GO BACK TO ‘NORMAL’ WHEN THE LOCKDOWN ENDS**

Niamh Sweeney, a teacher at Cambridge Sixth Form College, has written a powerful article saying that when the lockdown ends society will be fundamentally changed, and we should not go back to ‘normal’. She says that education will need to change, “We cannot simply return to the status quo. When we go back to school everything will be different, and it must be different. We need to ask ourselves the fundamental question: what is the purpose of education? We must be ready to enter a new reality of an education system that values the professional judgment of teachers and leaders”.

Ms Sweeney says, “The use of education as an ideological and political football that fails the most vulnerable must end. We cannot continue with a toxic exam system based on rote learning and an out-of-date curriculum chosen by whoever happens to be the education secretary, and an exam system that has been responsible for a dramatic rise in child and adolescent mental health illness. We have got to stop the testing hamster wheel that burns out children. We cannot continue to allow 16-year-olds to sit 33 hours of GCSE exams, when education and training continues to age 18 and beyond. We must end the fixation with A-levels as the “gold standard”, just because they’ve been around a long time. Our education system must recognise the achievements of all and must not continue to label those who take a vocational education route as less worthy or less valuable, or their qualifications less rigorous”.

She continues, “We must end the education “market” and the game playing, end the practice of schools competing against each other for pupils, results and league table places. We cannot and will not continue to be [terrorised by Ofsted](https://www.theguardian.com/education/2020/feb/04/outstanding-primary-schools-fail-ofsted-inspections-under-sudden-rule-switch), an overbearing accountability system that ends the careers of school leaders and teachers, discourages professional collaboration, drives up stress levels and disadvantages those working in the most deprived areas”.

She concludes, “This pandemic is going to hurt those most at risk: those in precarious employment, those in rented accommodation and all those who, just weeks ago, the government labelled as unskilled, the essential workers in schools, shops, hospitality, social care, delivery and communications, cleaners, caretakers, the armed forces, police, fire, ambulance and the NHS. If we don’t recognise now the vital importance of an inclusive education system and the positive impact it can have on developing a fairer society, then, I fear, we never will. We must use the situation we are faced with now to end child poverty and inequalities in education and the wider society”.

**WE FEEL WE WILL BE CHEATED OUT OF OUR EXAM GRADES**

A poll carried out by the Student Room found that 65.8% of the 750 students who responded said they felt that this summer’s grades would not be fair. Some were concerned over how teachers would be able to assess their attainment if they had had a lot of staff turnover. One said, “I have had so many maths teachers and my main worry is how will they judge me fairly when I have to keep adapting to their different ways of teaching." Another said, "My last teacher had has only known me for a month, so how will she give me the grades she thinks I deserve?” Others were uncertain about the timetabling for exams in the autumn term. One said, "I know I should be doing work, but I don't know what, feels like I'm wasting time." Another said, "I would prepare for A levels, but I don't even know what I'm doing any more (other than geography), [because] it might depend on the grades I get. That's another thing I'm confused about, if we were to 'resit' an exam, how would that overlap A levels in September, and would we be allowed to change options after we get our grades?"

An Ofqual spokesperson said: "In an unprecedented situation such as this, where students are unable to take exams, teachers are best placed to judge the likely performance of their students at the end of the course. Teachers know their students well and are highly experienced in making assessment judgements. There is evidence to show that teachers can rank order their students with a high degree of accuracy. We have provided clear guidance to schools and colleges on the grading and rank-ordering process to help teachers in different schools take a common approach to assessing their students. As the regulator, we will do everything we can to ensure that grades are fair, and as comparable as possible between schools and over time. All grades submitted by teachers will go through an external standardisation process developed by Ofqual and the exam boards."

**IS CLOSING SCHOOLS THE RIGHT POLICY AND WHEN SHOULD IT END?**

Scientists from UCL have said that keeping pupils off has little impact, even with other lockdown measures. The research, published in [The Lancet Child and Adolescent Health](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanchi/home), looked at 16 studies, some based on the spread of coronavirus, and others on seasonal flu and the 2003 Sars outbreak. The findings suggest:

* While school closures help during influenza outbreaks, the same may not apply to coronavirus
* Data from the Sars outbreak (in mainland China, Hong Kong, and Singapore) suggest that school closures did not contribute to the control of the epidemic
* Recent modelling studies of Covid-19 predict that school closures alone would prevent only 2%-4% of deaths, many fewer than other social distancing interventions

One of the research authors, Prof Russell Viner, said: "Data on the benefit of school closures in the coronavirus outbreak is limited, but what we know shows that their impact is likely to be only small. Additionally, the costs of national school closures are high, children's education is damaged, and their mental health may suffer, family finances are affected. Policymakers need to be aware of the equivocal evidence." He says policymakers must weigh up the possible harms and reopen schools at the earliest opportunity and not wait until September if it can be done safely sooner. Prof Viner says schools could have a phased comeback, banning or limiting playtimes and scheduling some part-time classes for pupils to reduce mixing, for example. He said, "There's a whole range of things that schools could do to reopen in a way that involves social distancing at schools but keeps schools open."

However, Prof Neil Ferguson, from Imperial College, who worked on the [scientific modelling](http://www.imperial.ac.uk/mrc-global-infectious-disease-analysis/covid-19/) that the current government advice is based on, says the UCL research fails to take into account the impact that school closure can have alongside other lockdown measures. He said, "When combined with intense social distancing it plays an important role in severing remaining contacts between households and thus ensuring transmission declines." The chief medical officer, Prof Chris Whitty, has said that schools were "not dangerous" for children during the pandemic, but that the decision to close them would slow the rise of infections.

The government says it will be guided by the science in terms of when to lift any restrictions put in place to help slow and suppress the disease. It said that the measures put in place to fight the virus, including school closures, work in combination with each other and that while some have more of an impact than others, it may not necessarily make sense to lift just one. It says that even if schools were allowed back, the social distancing measures would probably have to remain. So, children going back to school would probably still have to follow the stay-at-home advice outside of school, and also the 2m close-contact rule while in school. It also says that staff needs must be considered, some may be in high risk groups who should not work away from home.

Dr Samantha Brooks, from King's College and a member of the NIHR Health Protection Research Unit in Emergency Preparedness & Response, said: "The finding that school closures have at best only a small impact on the spread of Covid-19 is of great significance, especially linked with the sensible suggestions for how a gradual return to normal schooling could be implemented." Prof Robert Dingwall, professor of sociology at Nottingham Trent University, said: "This is an important study that confirms what many of us suspected, namely that the public health benefits of school closures were not proportionate to the social and economic costs imposed on children and their families. It also underlines how the assumptions used in modelling the pandemic may rest on very flimsy foundations in terms of scientific evidence. This work suggests that UK schools could, and should, begin to reopen as soon as practicable after the initial wave of cases has passed through."

**DO NOT LIVE STREAM LESSONS FROM HOME**

Teachers have been warned by the NEU against using live-stream technology to run classes from home. The NEU said it “cannot be business as usual” while schools are closed and said that online lessons should be kept “to a minimum”.

Mary Bousted, joint general secretary, said: “Teachers cannot be working as though they are sat in front of a class, and children cannot be expected to be able to study full time with online resources.” Concerns include teachers’ online safety, for example the opportunity for screengrabs to be taken of a staff member. A survey of over 6,700 teachers by pollsters Teacher Tapp last week showed 64% of schools were using an online learning platform to set or collect work. However, just 2% of state schools were using live video conferencing, compared to 28% of private schools, 8% of all schools used online chatting, while 19% provided online video clips.

Geoff Barton, head of the ASCL, urged caution over live-streaming lessons, but said teachers will know their groups “better than anybody” and are “best placed to make a judgement on the use of these platforms”. He said it can be “problematic when used with groups which may be difficult to marshal, have varying levels of engagement, and in which individuals may find ways to abuse the technology”. The FBI has issued a warning over ‘zoom-bombing’, where conferences were hijacked and disrupted by pornographic or hate images. Anne Longfield, the children’s commissioner, said as popularity of video conferencing has grown, so has “concern for how secure the services are”. When using Zoom she recommended locking the classroom, so no one else can join, using the ‘virtual waiting room’ feature, and stopping private messaging.

**WE DO NOT WANT TO SIT OUR A LEVELS IN THE AUTUMN**

A survey by UCAS and YouthSight of 500 university applicants found that 86% said they were continuing with their application as planned. Just 5% are planning to sit their exams in the autumn. 60% said they had chosen their firm offer for their university place, with most choosing a conditional offer dependent on achievement of certain grades. 27% said they had received all of their offers but were waiting to make a firm choice where deadlines have been extended to give students more time to select. 51% said they felt supported at the moment but would like more help, whilst 37% said they felt fully supported with their applications. This was higher among white applicants, 40%, than BAME applicants, 29%.

Clare Marchant, UCAS CEO, said: "Our immediate insight during these extraordinary circumstances shows students are keeping their sights on the exciting futures that lie ahead for them at university or college. With additional flexibility already introduced into this year’s application cycle, everyone should take the time they need to confidently make considered, fully thought through decisions. We are dynamically keeping students informed online, through social media platforms and personalised emails, plus our team are on hand for individual help. With fewer young people in the UK’s population this year, there will be plenty of places available and there is no need to rush and risk making a rash decision. Clearing will also be a great opportunity to explore alternative options later in the summer."

Josephine Hansom, MD at YouthSight, said: "Our joint research shows how attractive university remains, with students still aiming high and thinking about their futures. Having the right support is an issue for some though, especially those from BAME backgrounds. The online information provided by UCAS and universities is rightly being prioritised by current applicants, though it cannot be underestimated the importance students place on the individual support they receive from those who know them best, especially in these trying times."

Geoff Barton, head of the ASCL, said: “We are pleased to see that most applicants have not changed their mind about wanting to start university or college this autumn, and we would emphasise that there is no need for anybody to alter their plans. The decision to cancel exams will have been extremely unsettling. But we can reassure students that everything possible is being done to ensure they are awarded grades as fairly and consistently as possible through a system of moderated assessment, and that they will be able to progress to the next stage of their education in the normal way. The grade they will be awarded this year will be just as valid as in any other year.”

**VAST MAJORITY OF GCSE GRADES ARE WITHIN ONE GRADE OF PREDICTIONS**

Analysis by Data Educator of 19,029 predicted grades across 22 subjects last year found that although only 40% were correct, 84.6% were within at least one grade of being right. Of the 60% that were incorrect, 31% were too positive and 29% too negative. The findings will be seen as a vote of confidence in teachers’ ability to accurately grade their pupils. Geoff Barton, head of the ASCL, said the findings should “give everybody confidence that predicted grades are generally close to the actual results”.

However, disadvantaged pupils are slightly less likely to have their grades predicted accurately than their peers (37.1% V 41.2%), as are SEND pupils compared to those without SEND (38.4% V 40.2%). The accuracy of predictions also varied by subject. Maths, which is tiered, offering teachers fewer predicted grades to choose from, had a 53.8% accuracy rate, while GCSE combined science, which has more combinations of grades available, was only 25.6%. Mr Barton said it was “important to understand that the system proposed this year following the cancellation of exams does not rely only on a prediction of what a student would have achieved in an exam. What matters is that teachers can rank pupils; research suggests that teachers can do this with reasonable accuracy. There will be an external moderation process which will bring grades into line with what would be expected. This will ensure consistency and fairness for students.” Last year, 20.2% of all GCSE grades challenged were changed.

An Ofqual study from 2016 showed that nearly half of pupils in English literature were not awarded the ‘definite’ grade for their exam. Although this was higher in other subjects, for instance, examiners in physics were 95% likely to agree with the definitive mark per question. David Weston, chief executive of the teacher development trust, said that “even in a ‘perfect’ year, most overall grades have a level of tolerance. From what I’ve read of Ofqual’s approach it’s the least bad option right now, flawed, certainly, but less flawed than other options.”

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**HIGHER EDUCATION**

**YOU CANNOT CHANGE YOUR OFFER TO STUDENTS TO GAME THE SYSTEM**

DfE has extended a ban on [universities](https://inews.co.uk/topic/universities) changing their offers to stop institutions exploiting uncertainty over Covid-19 to boost their numbers. Last month [a two-week moratorium was placed on universities altering their offers](https://inews.co.uk/news/education/coronavirus-uk-university-unconditional-offers-banned-students-exploited-2513983), e.g. converting conditional offers to unconditional ones or dropping their grades, amid fears that students were being pressured into making choices that might not be in their best interests. This has now been extended to 20 April. The universities minister, Michelle Donelan, said the action had been taken to stop a “dangerous scramble by some providers to secure the recruitment of students by using recruitment practices that put at risk students’ ability to make informed choices”.

Nicola Dandridge, CEO of OFS, said: "Ofqual has announced details of how A level qualifications will be awarded this year. Its guidance is clear that this year’s grades will have equal status to the grades awarded in other years and should be treated in this way by universities. There is therefore no reason for universities to make unconditional offers or change existing offers for applicants awaiting their A level results where they would normally make admissions decisions based on these results." She wrote to universities saying: “We are particularly concerned that offers should not be made or amended during the school Easter holidays, when applicants might receive and respond to offers without any access to advisers. Making decisions during this time is likely to have a particularly negative affect on students who have been identified as vulnerable during the period of the coronavirus outbreak and those who are under-represented in higher education. The extension of the moratorium helps those students.”

Ms Dandridge said the OFS was considering what action it might take against universities that breach the rules, saying that they have the power to impose fines and can bar institutions from the Government’s student loan system. Her letter says: “To complement a wider package of measures to stabilise admissions, we are exploring what regulatory powers may be available to us to take enforcement action against providers not acting in the best interests of students and/or undermining the stability and integrity of the higher education sector, including considering options for enforcement of any such actions taken during the moratorium period.”

**PAYING FOR EMPTY ROOMS AT PORTSMOUTH UNIVERSITY**

In privately run accommodation at Portsmouth University, run by Prime Student Living, students are being told they must keep paying, even though the block had not been finished in time for the autumn term and students were put up in temporary accommodation. Helena Schofield, president of the NUS at Portsmouth, said, "Where the situation is so unprecedented there should be some more understanding." Eva Crossan Jory, NUS vice-president, says in the exceptional circumstances of the pandemic there is a "moral duty" on housing firms to give the "option of a no-penalty early release from their contracts".

Portsmouth University moved teaching online and allowed students in university-owned accommodation to end contracts as many will be studying from home, but it has no control over private housing. The local MP Stephen Morgan wrote to Prime Student Living calling on them to "do the right thing" and allow students to end their contracts early, but was told by the firm that, "Tenancy agreements are to remain in force and students are obligated to continue to pay remaining rent." Professor Graham Galbraith, VC of Portsmouth University, called on housing providers to let students end contracts and have the "certainty that they want and need."

Student housing charity, Unipol, said about 60 universities have agreed to waive rent in university-owned accommodation next term, others have yet to decide. Most student accommodation is privately run and some firms are allowing students to stop paying. Unite, one of the biggest private providers, says: "We will not be collecting any further payments from students who decide they don't want to return for the summer term." But this depends on students notifying Unite by 17:00 on 13 April. Private housing providers iQ and Scape are also allowing students to end contracts, with a deadline of 17:00 on 9 April. Martin Blakey, of Unipol, said it was fair for both landlords and tenants to reach a compromise and "share the pain”. “No one party [including small landlords as well as the big student property firms] should bear all the loss." he said. UUK said emergency legislation during the coronavirus outbreak meant all students were "protected from eviction", whether renting privately or from a university.

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**EMPLOYMENT**

**MOGGY IS DOING VERY WELL OUT OF CORONAVIRUS**

[Jacob Rees-Mogg](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/jacob-rees-mogg/index.html)'s investment firm Somerset Capital Management is accused of exploiting market volatility caused by the [coronavirus](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/coronavirus/index.html) panic to rake in huge profits. SCM are swallowing up businesses expected to 'bounce back' if the world economy recovers. They are telling investors that there are potential gains of 500%. Investments include private hospitals in Brazil, pharmacies in South Africa, and a Chinese firm behind a device which checks if people are wearing masks. Mark Asquith, an SCM boss, wrote to investors: “History has shown us that super normal returns can be made during this type of environment” saying that “Market dislocations of this magnitude happen rarely, perhaps once or twice in a generation, and have historically provided excellent entry points for investors.”

Sir Keir Starmer said: “Nobody should be seeking to take advantage of this crisis. We should all be asking ourselves what we can do for our country and each other.” Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell said, “'Profit seeking from suffering is nearly as low as you can get. When we come through this we need a tax on profiteers”. Oliver Crawley, a partner at SCM, said: “The human cost of the virus is devastating and we take it very seriously, but our job as investment managers is to remain rational during periods of extreme volatility, in order to carefully invest our clients' savings and pensions for their long-term security.”

**THE ECONOMIC COST OF CORONAVIRUS**

Britain's economy is set to suffer its worst year for a century and is predicted to shrink by 7.8% in 2020, analysis by banking giant Nomura has found. That would represent the most severe hit to livelihoods since a 13% slump in 1921, when Britain's exports collapsed, and the post-First World War boom was ended by a fierce deflationary spiral. George Buckley, UK economist at Nomura, said this year's crash would easily surpass the 2008 financial crisis, when the UK economy suffered a 4.2% fall and the lows of the Second World War.

David Blanchflower, a former Bank of England economist, said UK unemployment levels could surpass those of the Great Depression in the 1930s. He warned that there has never been a 'concentrated business collapse' on the scale seen in recent weeks. There were warnings of the jobless total hitting 2.75m by June. During the Great Depression, unemployment hit 24.9% in the US and 15.4% in the UK, over several years. Prof Blanchflower said unemployment in the UK could rapidly rise to more than 6m, which is around 21% of the entire workforce. In the US he said that unemployment could peak at 52.8m, which is around 32% of the workforce. Prof Blanchflower said, “The Government has tried to respond but it has no idea of the scale of the problem it is going to have to deal with. We make some back-of-the-envelope calculations and they are scary.”

**HEDGE FUNDS MAKING A KILLING SHORTING THE ECONOMY**

Andrew Bailey, Bank of England governor, said on the 18 March: “Anybody who says, ‘I can make a load of money by shorting’ which might not be frankly in the interest of the economy, the interest of the people, just stop and think what you’re doing.” He was met with deafening silence by hedge funds who are continuing to short sell UK-listed companies amid the coronavirus-driven stock market collapse. Over the first three months of 2020, the FTSE 100 plunged by 25% as many investors rushed to dump companies’ stock.

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Short selling is the, legal, practice where hedge funds and other financial speculators borrow shares in listed companies from pension funds and sell them in the expectation that they will fall in price. Since 2012, hedge funds have been required to disclose their short positions (their gambles) in UK-listed firms when they account for more than 0.5% of a company’s shares to the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA). Analysis shows the number being taken remains well above the level seen a month ago and some hedge funds have increased the size of their bets against UK-listed firms including the Royal Mail and Morrisons. The number of new short position declarations hit a peak of 550 in the week to 23 March, five days after Mr Bailey made his plea. The number fell to 306 in the final week of March. This remains well above the 197 new declarations made in the final week of February and the volume of activity.

GLG Partners, a hedge fund based in the City, was shorting 0.57% of the issued share capital of the Royal Mail on 20 March. By 27 March it had [increased](https://shorttracker.co.uk/company/GB00BDVZYZ77/) it to 0.72%. Citadel Advisors, run by multi-billionaire Ken Griffin, had a short position worth 0.7% of the share value of Morrison Supermarkets on 18 March. It has since [increased](https://shorttracker.co.uk/company/GB0006043169/) it to 1.18%. Bottom of Form

Marshall Wace, a hedge fund founded by Sir Paul Marshall, a Brexit-supporting financier with an estimated net worth of £590m, also increased its short position in some stocks. On 20 March it was shorting 0.64% of the share capital of the engineering company Weir. By 30 March it had [increased](https://shorttracker.co.uk/company/GB0009465807/) it to 0.73%. Hedge fund manager, Crispin Odey, said in an interview on 21 March that his fund made £115m from shorting UK stocks in March. Since 17 March, Odey Asset Management has [increased](https://shorttracker.co.uk/company/GB00BRJ9BJ26/) its short position in Fevertree, the drinks maker, from 0.55% of its share capital to 0.9%.

A hedge fund industry source (anonymously) said that the personal financial incentive for managers to short companies was too great. He said, “What are you more scared of? Losing your job or the Bank of England? If you offered any hedge fund manager right now an option to short a company in severe distress, of course they are going to take it. You’d be insane not to.” Regulators in countries including Italy, Spain, France and South Korea moved last month to temporarily ban the short selling of companies listed in their jurisdictions. The UK’s regulator banned the short selling of UK financial stocks during the global financial crisis 12 years ago but has said that in the current circumstances it is not minded to act.

Simon French, of the stockbroker Panmure Gordon, said, “Regulators the world over need to remain vigilant. Whilst short selling is an important part of share price adjustment, if this process becomes disorderly it can have damaging impacts on the real economy, jobs and the ability of good companies to get through this period. There is also a stability case for considering temporary bans on redemptions [from savings funds] at times like this, as selling into a depressed market is unlikely to be in savers’, or companies’, best interests.” Jack Inglis, the head of the Alternative Investment Management Association, which represents the hedge fund industry, said: “Banning short selling would further undermine today’s fragile markets. Yes, several European countries have imposed such bans, but this must not become a global knee-jerk reaction.” The Bank of England does not regulate equity markets directly and does not have the power to ban short selling, that responsibility lies with the (toothless and inept) FCA.

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**MISCELLANEOUS**

**COVID 19 IS DISPROPORTIONATELY AFFECTING BME PEOPLE**

A study by the Intensive Care National Audit and Research Centre [found](https://www.icnarc.org/About/Latest-News/2020/04/04/Report-On-2249-Patients-Critically-Ill-With-Covid-19) that 35% of almost 2,000 coronavirus patients studied were non-white, despite BAME making up 13% of the population as a whole. The study looked at admissions of a sample of 286 critical care units, and found that 14% of the most serious cases were Asian and the same proportion were black.

Kamlesh Khunti, professor in vascular medicine at Leicester University, said, "This is a signal and it needs to be looked at more carefully.” He said that there may be various reasons. For example, South Asians live in more deprived areas and have more cardiovascular disease and diabetes. In addition, South Asian families often live with 3 or 4 generations under one roof, limiting the possibilities for vulnerable people to fully isolate. He added, "We need to ensure that every individual, including the BAME population, are following social distancing instructions. We have anecdotal information that it might not be happening in certain BAME groups." There are also other socio-economic factors, NHS workers, as well as transport workers, are disproportionately drawn from ethnic minorities.

In America the disparity seems even higher. Chicago officials have said that black Chicagoans account for half of all coronavirus cases in the city and more than 70% of deaths, despite making up 30% of the population. Other cities with large black populations, including Detroit, Milwaukee, New Orleans and New York, have become coronavirus hotspots. Chicago has seen a total of 98 deaths as of Sunday, with 72% of them black residents. The disparity is reflected across the state, where black people account for 41% of Covid-19 deaths, despite making up 14% of the population of Illinois. Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot said city inspectors would be sent into shops to ensure everyone was adhering to social distancing guidelines. She also raised the possibility of curfews in areas where people gathered outside liquor stores. Black Chicago residents already live on average 8.8 years less than their white counterparts.

In Michigan, African Americans make up 14% of the population, but account for 33% of the coronavirus cases and 41% of deaths. In Milwaukee where African Americans made up almost half of Milwaukee Country's nearly 1,000 cases as of last Friday and 81% of its 27 deaths, despite accounting for 26% of the population. Some 40% of Louisiana's coronavirus deaths have occurred in the New Orleans area, where the majority of residents are black. Health officials have said that residents suffer from rates of obesity, diabetes and hypertension that are higher than the national average, making them more vulnerable to Covid-19.

Mayor Lightfoot said diabetes, heart disease and respiratory illness were "really prevalent" in black communities. Dr Cameron Webb, an African American physician who is running for Congress in Virginia, said, "It really exposes our society's fault lines." Alderman Jason Ervin, who chairs Chicago council's black caucus, said that "rates of non-compliance in some parts of the city with the stay-at-home orders" might also be contributing to the statistics.

**IS MANCHESTER LEADING THE WAY IN MORONIC BEHAVIOUR?**

Greater Manchester Police has warned people not to breach lockdown rules over Easter after it had to break up 660 parties last weekend. There were 1,132 coronavirus-related breaches reported between Saturday and Tuesday, they said. This included 494 house parties, some with DJs, fireworks and bouncy castles and 166 street parties. One woman in Bury became the first person in Greater Manchester to be charged under the Coronavirus Act 2020 after police had to repeatedly shut down one of the parties. The force also had to deal with 122 different groups gathering to play sports, 173 more gatherings in parks and 112 incidents of anti-social behaviour and public disorder.

Greater Manchester Mayor Andy Burnham said such behaviour was "completely unacceptable". He said, "The vast majority of people in Greater Manchester are observing the guidelines, but we cannot have a situation where we've got people flouting the rules. If you are going out and about you are putting at risk the most vulnerable members of our community and you need to have a good hard look at yourself." The deputy mayor for policing and crime, Beverley Hughes, said the number coronavirus-related incidents had risen considerably, with officers responding to about 500 callouts a day last weekend.

After a harrowing (once weekly) shop at Tesco in Watford on Thursday I can testify that moronic behaviour is not confined to Manchester. I thought arrows to show which way to go in an aisle are meant to be obeyed and not simply a decorative feature, but I was in the minority. People were also shoving past you to get things and stopped in aisles to chat on their phone and gossip with mates. The shop staff cannot be expected to police stupidity but why some of the dividend paid could not be diverted to employing security guards to enforce good practice is beyond me.

**BBC HELPING MEET THE EDUCATION GAP**

From 20 April the BBC is offering videos, quizzes, podcasts and articles on BBC Bitesize Daily via the BBC iPlayer, red button, BBC Four and BBC Sounds to help parents and children with schoolwork at home during the lockdown. Lessons will feature presenters including Oti Mabuse, Katie Thistleton and Karim Zeroual. BBC director general, Tony Hall, called it "the biggest education effort the BBC has ever undertaken." He said that the BBC has teamed up with organisations such as the RSC, Premier League and Puffin Books to keep the lessons fresh. The initiative will include 14 weeks of core subject learning to offer "rhythm and routine" for pupils "whatever your child's age".

Lord Hall said the "comprehensive package is something only the BBC would be able to provide. We are proud to be there when the nation needs us, working with teachers, schools and parents to ensure children have access and support to keep their learning going, come what may". Gavin Williamson said, "As a parent, I know encouraging children to learn at home is no easy task and I am delighted that the BBC has worked with experts and exceptional teachers to create this educational package." Culture Secretary, Oliver Dowden said that this was "public service broadcasting at its best", and it will "make a big difference to millions of children across the UK while schools are closed". He said, "I'm delighted the BBC is working closely with the government to help make sure our children are educated, informed and entertained during these challenging times."

The content will be divided into age groups and BBC Bitesize online will publish a new Maths and English lesson for every day with more subjects to follow. The lessons will be nation specific, and the BBC has "worked closely" with teachers plus "trusted education providers such as Twinkl and White Rose Maths, the Department of Education in England, the Welsh Government, Scottish Government and Northern Ireland Executive".

**LIKELY TO BE A RISE IN ONLINE CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE**

The National Crime Agency (NCA) has warned that there could be a rise in online child sexual abuse during the Covid-19 pandemic, with at least 300,000 people in the UK posing a sexual threat to children. The figure, which comes from intelligence pre-dating the coronavirus outbreak, reflects a new assessment of the threat and is far higher than previous estimates. The NCA said that it is possible to access child sexual abuse content on the open web in just three clicks. They are combining with charities and law enforcement agencies to tell people about the heightened risks. The NCA said that offenders are already discussing opportunities over online chat forums to abuse children.

The National [Police](https://www.theguardian.com/uk/police) Chiefs’ Council lead for child protection, Simon Bailey, chief constable of Norfolk, said: “It is sickening to think that some criminals are looking to exploit the coronavirus crisis to cause harm online. Despite the issues that the pandemic will cause for law enforcement, child protection is still a priority and we remain totally committed to keeping our young people safe.” The number of child safety concerns reported through the child exploitation and online protection command website since schools closed has decreased. However, a host of educational products aimed at children of all ages, parents, carers and teachers will be issued through the agency’s [Thinkuknow website](https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/) and social media channels. Rob Jones, NCA director of threat leadership, said: “Preventing offences occurring is always crucial and now more so than ever when there is masses of online traffic and a possible elevated threat to children. We are redoubling our efforts to promote our online safety messages to children, parents, carers and teachers and are working with partners to keep children safe.” The NCA and UK policing arrest more than 500 child sex offenders and safeguard about 700 children each month.

New research shows that residential schools for children with SEND recorded 10x more safeguarding concerns of a sexual nature than other residential schools. It found that online and peer-on-peer abuse were the most common concerns and highlighted the challenge of managing children’s online safety and peer relationships within the context of round-the-clock care. The report said, “Alongside more serious reports of sexual violence and assault some mainstream schools also recorded, for example, sexting and a range of peer-on-peer concerns. It seems unlikely that these issues were not also happening in other schools; rather, they were not being recorded in safeguarding logs, but perhaps elsewhere in behavioural logs. In addition, in special schools, some concerns with a sexual element seemed to relate to young people experiencing or exploring their bodies with no intent to harm.” Nancy Kelley, deputy chief executive of the National Centre for Social Research, who produced the report, said: “This research uncovers the unique challenges involved in safeguarding children in residential schools. Managing relationships between pupils, overseeing children’s online activity, and communicating with local authorities are all key areas of concern for these schools.”

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**SNIPPETS**

* Scotland’s chief medical officer, Dr Catherine Calderwood, has apologised for being caught ignoring her own advice by visiting her second home in Fife twice. She initially refused to resign (backed by Nicola Sturgeon) saying she was focussing on her job. But after a huge outcry she has reluctantly left.
* Gun shops in most US states have been declared essential businesses and are allowed to stay open during the lockdown. Some states also intend to allow churches to open for Easter Sunday.
* The National Domestic Abuse helpline has seen a 25% increase in calls and online requests for help since the lockdown, the charity Refuge says.
* Home education: Resources for schools, teachers and parents: April 7, 2020: <https://bit.ly/2xRvTFM>
* Home education: Resources for schools, teachers and parents: March 24, 2020: <https://bit.ly/3dmVyXb>
* Greg Jenner, historical consultant to CBBC's Horrible Histories, is hosting a set of 15-minute history lessons on BBC Radio 4 while schools are closed.
* BT has created [a fun introduction](https://newsletters.jpimedia.co.uk/e2t/c/%2AW3v0V9g6vMkyRW1H9Drw4qMHlR0/%2AW8f9RQp1XXYgZW7QqfNB23p_Z90/5/f18dQhb0SbTX8YHsJYW2t-R9050RnyCVqlHxQ1hssMmW1FSlSs64DbVMV4hbtL5_LpNYW9cYnRd9dmDPxW8mnxz09bTNXYW954KlM4P0Yt6W2d4g6C7P8KgkW60Sn728Gd89zW1N0Md831V1q6W23-nGK265VBJW22-vhJ1Q40wbW5w8KG83gPWhXVR868f2JDZKmN2JDgVLPNtddW61LzvJ5K_zXKW3lj2tv3blhRkW3Yjbf-8BWb60VPy-7Z5LFHhRW419c0T3TmFnvW3gKR8N8zv3qYW31zXsG41gD7mW8vYBbk5G2CKDW3qDxCn5tbXmqW8jyxK-5tMTsFW5jgxyW8vB601W8KQlmF5lYczzW8dK_TX3sfd9XW44M2PY3gps4_W5CxXHK3nFl2fW3xdq2h8d9z62W8h-PxC42kg76VskR9j941smzW1NFfl48P4zkFW2JjYlZ63kqFyW1nhMWB8mFKy3VyqHxB4QtPMCW2nRylc5qPrHJW675vvF3sWdC8W2_yVBq5JcjYwW9cFG6R3CVSgSW3YpYcr1NwBMnN1MVsRj1wzGYf5sPJsR03) to the fundamentals of learning to code through programming a robotic arm to make a cake, complete with varying degrees of mess if you input the ingredients in the wrong order.
* [James Dyson Foundation](https://newsletters.jpimedia.co.uk/e2t/c/%2AW3v0V9g6vMkyRW1H9Drw4qMHlR0/%2AW4r0JmJ1k0CPdN8tZKqXTk9Tq0/5/f18dQhb0S9r39hP7lMW5Xy7hp2wqbgQW4VLgK55kh8QVVRqVDv64DbVMV4hbtL8Vm6N7W7qwBPl7JD6_VW8mQCyL7K57CTW4B_sgC7N2TzzW8hTsKm9dSp4WW79T9-02dkBRqW83_Pyq834DLzW8XWFC-6WBlynW85kgp67byFGvW4ffqGV19P2JTW63-j-R1tmXX4W5-2t5m20Wxs7W59R6_d20Y98hW1Yg1Qd2Y7Dl7W6pzHWB79p3pWW4YLbNF57-WqMW3H_Pty2DzCtRW1yB_bn7D6jKHW8hfhqx6f973DN21rQqCC9-5KVL34qj7t8vLDW5p98Ly6_MbFHW4-T61K7qbYYCW1MBncY8t5lKjN8j5Z-K5h__SW7Jqt5g49sjVtVsCsRH66G2gBW4d-1PZ2G-bxGW9d9j116zLZnLN1MjrqbV7fPxW52hx7D5JT-48N6wr3hF6Q977W4M13Rz9dKn4YW73Qsnm1d5pgbW4T_Zg56_93q7W2WdR7Q22PYdVW7kvS6h4qPd3zV42cYP3nNLHBW2WmBKT48TTcmW7cNWTc1sGZLVW9906_38d4vG-W8HjD3h2WTZMrN73Q0vR1-Nt_f2WTcSL02) has a series of short engineering challenge videos, including how to build the Golden Gate Bridge out of spaghetti, race a balloon-powered car or cobble together a homemade periscope.
* The DfE has said that schools could receive up to £75,000 each in funding to help cover additional costs incurred due to the coronavirus outbreak.
* Some teachers have reported they are being pressured into working over the Easter holidays to keep schools open for vulnerable children and children of key workers, according to the NASUWT.
* East Midlands Police have warned parents to be alert to a school meals scam. Some parents have received emails asking them to send bank details if their children are eligible for free school meals. Police urge people not to respond, "and delete it immediately".
* Sir Patrick Stewart (Star Trek) is a renowned classical actor and is reading a Shakespeare sonnet on twitter every day.