



# Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on children and young people

We are the British Academy. We held a workshop in May 2021 which looked at the impact of COVID-19 on children and young people in the UK.

We have produced this booklet to tell you all about it.

# What is the British Academy?

We are a government funded organisation which gathers together the world's best researchers. We are a forum for debate and engagement, and we champion the humanities and social sciences.

## Why did we hold this workshop?

We are carrying out a programme looking at many aspects of childhood. As part of this, we have looked into the impact of the pandemic on the lives of children and young people.

It is important that our research involves experts in this field, but we also want you to be heard and take part.

## What did we do and how did we do it?

Participants at the workshop consisted of experts in each of the areas we looked at. The workshop also included young people who shared their views with us.

## What areas did we look at?

Often, when adults think about the lives of children and young people, they only consider education. We know that your lives and interests involve so much more. We looked at:

Education

Family Life

Mental and physical health

Social Relationships, Play and Creativity



# What we mean by...

## Education

Doing as well in lessons as possible at school is very important, but school also helps children and young people with things such as making friends, learning English for those that do not speak it at home, and even providing a healthy meal at lunchtime. The pandemic had an enormous impact on all of these areas.

## Family Life

We looked at what experts told us about family life during the pandemic. You told us about the good and bad things about spending more time with your family. And about the problems faced by those of you who don't have enough space at home. We also heard about the increased strain on those of you who care for family members.

## Your Health

We heard about not being able to have a hot school meal. You also told us about the impact that lockdown had on reducing access to outside spaces. We heard about your problems accessing GPs, and the effect of lockdown on your mental health.

## Social Relationships, Play and Creativity

We looked at how the pandemic affected your leisure activities and your creativity. We heard how you missed seeing your friends during lockdown, and how you couldn't visit parks and other places such as leisure centres.

**"It's inspiring to have decision makers trying to work more with young people."**

**Young participant at workshop**



**On the following pages, we look at what the experts and young people talked about in our workshop.**

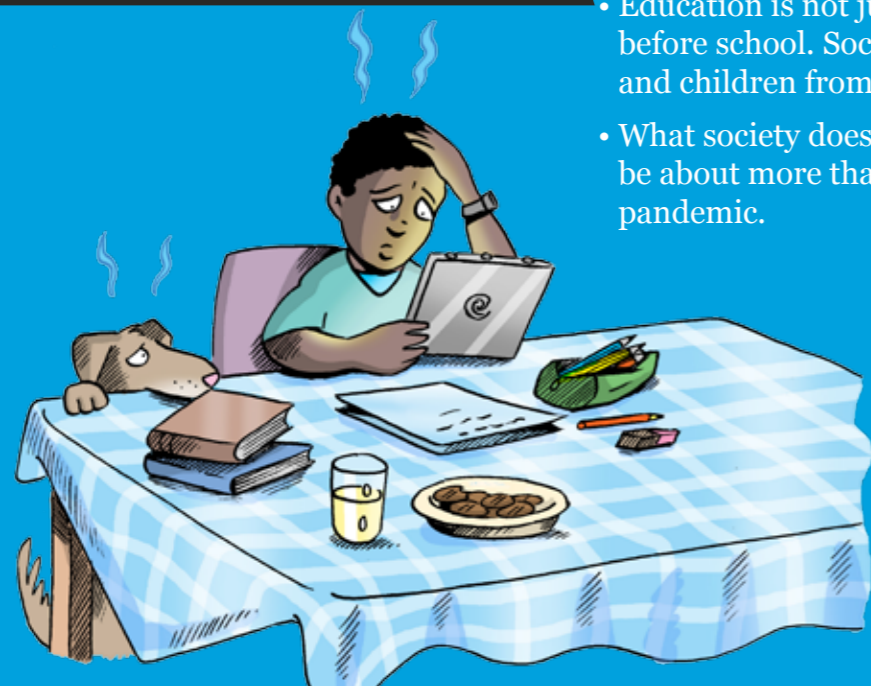
# Education

## What you told us

- The impact on those children from families that have less opportunities than others was much greater, with some of you reporting feeling less hopeful and less ambitious for future prospects.
- You felt pressure with the changes involved in moving to home schooling.
- Families were under more pressure – dealing with jobs and managing home schooling – and this had an impact on you.
- You wanted to return to seeing your teachers and class-mates in face-to-face interactions.
- You reported having ‘digital fatigue’ from using devices for everything.
- You felt confused and anxious about changes to exams and grading.
- You told us you felt “anxious”, “annoyed” and “frustrated”.

**“People in my classes and friendship groups have been confused...not knowing which ministers to listen to...when to listen to UK government or when to listen to Welsh government.”**

**Young participant at workshop**



**“It’s not just the UK government that has an effect on young people’s lives... Policy should emphasise that there are different COVID restrictions depending on where you live in the UK.”**  
Young participant at workshop

## What we found and what should be done to help improve your education

- Access to education for children and young people is a fundamental human right under UNCRC Article 28, so we need to make sure that you can access education.
- There aren’t enough mechanisms in place to allow you to be heard and consulted on issues that affect you. We must listen to your views.
- Society needs to recognise the level of trauma experienced by children and young people because of the pandemic.
- Society needs to look at how missing out on school and not being able to see friends and class-mates has affected children’s overall development.
- Education is not just about school – it starts before school. Society needs to support families and children from birth.
- What society does – going forward – needs to be about more than just catching up from the pandemic.

# Family life

## What you told us

- You told us that spending more time at home was a good thing for some, and bad for others.
- Lots of your families struggled with the stress caused by the changes to work, loss of work, money problems and juggling work and home schooling. This had an impact on you.
- Those of you who are young carers have felt under more pressure and unsupported.
- Younger children, especially, may not have been able to see friends and family because of lockdown, which led to increased feelings of isolation.

## What we found and what should be done to help improve your family life

- When we talk about the pandemic and the impact on children and young people, we need to recognise that there are different issues in different parts of the UK. This means that children and young people in each part of the UK may need different support.
- If there had been a more joined-up, well-thought-out approach to the impact of the pandemic on children’s rights, it would have lessened the negative effects on children’s and young people’s lives.



# Mental and physical health

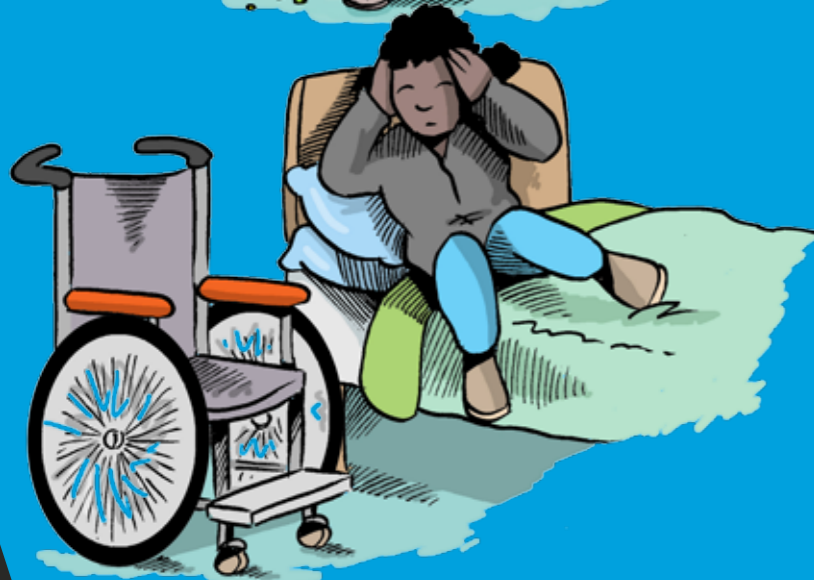
## What you told us

- You said that being stuck indoors, without enough space or privacy, affected your mental health.
- It was difficult to get appointments with GPs or other health professionals, when you needed help with your mental health.
- You said that online appointments were not as helpful as when you could see health professionals face to face.
- Younger children found it harder to stay connected with their friends, and felt more distress.
- You reported anxiety around preparing for exams, lack of information about school closures and changes to exams.
- Some of you said you lost motivation, and suffered from anxiety and hopelessness. You sometimes felt sad and lonely.



## What we found and what should be done to help improve your mental and physical health

- The pandemic made existing physical and mental health issues worse.
- Children are entitled to receive the highest possible level of healthcare and they did not get it during the pandemic.
- Some children may feel the negative impacts of the pandemic for longer than others.
- Society needs to tell children and young people about the changes that affect them, and tell them as soon as possible.
- Different children will require different kinds of help because 'one size doesn't fit all'.
- Society should listen to children and young people in order to give them what they need.



# Social relationships, play and creativity

## What you told us

- You know younger children who missed out on access to leisure facilities such as playgrounds.
- You couldn't mix as much (or at all) with wider family and friends.
- Some of you enjoyed having more time at home to play with your family.
- Art is an important method of expression and it can help children deal with events such as the pandemic, but it sometimes gets forgotten about.



**“Play is really important to development, but this goes away really quickly [as the child grows up] and takes with it some of the creativity.”**  
Young participant at workshop

**“Art is an important method of expression but it gets forgotten about.”**  
Young participant at workshop



## What we found and what should be done to help improve your social relationships, play and creativity

- Not being able to play has as big an impact as problems accessing education, because play is such an important part of development.
- The lockdown restrictions may have a long-term negative impact on some younger children (2- to 4-year-olds).
- Screen time increased over the pandemic, which may be viewed as a bad thing. But often it was the only way for children and young people to socialise with friends and families.
- Reduced traffic and quieter streets made it safer for children to play outside.
- Play and creative activities should be encouraged as they will help children express how the pandemic has affected them.

# Conclusions

- Society needs to recognise the high price that you have paid during the pandemic.
- Policymakers must listen to children and young people, like yourself, and involve them in decision-making.
- You would like a senior member of government to take responsibility for the interests of children and young people so there is a joined-up approach to policies on children and young people.
- When policymakers make decisions about children and young people, they cannot treat you as one group. You have different experiences, views and needs.
- Children's and young people's needs are about more than your education.
- Society needs to give you information in ways that you can understand.
- You need to be able to express yourselves through activities such as art and music. You have said that this becomes more difficult as you grow older, but that it is vital for all ages.
- Policymakers need to consider the impact of potential cuts to children's and young people's services.



## How do I find out more?

Please contact us on:  
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with your questions or comments.

We look forward to hearing from you.



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