# *Shape the Future*:
# how the social sciences, humanities and the arts can SHAPE a positive, post-pandemic future for peoples, economies and environments

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*Abstract:* COVID-19 is the most challenging global public health crisis we have faced for many decades. However, it is more than a health crisis. The impacts go well beyond the medical sphere and are changing lives, livelihoods, communities and economies within and across nation-states. The British Academy launched its *Shape the Future* initiative in May 2020 to bring insights from the social sciences, humanities and the arts together to understand how we can shape a positive future for people, the economy and the environment post-pandemic. These disciplines have a critical role to play in the handling of and recovery from the pandemic. This paper summarises the discussions held during twenty policy and research workshops which considered topics under three broad themes relevant to the post-pandemic future: revitalising societal well-being, recreating an inclusive economy around purpose, and revisiting the histories and cultures of science, policy and politics.

*Keywords:* COVID-19, society, history, culture, policy, SHAPE.

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## Introduction

COVID-19 is the most challenging global public health crisis for over a century. But it is more than a health crisis, as the impacts go well beyond the medical, changing lives and livelihoods, communities and economies within and across nation-states. We are only just beginning to understand the implications and the cause and effect relationships, but we have quickly seen it straining, if not bursting, the seams that hold our cultural, economic, political and social infrastructures together.

In response, the British Academy's *Shape the Future* initiative is bringing insights from the social sciences, humanities and the arts together to shape a positive future for people, the economy and the environment post-pandemic. These 'SHAPE'[1] disciplines have a critical role to play in informing future policy, based on decades of evidence and insight. Our initiative seeks to ensure we are ready and able to translate and synthesise these insights to help society and government recover and rebuild, and to encourage interdisciplinary learning which incorporates the long view and the world view.

Over a six-week period, between 19 May and 3 July 2020, the initiative amassed the combined insights of over 250 researchers, British Academy Fellows and policymakers through twenty policy and research workshops. These considered topics under three broad themes: revitalising societal well-being, recreating an inclusive economy around purpose, and revisiting the histories and cultures of science, policy and politics.

This article provides the summaries of all twenty discussions and the policy questions, challenges and opportunities that emerged from each one. It starts, though, with an introduction and a cross-cutting set of thematic principles. These principles are meant to serve as a starting point for further reflection by policymakers and the research community, and to inform resilient and robust policy and research ecosystems that can be effectively and efficiently used to shape a positive recovery and future for people, the economy and the environment.

## Revitalise, rebuild, revisit

The topics for the workshops emerged through an iterative process of looking for issues that were present in policy discourse and those that were identified by Fellows

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[1] SHAPE, Social Sciences, Humanities and the Arts for People and the Economy, is a new collective name for those subjects that help us understand ourselves, others and the human world around us (www.thisisshape.org.uk).

**Figure 1.** Titles of *Shape the Future* workshops under three thematic headings

of the British Academy or through our policy and research programmes. The result was detailed insight drawn from a depth and breadth of disciplines which covered topics from social cohesion and inequalities, lessons for public inquiries, pandemics and crises through the lens of history, inclusive, sustainable and purposeful economic recoveries, to elections, democracy and protests (Figure 1).

Several cross-cutting themes emerged from these workshops relating to the structures, processes and content of policymaking. To the extent that any synthesis across such a broad set of workshops can identify consensus, we believe there are a set of principles which emerge for policymakers and researchers to consider. These principles could be used to inform a more resilient and robust research and policy ecosystem which can help us understand the evidence needed to tackle the policy challenges and opportunities ahead (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Principles for policymakers and researchers.

*Principle 1:* Use a broad **knowledge** base in policymaking, in particular one which coherently integrates insights from SHAPE and STEM disciplines together, actively articulating the social, the historical, the cultural, the behavioural and the economic, together with the medical, the biological and the physical.

*Principle 2:* Be responsive to **local and historical contexts**, including consideration of people and purpose in policymaking. Knowledge, as understood in the previous principle, is not just about different disciplines; it is about the knowledge of and from people and their contexts.

*Principle 3:* Consider the implications of **voice and political authority**, with particular attention to the language and discourse of policy. Who has a voice, and how they use it, has important implications for how different communities engage with policy and the relationships and practices that affect the recovery.

*Principle 4:* Identify better ways of accounting for the **temporal and scalar dimensions** of policymaking, including how to integrate the insights this gives us and the mechanisms by which we connect the dimensions together to create strong and robust *governance*.

*Principle 5:* Consider a renewed policy focus on the perennial issues of **inequalities and inclusivity**, **sustainability and the environment**, and **education and skills**; the relational aspects of the pandemic are highlighting areas of future policy that matter to us all.

## Principle 1: Using and integrating a wide range of knowledge in policymaking

The need for better understanding, use and integration of knowledge in policymaking from different sources and types of data and evidence was articulated across workshops. This begins with knowledge of how interdisciplinary insights from across all disciplines can be integrated, and in particular how the SHAPE and STEM disciplines come together coherently to inform policy and shape better outcomes. For example, the workshop on the role of the justice system in public health highlighted the role of law in protecting the nation's health by providing a route to addressing health inequalities, while the session on plagues, pandemics and crises throughout history demonstrated through examples from Thucydides to the Black Death to HIV/AIDS that pandemics are complex, and policy interventions must be multidisciplinary and intersectional in response.

Equally, there is no single criterion for the kind of evidence that we need. All disciplines will bring a wealth of methodologies, findings and contexts from which data are produced and evidence for decision-making is helpful. It is well acknowledged that the integration and use of diverse knowledge for policymaking is challenging, but this means there is all the greater need to achieve it.[2] For example, the workshop on trust, expertise and policymaking explored in some depth the nature of expertise as

[2] See, as just one example, the British Academy's work on Truth, Trust & Expertise
(https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/projects/knowledge-frontiers-truth-trust-expertise/).

'fluid, varied, and contingent on new evidence' and its expression as 'possibilities and probabilities, not certainties'. Policymakers have to deal with potentialities, and the incentive structures of the two systems are not always in alignment, particularly in times of crisis.

We need coordinated solutions that integrate the social and ethical aspects of the problem from the beginning. Knowledge from SHAPE subjects can help to make sense of differing contexts, making the complexities of pandemics more navigable by revealing the influences of culture, and providing ways to understand uncertainty and communicate risk. They can help us to explain the 'why' and 'how' of norms and actions around health and disease, as the workshop on words, stigma and the corona virus demonstrated. Establishing ways to do this well is of course not straightforward, but future work needs to embed this approach deeply into its rationale so that we maximise its value.

### Principle 2: Being responsive to and knowledgeable of local and historical contexts

The second principle is of localisation and history, and the use of knowledge that is grounded in the citizens, communities and cultures that are affected by the pandemic. The workshop on urban environments brought attention to lived experiences, and the notion that one place's definition of 'build back better' will vary significantly from another's. The workshop on cohesion explored how the pandemic is increasing multiple fault lines of potential fragmentation and exacerbating inequalities. These are exposing how we are not actually 'all in it together' and ways in which that framing may also inadvertently legitimise very unequal practices. The session on children and young people highlighted how the impacts on children's lives and spaces must be understood, and responded to, from their perspective, not only that of adults.

Many sessions recognised the value of approaches to policy and learning which are grounded in and responsive to local and historical context as these are necessary to tap effectively into networks and systems within communities which are already trialling and testing new approaches to delivery of services. The session on public culture called attention to the under-appreciated renaissance of culture in inner cities and town centres in recent decades. There are myriad neighbourhood and community-based arts and culture projects in every part of the UK and the use of creative industries and higher education for regeneration of deprived and neglected communities ought to move to the forefront of government policy and cultural subsidy in the recovery.

**Principle 3: Considering the interplay in voice, political authority, trust and discourse**

Third is the theme of voice and political authority, which is concerned with the way people interact with the language and discourse of policy and form different relationships, behaviours and practices depending on how political responses to crises are articulated and whose voices have legitimacy in them. This theme cross connects with others as it concerns the way in which public policy is developed, communicated and implemented.

Discussions about stigmatised diseases identified the performative effect of language, as well as the public health consequences; the words, phrases, intonations and expressions associated with a disease like COVID-19, and the words used to describe those afflicted by it, can create negative perceptions that have profound and far-reaching consequences on people's lives. In many cases, the social consequences of stigma, shame and ignominy may be worse than the biological effects of the disease itself. History shows us that diseases have a strong potential to be discursively linked to particular communities and identities. When governments make unnuanced remarks about the geographical origins of a disease or imply the cultural practices of an ethnic or religious community may increase the risk of infection, there is a danger of provoking intolerance and discrimination of certain groups. Such effects also exacerbate inequalities and threaten societal cohesion.

How governments refer to COVID-19 and different groups affected by it therefore matters a great deal. The messaging is only as good as the public understanding of it. This not only has the potential to breed stigma, blame and marginalisation: sending the wrong message on a particular policy intervention, such as the wearing of face masks, will dramatically affect its impact and may hinder the progress of the recovery. Fundamentally, the effectiveness of such messages also depends on people's trust in government, institutions, authority and one another. But where and how can trust be built and what undermines it?

Many discussions also highlighted the importance of enabling meaningful participation, engagement, inclusion and mechanisms to enable the voice of different groups affected by the pandemic to come to the fore. Which groups are given legitimacy to voice their interests in the political response, and how these interests are to be considered and balanced against competing demands will have implications for societal cohesion, posing difficult questions for mechanisms of democratic participation, deliberation and accountability. The question of how we define groups and communities—and who defines them—will also have a profound effect on efficacy of the public voice. In answering these questions, the development of new policies must be based on contributions from a wide range of voices. The lockdown potentially marginalises different groups or further alienates the already marginalised.

Children and young people, for instance, have faced unique challenges, but their voice in policymaking was already severely limited. The long-term impact on children will exacerbate existing inequalities given the social gradient in potential to home school: we need to give attention to both the education and experience of children.

### Principle 4: Accounting for the temporal and scalar dimensions of policymaking

The fourth principle draws attention to different dimensions of policymaking. There are both temporal and scalar dimensions which need to be appreciated distinctly and in an integrated way for strong and robust processes of governance. The temporal dimension to policymaking includes understanding, appreciating and learning from past and recent history, while also considering the length of the recovery and where we want to be at different stages. History tells us that seeking social solidarity and community through collective activities—whether these be religious thanksgivings, 'Clap for Carers' evenings or, indeed, bear hunts—has long served as a way for humans to make sense of what is happening around them. The session on peace and security highlighted that deep-seated conflicts will not simply end because of today's crises, but equally called attention to areas where increasing cooperation between regional and subregional groups, notably in Africa, was strengthening the capacity of these groups to respond in such a way that could alter the architecture of future crisis response.

There is also a scalar dimension which must build in analysis of the complex interconnections between different scales of social and political space (personal, family, local, regional, devolved national, UK national, international, global), and the relations of power and influence within and between them. The workshop on an inclusive and sustainable recovery explored the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic as an example of 'radical uncertainty'; it reflected on the response of individuals, organisations and states to multiple concurrent health, economic, political, institutional and cultural shocks.[3] In order to respond well, we must develop ways of understanding these shocks across spatial and scalar dimensions, and integrating the possible solutions across them. The session on children and young people considered how the dispersed nature of governance on childhood policy issues, where there is no one government department focusing on children, requires strong interdepartmental and inter-agency working to prevent child-related issues 'falling between the cracks'. The workshop on cohesion explored how expansive, ambitious approaches to future policy could look at the pandemic as one crisis amongst many, including the aftermath of

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[3] See also a similar web of interrelated complexity expressed in a webinar and report on 'A Sustainable Food System for the European Union' by SAPEA (Science Advice for Policy for European Academies, https://www.sapea.info/topics/sustainable-food/).

the financial crash and great recession, the ongoing health and social care crisis, and the impending climate crisis. As these workshop summaries show, accounting for both temporal and scalar dimensions can play a role in resilient policy across all of these areas.

**Principle 5: Addressing inequalities and promoting inclusivity, embedding sustainability and prioritising education and skills**

Fifth, and finally, the workshops highlight the increasingly prominent need for policy questions to consider issues of overcoming inequalities and embedding inclusivity, ensuring sustainability and a focus on the environment, and education and skills to help us recover from the impacts of the pandemic in a way which helps alleviate social and economic issues rather than creating new ones.

There was not a single workshop in which some aspect of inequality was not discussed. This highlights just how wide ranging the issues are, with different dimensions of inequality being described as part of a 'grid' with types of impact on one axis (medical/physical, mental/emotional health, socio-economic and environmental impacts), and the types of inequality on the other (age, race and ethnicity, gender, disability, citizenship, employment status, caring responsibilities, income and wealth, and geography by regional and local level). Uncritically defaulting to the status quo may well lead to the persistence of structural inequalities. The UK government's levelling-up agenda could be a vehicle to address high levels of disparity between regions that may be exaggerated as the full impact of the crisis becomes clear, but there is also a risk that it is applied as a blunt instrument that ignores or masks significant within-area and intersectional disparities.

Nature, sustainability and the environment were also strongly articulated across the majority of sessions. Most proposals for recovery, whether discussing urban geographies, social policies, future business strategies or local action, stressed the importance of combining these with a commitment to environmental sustainability and the future of human and planetary well-being (see, for example, other initiatives that have also addressed this, including the recent Citizens' Assembly on Climate Change report.[4] The session on living with nature began with this as its framing, but the discussion about an inclusive economic recovery put a green investment bank at the heart and highlighted positive feedback loops between local planning and sustainability, the session on purposeful business explored the role of corporations in promoting sustainable futures, and the workshops on urban futures and public culture

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[4] Climate Assembly UK, *The Path to Net Zero* (House of Commons, 2020, https://www.climateassembly.uk/report/).

both stressed the need to rethink our relationships with nature in the context of our cities.

Finally, the discussion on an inclusive, sustainable and purposeful recovery highlighted the need for new, more innovative ways of thinking about industrial strategy. There is a growing argument for incorporating a broader understanding of purposeful economies, and linking this directly to thinking about the education, skills and training needs, including languages, of our workforce and for the children and young people living through the pandemic.

There are important fiscal policy questions throughout all of these issues in terms of how the public costs, and the major gains and opportunities, of the recovery are shared across different groups and generations. There may be different kinds of state capacities which are required to address any one, let alone the integrated set of issues identified in these pages. But, above all, there was widespread agreement that governments should adopt strategies which put human flourishing, in its widest sense, as central to their long-term visions.

## Workshop summaries, by date

The roundtable topics emerged through an organic, iterative process of looking for issues that were present in policy discourse, in addition to those that might not have been top of the agenda. The result was a breadth that covered issues from social cohesion and inequalities, lessons for public inquiries, pandemics and crises through the lenses of history, inclusive, sustainable and purposeful economic recoveries, to elections, democracy and protests.

Over 250 participants were involved in the workshops, which reached across the British Academy's community, including Fellows, award holders (particularly early career researchers), policymakers and practitioners. Each workshop was up to 90 minutes in duration and focused on three broad areas of discussion: what is the existing context and knowledge base for this topic, what are the policy questions that need to be considered, and what are the next steps for a co-produced policy and research agenda. A small editorial group was formed to write up a short summary of the discussion. These summaries outline the policy research questions and the challenges and opportunities ahead. They were not intended to map out policy solutions nor provide a comprehensive synthesis of the topic.

All twenty workshop summaries are included as Appendices to this article. They are presented chronologically in order of the date in which they were held, and the discussion chair for each session is listed. The summaries of each discussion vary, as did the discussions themselves. Some contain further references to other work; others

delved deeply into very specific policy issues. Some refer to cross-national and international work; others clearly locate themselves in the UK. Some speak to a longer term vision; others to immediate efforts of rebuilding and revitalising. We have left this diversity to speak for itself and to stimulate a range of thoughts and responses.

It is also worth reflecting on the timing and context of the workshops. Much has happened since the first one was held in May and some may seem to have gaps in coverage as a result. One of the most notable examples of this is the workshop on children and young people, which was held before any of the crises over the grading of exams. The majority of all workshops were conducted during lockdown and only just as some government restrictions were being eased, for example schools in the UK reopened for Reception, Year 1 and Year 6 pupils on 1 June 2020, and on 13 June the concept of 'social bubbles' was introduced and households were allowed to start to merge so people could see family and friends. On 17 June, Premier League football made a return, albeit to empty stadiums, and by the end of June travel corridors were established between some European countries and many people began planning summer holidays. On 4 July, museums, galleries, restaurants, pubs and many other cultural institutions could reopen, but face mask requirements were soon to be introduced and the spectre of a second wave of the virus remained on the horizon. In mid-July we saw local lockdown orders re-emerging for some parts of the country. And amidst all of the pandemic-related events, the issues of racial justice and structural inequalities in our society came surging to the fore after the killing of George Floyd and other Black Americans in the United States. There was a global outpouring of support for the Black Lives Matter movement and it gained strength in ways not seen for a generation. The workshops summarised in these pages were able to address only some of these developments as they unfolded and we hope that future work discusses and engages more fully with these issues and their implications.

Finally, a note about the review process. These summaries have been prepared and reviewed by the Discussion Chairs and the Academy Vice-Presidents for Social Sciences and Humanities as co-chairs of the British Academy COVID-19 Response Steering Group. They represent the central content of the discussions, rather than views of individuals who were present. The summaries are not intended as comprehensive syntheses of each area, but rather as an overview of the discussion that took place and which drew on the expertise and knowledge of the individuals present. They present a starting point for further consideration of the policy research questions we must discuss in order to shape a positive, post-pandemic future. They are intended to inform and enrich debate and discussion going forward.

To that end, we fully recognise that this is a work in progress. Convening and coordinating this series of workshops has made us even more keenly aware that there is much more to be learned, and that this integrative approach will be required with

continuing effort into the future. We welcome comments and feedback, as well as suggestions for additional or new directions to pursue in order to ensure that the voice of the SHAPE disciplines is strong and influential in future policy development.

**Summaries of workshops, published in Appendices**

1.  Democracy and protests in the context of COVID-19 (19 May 2020)
2.  COVID-19 and the implications for urban life (20 May 2020)
3.  COVID-19 and business (22 May 2020)
4.  Learning 'well' after COVID-19: lessons from public inquiries (27 May 2020)
5.  Implications of COVID-19 for cohesion (28 May 2020)
6.  Implications of COVID-19 for inequalities and vulnerabilities (29 May 2020)
7.  Implications of the COVID-19 pandemic for the role of the justice system in public health (1 June 2020)
8.  COVID-19: trust, expertise and policymaking (2 June 2020)
9.  Communicating COVID-19: when is there too much information? (5 June 2020)

10. COVID-19 and the value of (quality adjusted) life (expectancy) (11 June 2020)
11. Elections in the light of COVID-19 (22 June 2020)
12. COVID-19, peace and security (24 June 2020)
13. Implications of COVID-19 for children and young people (24 June 2020)
14. COVID-19 and the future of 'public' in public culture? (26 June 2020)
15. Living with or against nature? COVID-19 and our relationship with the natural world (29 June 2020)
16. Words, stigma and the coronavirus: implications of COVID-19 for holistic approaches to infectious diseases (30 June 2020)
17. Skills for the future (30 June 2020)
18. Supporting a recovery from COVID-19 that is sustainable and inclusive (2 July 2020)
19. Plagues, pandemics and crises in the lens of history: roads to recovery (3 July 2020)
20. Communications in a crisis: languages other than English and public services (31 July 2020)
21. List of workshop participants

# APPENDIX 1
# Democracy and protests in the context of COVID-19

*Shape the Future* workshop, 19 May 2020

*Discussion chairs: Professor Simon Goldhill FBA and Dr Liane Saunders, Strategy Director, FCO*

This workshop[5] explored the potential impact of COVID-19 on democracy, with a specific focus on protests. Held jointly with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and Fellows and researchers of the British Academy, the roundtable considered the relationship between protests and democracy, using protests as a way of interrogating the way democracy is developing, particularly given the current situation created by the pandemic facing all democracies. It considered the impact of COVID-19 on protests movements and for democracies more broadly, and the challenges it poses both in the context of domestic policies and for international actors in the way in which they engage with other countries and institutions struggling with similar—or indeed divergent—issues in the face of the pandemic.

## Democracy in undemocratic times

The pandemic is a challenge that has been posed to democratic and authoritarian governments alike, and it is important that there is recognition, and humility, about the difficulty of dealing with the situation. A health emergency of the type that we are engulfed in raises questions for even

> **This is an undemocratic moment even in the most democratic places—the balance between public safety, surveillance, privacy and human rights more broadly is a challenge facing all governments.**

the most democratic states of the balance between safety, surveillance, privacy and human rights more broadly. In the context of statehood and the management of public health, this is not an unparalleled moment in history and the relationship between the two has always been of critical importance. The dilemmas that are now faced have similarities that can be drawn on from the past.

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[5] This workshop was not originally devised as one of the Shape the Future workshops, as it was planned before the series was conceived. But as it coincided with the series and had highly relevant insights, it has been included here.

Even in the most democratic of places, this is an undemocratic moment as highlighted by the discussion on elections in Appendix 11. While it is evident that some governments have used the emergency as an opportunity to introduce more authoritarian measures to restrict opposition to their rule, this is not necessarily the motivation of all states that have imposed restrictions that could be deemed anti-democratic. Democracies and authoritarian regimes will both have strengths and weaknesses in responding to a pandemic. How to gauge the legitimacy of the states' responses—both democratic and authoritarian—or indeed chart a way out of them once the immediate urgency of the pandemic recedes will be problematic, and will be a crucial moment. In addition, the charting out of extreme danger has both practical and narrative-building implications. It will be important to track and be attentive to both in any holistic response and analysis.

**Perception of the public**

The next phase in the response to COVID-19 will be a dangerous one in a number of ways, as states grapple with competing challenges and values as they try to get things, in particular economies, moving again while the virus continues to exist within societies, demonstrating starkly existing inequalities and deep-seated grievances against unfairness. There is a difference between high crisis and what will come later. It will be telling to see where governments land on the question of values versus interests, and the response of the public to these decisions. The role of the incumbent at a time of crisis is not an enviable one, and particularly in this case where it appears very difficult to deem what an effective response to the COVID-19 pandemic looks like. In democracies, it has been suggested that the electorate may value skills that win elections rather than ones that can support effective governance—this will be a moment that demonstrates whether those who have gained power through appealing to the electorate in this way can

> **Restarting the economy while the virus continues to exist within society will be a moment that reveals governments' approaches to values versus interests.**

maintain the support while making difficult governance decisions. Trust is always a crucial element in governments' abilities to implement policies, but it will now be a new yardstick or gold standard requirement for government's response to the pandemic, and the recovery in its aftermath.

**The nature of protests**

The types of protests that have been taking place in the early stages of the pandemic can provide some helpful pointers for the longer term impact that COVID-19 may

have on democracy, as well as highlighting developments that have been happening for some time but have been brought to the fore by the current situation. There is a danger in seeing all protests as democratic—many are not, and this has been demonstrated by a number of the protests that have been in response to governments' handling of the pandemic itself. This could be exacerbated by the longer term economic implications of the pandemic. These protests have also reaffirmed the role that social media can play in such movements—mobilisations, particularly those with roots in cyberspace, have the potential to scale up quickly based on small acts of political participation. The pandemic has demonstrated also other long-term dangers that the online world can bring for democracy in the form of disinformation and cybercrime.

## The role of non-state actors

While some governments have seen the coalescence of civil society groups as a threat, there has been some recognition that civil society can play a role in providing aid in ways that the state cannot, and either a tactic or open acknowledgement of the role that civil society has played in tackling the pandemic at a local level. In addition, some actors that have stepped in to fill a state-support vacuum are not benign, even if they are currently providing crucial support. The control over aid and health support is a concern both in the hands of non-government actors and in governments themselves—the delivery of health services during the COVID-19 crisis is vulnerable to political manipulations. As such services are likely in some contexts to become patronage goods given selectively to the client groups of those in power. If and when this happens, it may exacerbate political tensions between groups and fuel conflict.

**The control over aid and health support is important—it conveys authority—and is at risk of being manipulated by both government and non-government actors.**

## A global response?

Moving from the local to the international, it is noteworthy that a phenomenon that is so global in nature has become such a national issue, with national responses prioritised over international collaboration, and attempts made to score political points through comparisons over different nations' relative handling of the pandemic. Such divisive actions are dangerous in terms of hobbling the global response to this global issue, but also could have longer term implications for international cooperation more broadly. This is particularly given the ideological differences and

**So far, the global crisis that is the pandemic has not elicited an effective global response—it has been divisive and dangerous.**

already-strained relations between many of the countries who have suffered the most as a result of the pandemic to date, and the potential impact on countries in the Global South is also still unclear. The lack of certainty and the expected gravity of the full economic consequences of the pandemic are likely to lead to significant turbulence and the potential for a transformational period. The SHAPE disciplines have an important role in helping the public and policymakers move forward.

# COVID-19 and the implications for urban life

*Shape the Future* workshop, 20 May 2020

*Discussion Chair: Professor Simon Goldhill FBA*

This workshop explored the implications of COVID-19 for urban life. Three themes emerged: the lived experience of those in cities; the opportunities and challenges cities provide in rebuilding post-pandemic; and the politics and responsibility for this. This is intended to be a starting point for further reflection and discussion, including within the *Shape the Future* initiative, and will build on and further inform work as part of the Academy's *Urban Futures* programme.[6]

## Lived experiences

Cities, as political and economic centres where people live most closely, have experienced the repercussions of COVID-19 acutely. This requires a holistic recalibration of urban life. It is too early to answer how, when and what forms of recalibration can take place—and by whom—with any certainty. However, as Appendix 6 on inequalities and vulnerabilities addresses in greater detail, an intersection of the poor, women and minorities (entire cities as well as communities and individuals) are and will be affected disproportionately by the virus.

**How do we record and document the new urban experience of lockdown?**

**As we return, what are the emotional and affective consequences of lockdown and how will the return to sociality be experienced?**

The immediacy of varying degrees of 'lockdown' and social distancing measures brought about by COVID-19 in cities has put biopolitics—the political control of bodies—into unusually stark relief. Uncritically defaulting to the status quo may well lead to the persistence of structural inequalities. To explore further we should consider: first, how do we record and archive the new urban experience of lockdown? Second, as we return, what are the emotional and affective consequences of lockdown and how will the progress to sociality be experienced?

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[6] https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/programmes/urban-futures/

**Rebuilding post-pandemic**

Rebuilding post-pandemic will lay bare significant challenges, existing inequalities, and the vastly different needs, priorities and available resources of different cities. 'Building back better' will be inevitably a value-laden and risky process. 'Staying home' and 'social distancing' are neither a universal possibility, nor universally understood as providing safety and comfort. How and when will 'building back' come about?

**How are the relations of supply, transport, space and green transition to be interconnected into an integrated urban policy?**

**How and where are the necessarily conflicting demands of such a complex system to be decided—and by whom?**

Cities will also experience differing opportunistic narratives of improvement and recovery, and differing risks posed by assumptions of popular consensus. For some cities, 'better' might equate to meeting urgent demands for food, sanitation and shelter. For others, 'better' could mean reduced carbon emissions, advanced automation or resuscitating the economy. In India, for example, it has been suggested that urban green space could be repurposed for agricultural use to compensate for a reduction in food supplies from rural areas. By contrast, the UK may experience a decline in urban populations, where virtual working is becoming more commonplace and major industries, such as tourism, have contracted.

This leaves us to explore, first, how are the relations of supply, transport, space and green transition to be interconnected into an integrated urban policy? Second, which responses to the pandemic have made cities and their residents more resilient, and could be built upon in a 'recovery' phase that will see many people continue to struggle? Third, how and where are the conflicting demands of such a complex system to be decided—and by whom?

**The politics of what is going on**

Whose responsibility is it, or should it be, to meet the needs of city-dwellers and to initiate and/or implement 'improvements'? There is a tension here between state and non-state actors, particularly in contexts where the state and its apparatus are widely mistrusted. Rio de Janeiro is an example where, whilst vilified by the authorities, gangs and cartels have provided vital services and infrastructure to favela communities. Recovering cities are not politically neutral spaces, but places where vernacular and grassroots knowledge and approaches cannot be ignored.

**Which responses to the pandemic have made cities and their residents more resilient, and could be built upon in a 'recovery' phase that will see many people continue to struggle?**

**How will the different compulsions of state and non-state actors be reconciled?**

The imperfect meshing of democracy and social media is being witnessed in real time through the pandemic. Productive ways forward are key for the future of those living in cities. To explore further: first, how will the different compulsions of state and non-state actors be reconciled? Second, and more specifically, how will the technology of social or digital media be reintegrated into a working political system?

# COVID-19 and business

## *Shape the Future* workshop, 22 May 2020

### *Discussion Chair: Professor Colin Mayer FBA*

The workshop explored the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic for business and the role of purposeful business. Three themes emerged around government–business relations, structures and decision-making, and business practice and international cooperation; and a set of questions which provide a starting point for a deeper examination of the issues. These will be the subject of further discussions and enquiry by the *Shape the Future* initiative, as well as within the Academy's *Future of the Corporation* programme.[7]

**The government–business relationship after COVID-19**

The substantial loans, grants and tax breaks provided to companies and industries during the pandemic change the relationship between the government and business. Governments now have new leverage over businesses, which could be used to persuade companies to follow government policies, particularly the climate agenda and other environmental initiatives, and as Appendix 15 on living 'with' or 'against' nature explores from an environmental perspective, there is an appetite within the general populace for business not to return to 'normal'.

The notion of a sustainable or social licence to operate could be a means by which this leverage might be used to work towards a more viable planet. However, three issues must be considered: the question of the government's priorities and whether it would be willing to push its agenda via business; how to reconcile the issue of fairness between corporate stakeholders; and how to structure any longer term relationship between government and business to overcome public suspicion of 'capture' and back-room deals (especially after the financial crisis).

**Does the crisis change the nature of the relationship between business and society and, if so, what should a new sustainable or social licence to operate look like?**

Another consideration as the economy emerges from the crisis will be the significant underutilised resources or 'slack', which will compel the government to look into a

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[7] https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/programmes/future-of-the-corporation/

new industrial policy. This could be directed towards green industries (bringing with it the need for retraining, commitments to research and development and incentives for companies). These policies may require extra taxation and the government could take the opportunity to challenge tax havens more actively and pursue a 'fair tax' agenda, as discussed further in Appendix 18 on an inclusive recovery.

**How can a new industrial policy be developed that responds to the consequences of the crisis and incorporates ideas of purposeful business, inclusive economies and 'levelling up' regions? What role will taxation play in this?**

In response to these issues, it would not be enough for businesses to agree upon a statement of purpose. They should also put in place governance structures which secure adherence to that purpose. New mechanisms of board appointments and non-executive methods of accountability ought therefore to be established, to ensure propriety of behaviour and adherence to corporate purpose. An advocating board would need to be fully cognisant of the interests of multiple constituencies and capable of balancing competing interests around a common good. It would not need to be a representative body; however, this can be difficult to avoid. Meanwhile, governments are themselves dependent on

**How can employees and other stakeholders be more effectively involved in governance? Can new decentralised structures provide a solution that avoids the pitfalls of a representative model?**

international financial institutions and firms. The British Academy's publication, *Principles for Purposeful Business* provides further insight into these and other issues.[8] The purpose debate also highlights challenging avenues for exploring the history and language of capitalism. Terminologies (such as 'investors' and 'owners') inhibit change and could be reconsidered.

**Structure and decision-making**

The issues around gatherings and travel raised by the pandemic also lead to the question of whether it is possible to structure firms into relatively small units, which might also provide new answers to the challenges of governance. Considerations of structural reforms to business raise the question of participation and to what extent different parties ought to be included in the decision-making process. Existing research has shown that bringing employees and stakeholders into discussions has had positive impacts on productivity, organisational effectiveness, addressing abuses of management and curbing inequalities. There is an opportunity for business to engage in a

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[8] https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/publications/future-of-the-corporation-principles-for-purposeful-business/

wider consideration of organisations' responsibilities to shareholders versus wider societal responsibilities.

Responding to COVID-19 may present opportunities for more plural discussions and contributions from those who have previously been marginalised, and Appendix 5 explores more broadly cohesion and inclusion and how

**What role does business play in other agendas affected by the pandemic, for example, regionalisation, the role of cities, inequality and social cohesion?**

new policies should involve those most affected through co-produced research with communities. One challenge in this regard relating to business representation is that unions represent an increasingly small part of the workforce, so further research and debate is needed on the right mechanisms to bring all stakeholder voices and groups into decision-making. There are also differences between regional and national needs which existed before the pandemic. The UK government's *levelling-up* agenda could be a vehicle to address high levels of disparity between regions that may be exaggerated as the full impact of the crisis becomes clear.

**Business practice and international cooperation**

Increasingly isolationist policy interventions made during the pandemic have made it more difficult to manage resilient global supply chains. Britain's businesses are particularly embedded in these value chains and any policy decisions will

**How can the UK encourage and lead international cooperation and exchange of good practices on business policy in response to the pandemic?**

need to be made in relation to careful consideration of their potential impact across borders.

International cooperation will be more challenging after the pandemic and, potentially, Brexit may mean there is a greater need for knowledge of different languages, societies and cultures, as explored in Appendix 17 examining future skills. Taxation highlights the challenge, particularly if new business taxation is used to repair public finances and if there is less cooperation and more tax competition between governments pursuing unilateral action.

Meanwhile, the value of cooperation between companies is becoming better recognised as the pandemic has created new pressures and expectations. But cooperation may be impeded by competition policies which were already being questioned before the outbreak.

# Learning 'well' after COVID-19: lessons from public inquiries

*Shape the Future* workshop, 27 May 2020

*Discussion chair: Professor Christopher McCrudden FBA*

This workshop explored the lessons from the past for any future public inquiry on COVID-19. It explored how society, government and public institutions can 'learn lessons' from the COVID-19 pandemic and its wider societal and economic consequences, with a particular focus on the role public accountability mechanisms may play in this process. This session highlighted issues that policymakers should be considering in the short term, even as the pandemic is ongoing, and the role that academia can play in the delivery of effective lesson-learning and public accountability mechanisms. This note is intended as a starting point for further reflection and discussion, including within the *Shape the Future* initiative, and will build on and further inform work as part of the Academy's *Truth, Trust & Expertise* programme.[9]

## The purpose of an inquiry

One key question is what is the primary purpose of an inquiry (or inquiries)? If the objective is to learn from what has happened, are there some types of inquiry that are better than others at delivering this objective? While a 'no blame' inquiry might facilitate the process of making it an open inquiry, would this be acceptable to the public, who may wish to see those responsible made accountable for any shortcomings in decisions made in response to the pandemic? In this context, it is important to distinguish liability-determining processes centred on attributing blame, from inquiries that seek to make decision-makers accountable.

> **Are there some accountability mechanisms better suited to lesson-learning than others? Would ensuring accountability get in the way of lesson-learning?**

We should also be mindful that we are unlikely to be able to consider the pandemic 'over' until there is a vaccine or effective treatment. This will have an impact on how an inquiry is likely to be

> **Will there be an impact on current policymaking behaviour based on the type of accountability mechanism chosen?**

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[9] https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/projects/knowledge-frontiers-truth-trust-expertise/

conducted, the impacts it will have downstream on decision-making and policy responses to any repeat waves. Would different forms of inquiry have different impacts on current policymaking behaviour? Appendix 8 considers trust in the policymaking process and how accountability can be improved.

While the focus for policymakers may be learning lessons, others may see the inquiry in a very different way, and it does not at this stage seem likely that the government will be entirely in control of the agenda—they will have to work with opposition parties and others in order to address issues of accountability. The Scottish government's decision to hold an inquiry may also create some pressure to have one for the United Kingdom as a whole. In addition, it seems that there are some areas in the handling of the pandemic which may necessitate specific scrutiny—for example, decisions on care homes or the adequacy of measures taken to protect key workers. On some of these, if the government fails to take the initiative to address the question of accountability, they are likely to be forced to through the courts—will this impact the way the government approaches the entire question of accountability mechanisms? This also raises the question of the ability to learn in real time from the evidence that is already being amassed through legal challenges working their way through the courts.

Given the global nature of the pandemic, the international element is also important in this context. There is already a World Health Organization commitment to an inquiry into the pandemic, and what the UK does in terms of accountability will have to be set in the context of a global response and global accountability mechanisms. The establishment of inquiries in other European countries like France and Sweden are also likely to produce findings that have implications for the UK.

**Learning lessons from previous inquiries**

The discussion highlighted that, even in cases where extensive inquiries had taken place on issues closely connected to pandemics, sometimes the lessons learned have not been the right ones, particularly when being applied to a new situation. Lessons from previous inquiries should

**What can be learnt from previous inquiries about both process and scope, to better inform the development of accountability mechanisms around the COVID-19 response?**

be interrogated in the particular context in which policymakers find themselves today.

However, past inquiries, and the way they were approached, could be helpful in informing the approach to a new inquiry, particularly in the initial stages to address questions around the terms of reference for a possible inquiry, timings and the extent to which it should (and can) be made independent. The intention would not be for

previous inquiries to form a blueprint for an inquiry related to COVID-19, but for lessons to be learnt from the process and response to previous inquiries.

In this spirit, we should focus efforts on a lessons-learned inquiry, or lessons being learned as we have noted earlier, rather than a blame-focused inquiry. Such an emphasis on 'lessons used' will be important for the points about real-time learning. It will also be important to consider the timeliness and potential benefit of short, focused

**How broad and deep should an inquiry be at understanding the effect of long-term structural issues on the system, and how should it be handled with respect to the likelihood of repeat waves?**

inquiries versus wider ranging ones, and that perhaps a mix, or cascaded set of inquiries might better facilitate timely policy and legal changes, as well as restitution.

This stimulated a discussion around the types of expertise that should be drawn on during the process of an inquiry, highlighting the benefits of drawing on academic knowledge. This was both in terms of the expertise that can be drawn on but also bearing in mind the best use of resources and skills. There are some elements that judges and lawyers may need to be involved in, but much of the work can, and arguably should, be led by others, including academics from relevant disciplines.

Finally, there is an immediate need to focus on the evidence that currently exists. For example, one of the most interesting elements of this pandemic may be the development of scientific advice and how it affected policy. In some ways it seems that a considerable amount of relevant evidence is already in the public domain, for example in the form of minutes from SAGE meetings. But does this cover all forms of communication, particularly given the contexts in which people are working, primarily from home using new forms of technology? We have already seen a shift to communication via sources that are less easy

**Immediate thought needs to be given to how communications and evidence around decision-making is being stored and how it will be made accessible in the future.**

to document later, including WhatsApp and other form of 'hidden communications'. Has thought also been given to how virtual meetings and communications are recorded and stored for future use, including those most relevant in the context of an inquiry?

**Future research and policy agenda**

A future research and policy agenda should provide guidance for policymakers about what the drivers for an inquiry are, when they should be used, and how we make sense of them in 'real-time' during a continuing crisis. We need to understand the role that independent bodies like the national academies may play in analysing how policymakers comprehend and use data and evidence. We should identify ways to support a

diverse set of policymakers, at national, regional and local levels, as well as regulators, to understand the effects of learning in real time and involve a wider set of relevant academic disciplines in looking at these questions. This wider inclusion is also a matter of trust and authority in policy, as examined in Appendix 8. Finally, there is a looming question as to who should monitor and bring together the evidence in real time and how that will be stored and utilised over the next few years, including evidence that is being generated through the legal system. There are some accountability mechanisms that are better than others in producing usable knowledge and facilitating learning and we should understand which mechanisms will be most suitable here, and why.

# APPENDIX 5
# Implications of COVID-19 for cohesion

*Shape the Future* workshop, 28 May 2020

*Discussion Chair: Professor Anthony Heath FBA*

This workshop explored the implications of COVID-19 for cohesion. Four key themes emerged: the pandemic has increased some facets of cohesion but also exacerbated inequalities, and therefore new policy directions should be sensitive to scale and place, should involve those most affected and learn from theory and comparative research. This note is intended as a starting point for further reflection and discussion, including within the *Shape the Future* initiative and the wider Academy *Cohesive Societies* programme.[10] This session was arranged in parallel with and is particularly complemented by Appendix 6, 'Implications of COVID-19 for inequalities and vulnerabilities'.

**The pandemic has increased some forms of cohesion, but it has also exacerbated inequalities**

The pandemic has increased some forms of cohesion and drawn attention to others. Increased goodwill, solidarity and a sense that we are 'all in it together' have been seen in local mutual aid groups, increased donations to food banks and compliance with national lockdown policies. However, these positive experiences of social cohesion tend to be concentrated at the very local level and are unevenly distributed.

As examined in more detail in Appendix 6, the pandemic is also increasing fragmentation and exacerbating inequalities, exposing how we are not actually 'all in it together'. Voluntary

> **How do differential experiences of voluntary solidarity and cohesion vary across different local communities?**

mutual aid and solidarity are significantly easier for groups with resources, including money, the ability to work from home, green space, and time not required for work or caring responsibilities. In many ways, the 'all in it together' discourse actually legitimises very unequal practices; the message that the virus is indiscriminate neglects differential experiences due to a wide range of factors, from the risk of exposure inherent in particular professions to access to health care.

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[10] https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/programmes/cohesive-societies/

The divergent experiences will continue as we transition out of the immediate crisis and into a recession. We know that in a recession different groups have different outcomes, with people in lower paid work, women, disabled people and Black, Asian and minority ethnic people all facing worse outcomes. In a recession, the impact of the pandemic will interact with other areas of social policy that already contain inequalities, such as housing and mental health. These divergent experiences will continue to be different in different places.

As an example of changing social priorities, the limits on social solidarity have been acutely felt by migrants and Black, Asian and minority ethnic people. This is in part due to the higher proportions of these groups working in the

**How can we make the provision of social security more equal without appealing to rhetoric that relies on disadvantaged groups 'earning' their inclusion through sacrifice?**

health and care sectors. There is a danger that shifting attitudes towards these groups could collapse as their contributions are forgotten once the immediate crisis is over and the political context shifts to recession. While there may be opportunities to redraw the boundaries of deservingness in crisis, as seen in the changes to the NHS surcharge, even these changes may not be desirable. Groups' deservingness of social security should not be determined by past pain and sacrifice. This does not mean, however, that we should not draw attention to the invaluable contributions made by these groups and the discrimination that they experience.

**New policy directions should be sensitive to scale and place**

The pandemic has drawn attention to the ways in which experiences differ based on place. This includes differences at the national, regional, local and hyper-local levels. Future policy will need to need take this into account: regional and local organisations may be the best placed to respond to many aspects of the crisis and, as Appendix 18 addresses, will be crucial to a sustainable and inclusive recovery. Any response, at any level, will need to be properly resourced. However, there are also some forms of policy intervention that

**How can responses to the pandemic be properly situated in an expansive, ambitious approach to policy and research?**

can only be effectively managed at a much larger scale, including some that can only be managed by a functional state. A local mutual aid group can provide significant social support, but it cannot ensure that there are enough ventilators in the local hospital.

New policy directions should also consider how the crisis will interact with ongoing social policy issues, which are themselves experienced differently in different places. These issues include unemployment, education and training, housing, and violence

and crime. Expansive, ambitious approaches could look at the pandemic as one crisis amongst many, including the aftermath of the financial crash and great recession, the ongoing health and social care crisis and the impending climate crisis.

**New research and policy directions should involve those most affected**

The development of new policy interventions and practices should involve those most affected. This could present an opportunity to meaningfully co-produce research, policy and practice with communities and individuals. This would enable rich, deep understandings of the problems, and provide the opportunity to learn from emergent solutions and innovative approaches. This should be complemented by other research methods, such as large attitudinal surveys.

**New policy directions should learn from theory and comparative research**

New research and policy should learn from comparisons across space, but also time. As Appendix 19 showcases, historical research and understanding can provide insight into how societies have successfully moved out of pandemics or avoided second waves of infection, including by applying an interdisciplinary approach. History can also provide insight into the ways in which societies respond to crises, even those that are not pandemics. For example, Durkheim's seminal study found that some kinds of suicide increase during war, and others decrease. This perhaps has parallels in the ways that some forms of social cohesion are increasing while others are decreasing, and they are being experienced very differently across the country, as examined in Appendix 6 on inequalities.

New policy directions should also learn from comparative research, at different geographical levels. Comparisons with other countries, including those experiencing the spread of disease 'ahead' of the UK, could provide valuable insight into what we might expect to happen

> **What are the skills implications of taking an approach to crisis preparation and response that is informed by complexity theory and adaptive systems approaches?**

next. As we move out of the immediate pandemic and into the recession and recovery, there may also be a huge amount to be learnt through the comparison of activities and interventions occurring in different local communities across the UK. Research might seek to learn how and why different contexts manifest different challenges and responses.

Finally, new research and policy directions should also learn from disciplines beyond the empirical social sciences. One area of theoretical work that has huge potential is complexity theory and the related study of adapative systems. The approach can provide tools for learning from the past and preparing for future crises in a way that is flexible, adaptable and better fit for purpose. This may have implications for skills and competencies, and for community social and economic resilience.

# Implications of COVID-19 for inequalities and vulnerabilities

## *Shape the Future* workshop, 29 May 2020
### *Discussion Chair: Professor Peter Taylor-Gooby FBA*

This workshop explored the implications of COVID-19 for inequalities and vulnerabilities. Three key themes emerged: the groups that are the hardest hit by the current crisis cannot be easily characterised, the severe limitations of current mitigation policies, and the need for future policy directions to be bold. This note is intended as a starting point for further reflection and discussion, including within the *Shape the Future* initiative the wider Academy *Cohesive Societies* programme.[11] This session was arranged in parallel with and is particularly complemented by Appendix 5, 'Implications of COVID-19 for cohesion'.

**The groups hardest hit by the pandemic are best described in terms of a grid of intersecting inequalities that is cumulative, complex and dynamic**

The pandemic has thrown into relief a wide range of interrelated inequalities, described by participants in terms of a 'grid'. One axis would be the types of impact, including: medical/physical, mental/emotional health, socio-economic and environmental impacts. Cross-cutting this would be the dimensions along

> **How do we disaggregate the effects of different kinds of inequalities?**

which inequalities emerge: age, race and ethnicity, gender, disability, citizenship, employment status, caring responsibilities, income and wealth, and geography by regional and local level. The crisis affects different groups along the various dimensions of inequality over time: those already affected, those at highest risk in the coming recession and those for whom the impact will endure into the longer term future.

Inequalities along the various dimensions intersect in complex ways. For example, lower income people are more likely to face unemployment and consequent poverty than the better off, and the risks of unemployment are much higher among women, Black, Asian, minority ethnic and younger workers and in different parts of the country. Older people face much greater health risks, but are less likely to lose income.

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[11] https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/programmes/cohesive-societies/

In sum, inequalities can be summed up as differences in power in society. As Appendix 16 elaborates, this varied impact, whether real or imagined, can lead to stigmatisation and further marginalisation and inequality.

**The crisis has exposed severe limitations in current mitigation policies**

The pandemic has exposed significant problems in current provision across social security and cash benefits, health care and public health, social care, education systems and local government. These problems are exacerbated by a decade of austerity cuts and by the fragmentation of public provision resulting from privatisation. Urgent problems include the low level and delays in payment of Universal Credit, the fragmentation and lack of coordination of state and private health, social care and public health services, the imposition of additional responsibilities on local government without adequate funds and the exclusion of members of some groups (particularly immigrants without recourse to public funds and some self-employed people) from provision.

The impact of the pandemic and of many policy responses has been to exacerbate existing inequalities, particularly between better off people who can work from home and whose expenses are reduced and those already low paid who are much more likely to lose their jobs and incomes.

**New policy directions should be bold, and should capitalise on this unique moment in history**

Previous research suggests that, for a number of reasons, crises present a unique opportunity to remake societies, decreasing inequalities and improving sustainability.[12] Relevant factors include: the collective experience of the crisis and sense that we are 'all in it together'; a re-evaluation of which roles and jobs should be

**How do we capitalise on a moment to move towards a more equal society?**

**What package of training and education and improved employment rights could be provided to better support vulnerable workers?**

most valued and of the worth of care and of paid and unpaid work; and the exposure of deficiencies in existing provision. Appendix 3 considers how, through financial support, governments have potentially acquired leverage over business which can be used to effect change. However, there is also a risk that the result of this crisis could be a society in which we double down on populism and a politics of austerity and exclusion.

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[12] For example, see Walter Scheidel, *The Great Leveler: Violence and the History of Inequality from the Stone Age to the Twenty-first Century* (Princeton University Press, 2017).

The pandemic has drawn attention to casualised, outsourced work, and to the undervalued work of many of those now categorised as 'key workers'. Appendix 17 on future skills addresses how the role of 'key workers' during the pandemic has revealed that salary is not the measure of societal value. Many critical roles and jobs of huge social value, such as care workers, delivery drivers and teachers, are not considered 'well paid'.

The opportunities available to these groups could be improved through better training and education as well as stronger anti-discrimination legislation, parental support and better employment rights. In almost all these areas there have been significant cutbacks and dilution of rights in recent years.

The pandemic may also present an opportunity to challenge the narrative about poverty and inequality. With more people experiencing the social security system, this may be the moment to challenge broadcasters and publishers to shift the narrative away from poverty-shaming coverage such as 'Benefit Street'.

The creation of a more equal society requires substantial changes to the tax and benefit system. These might include: better taxation of wealth; broadening the base of national insurance; new

**How do we work with broadcasters and publishers to shift the narrative about poverty and inequality?**

taxes or insurance schemes to fund specific state services, such as health and care; enhanced child benefits; a universal income benefit or a basic income floor; and improved employment protection to include informal and precarious workers.

All of this will take place in a particular political context. This will include both existing challenges that may be exacerbated—such as Brexit and the housing crisis—

and new challenges—such as the possibility of mass unemployment and pressures on particular groups in the labour market, especially lower paid workers and Black, Asian and minority ethnic

**How do we implement the policies for a more equal society through the tax and benefit system?**

workers, women and those in harder hit regions. It also takes place in a particular national and international context. There are important lessons to be learnt from comparison between the different nations of the UK and between the UK and elsewhere in Europe.

The development of new policies must be based on contributions from a wide range of voices, including but not limited to those most affected. Vulnerable groups and those who are experts as a result of their experience, and children and young people must be brought into policymaking.


**In the longer term, research and policy need to look beyond the hardest hit**

The focus during the immediate crisis has been on the hardest hit. Research and policymaking for the longer term must look beyond these groups. We need to consider

both ends of the range of inequalities: how far is extreme wealth acceptable? What degree of regional inequality can we accept? How do we assess the balance between paid and unpaid work? We must also ensure that policy directions help address issues of climate change.

# APPENDIX 7

# Implications of the COVID-19 pandemic for the role of the justice system in public health

*Shape the Future* workshop, 1 June 2020

*Discussion Chair: Professor Dame Hazel Genn FBA*

This workshop explored the implications of COVID-19 for the role of the justice system in public health. Three key themes emerged: how the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted existing health inequalities within society; how the law and legal services can impact upon these inequalities; and whether the response to COVID-19 has taken this into account. Several questions for further investigation were identified. This note is intended as a starting point for further reflection and discussion, including within the *Shape the Future* initiative and the Academy's wider work on *health policy*,[13] including a workshop on Health Justice and the role of law and legal services in mitigating health inequalities, also chaired by Professor Dame Hazel Genn.

**The pandemic is highlighting health inequalities within society**

As Appendix 6 shows, the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted and exacerbated many inequalities and vulnerabilities, and this includes health inequalities within society. The disease itself and the financial, social and health impacts of the lockdown have disproportionate impact on the poor, and those who already have poor physical or mental health. People from Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities have suffered particularly badly, with higher rates of morbidity and mortality. Care homes, prisons and psychiatric institutions have become 'hotspots' for the disease, although it has been challenging to try to stop the spread of the virus in these settings, or accurately document infection and death. The pandemic's impact upon undocumented migrants, who may be reluctant to access health care services because of the fear of being deported, is substantial but largely invisible as well.

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[13] https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/programmes/health-wellbeing/

**Policy question: how does the law and access to legal services impact upon health inequalities?**

The law has an important part to play in fostering and protecting the nation's health and in addressing health inequalities. Where the public health perspective on the relationship between law and health has traditionally focused on the legislative process, a much broader focus is needed if we want to understand how to achieve better outcomes for all. The micro and meso (local) levels are of crucial importance in this. Yet legislation does not always translate into protections, given the barriers individuals and communities face in getting informed about justice and accessing it. Furthermore, the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic have landed in localities deeply affected by a decade of cuts to public spending, from local authorities, to the NHS and legal aid. This has had an impact on their ability to use legal enforcement to stop the spread of the virus.

In other countries, local authorities have played a key role in implementing 'track and trace' policies. In the UK, though, participants noted that the highly centralised structure of the state has at times dismissed the value and effectiveness of local knowledge. This is counter to points considered in Appendix 8 on trust in expertise and policymaking, where there was great benefit in involving a range of policy players and 'experts'.

**What package of training and education and improved employment rights could be provided to better support vulnerable workers?**

**How do we ensure that policy development engages legal processes in support of local implementation now and in the future?**

Furthermore, local authorities' budgets have been cut to the bone so that their capacity to take on new tasks—like implementing 'track and trace'—is limited. Public health has been one of the statutory responsibilities of local authorities since 2012 and while this could have facilitated a more active role of local government in the fight against COVID-19, budgets have been reduced in this area as well. In addition, local authorities are responsible for providing social care, and care homes have been especially badly affected by COVID-19.

Cuts to legal aid make it very difficult for people whose health problems might have a legal solution to access the help they need. For example, if someone's respiratory problems are caused by living in a damp house, the solution is to force the landlord to meet their legal duty to ensure that the property is fit for habitation. Integrating social and welfare legal advice within primary care services might be one possible solution. Additionally, individual actions and complaints can be collated and used by legal services to highlight ways in which the law is not being appropriately implemented at present. This can therefore lead to meso-level change, and possibly legislative change.

**Policy question: has the government's response to COVID-19 taken into account its impact upon widening health inequalities?**

Social scientists with expertise in health inequalities and health justice do not appear to have been represented on the expert committees advising government on its response to COVID-19. Behavioural psychologists have been part of the debate, but social science is by no means confined to behavioural psychology. Government messaging has focused on medical and behavioural solutions to the virus (for example, vaccination or physical distancing), but the importance of socio-economic conditions as the key determinants of health has not been adequately recognised.

Part of the problem may also be underfunding of the UK's public health infrastructure. In responding to COVID-19, there has been an emphasis upon increasing capacity in acute hospitals, rather than increasing public health capacity. Fear of catching COVID-19, and fear of overburdening the NHS, has led people with other health conditions to avoid hospitals, and the negative health consequences of this are likely to continue for years to come.

> **How do we get more disciplinary expertise feeding into policy development?**
>
> **Can we use this as an opportunity to address a range of health inequalities in justice that have existed previously, but are now being more fully revealed?**

Those who cannot seek the protections afforded by legislation, the welfare system and the specific financial safety nets introduced in response to COVID-19 include irregular migrants, those without recourse to public funds and routinely socially excluded populations. COVID-19 has exacerbated those populations' barriers to healthcare and justice (for example, through increased isolation), as well as the impacts of such barriers, including loss of life. Therefore, as argued in Appendix 6 discussing inequality and vulnerability, the pandemic has not only entrenched existing inequality but has also revealed inequalities that preceded the pandemic.

**The shape of the future policy and research agenda**

In the future we need to ensure that the law, and access to legal services, are acknowledged to play a vital role in protecting public health and addressing systemic health inequalities. The idea was raised that policymakers might support the

> **How, and how well, are we documenting and understanding the impact of COVID-19 on existing health inequalities ?**

creation of an Observatory whose role would be to collect information about the impact of COVID-19, and of the lockdown and its aftermath, on the most disadvantaged in society. Particular priorities might be housing and homelessness, domestic abuse, children's welfare, mental health and gambling.

A future research and policy agenda should also include the adoption of a 'systems' approach, through which people from a wide variety of disciplines—medicine, social science, humanities, law, mathematics—are brought together to collaborate on the lessons that should be learned from COVID-19. This could include a 'health in all policies' approach, through which health impact assessments are carried out routinely in order to evaluate the public health impact of any proposed piece of legislation or policy change. Transparent health-focused pre-legislative scrutiny should encompass both physical and mental health. Finally, the British Academy and other academies might collaborate on finding a way publicly to scrutinise decisions and learn lessons from COVID-19 now, rather than waiting for a future public inquiry. In particular, in order to 'speak truth to power' in a constructive way, STEM and SHAPE disciplines (as embodied by the Royal Society and the British Academy, for example) should work together in as transparent a way as possible.

### Some further reading

Eric Klinenberg, *Heat Wave: A Social Autopsy of Disaster in Chicago* (University of Chicago Press, 2nd edn 2015, https://doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226276212.001.0001). It details how a crisis, in this case a heatwave in 1995, revealed the impact of social inequity.

World Health Organization, *The Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion* (1986). It included a 'health in all policies' emphasis, which was later reiterated as a focus in 2013 at the Helsinki Global Conference (https://www.who.int/healthpromotion/conferences/previous/ottawa/en/).

# COVID-19: trust, expertise and policymaking

*Shape the Future* workshop, 2 June 2020

*Discussion Chair: Professor Simon Goldhill FBA*

This workshop explored the implications of COVID-19 for trust, expertise, and policy-making. It focused on three main points: the relationship between expertise and policymaking, holistic policymaking and trust and trustworthiness. How can expertise and policymaking most effectively operate in emergencies, as well as in preparation for and recovery from extreme danger? And what lessons can be learnt in the UK and internationally from the response to COVID-19 in this respect? Does the UK have the right system and people involved in its science advice mechanisms? This note is intended as a starting point for further reflection and discussion, including within the *Shape the Future* initiative, and will build on and further inform work as part of the Academy's *Truth, Trust & Expertise* programme.[14]

### The relationship between expertise and policymaking

Expertise and science are used regularly in policymaking. In many areas this goes largely unnoticed and unchallenged on a day-to-day basis. Expertise can be deployed in policy for the (instrumental) purposes of helping to design and

> **The challenge of COVID-19 is how can expertise and policymaking most effectively cooperate in situations of extreme public danger?**

implement policy, and for the (symbolic) purpose to signal authority or demonstrate credibility; or more problematically selectively to bolster already-taken policy decisions. The use of expertise therefore engages in multiple relationships and is not simply a dynamic between experts and politicians. It includes a range of important relationships, such as:

- The relationship(s) between experts/scientists and ministers/politicians/policy-makers. This goes in two directions: that experts will give the best advice based on their expertise, where the expertise is grounded in empirically tested experience; and that the politicians will listen to and evaluate, and not misuse the expertise provided.

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[14] https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/projects/knowledge-frontiers-truth-trust-expertise/

- The relationship(s) between the public(s)—and there are a variety of publics—and policy. The different sectors of society are to trust that policy is (a) based on expertise, and not simply on political self-interest; and (b) that the policy is based on an evaluation of what is best for the whole of society and not unduly biased towards one group.
- The relationship(s) between the public(s) and policymakers on the one hand and experts/scientists on the other. It is crucial that 'public science' as expertise is serious and takes transparency and explanation seriously, and that both the public and policymakers increase their understanding of the expertise offered.
- The relationships between the public, experts, policy and media institutions. The role of the media in mediating the relationships specified above is essential and depends both on the experts and on the policymakers to expect the media to represent policy accurately and without political agendas, and on the media to expect that they are properly informed.

In the context of COVID-19 these relationships are operating in exceptional circumstances. Expertise is not equipped, however, to act as an insurance policy for policymakers, nor to make political decisions.

**Holistic expertise for policymaking**

In no significant sense, is there ever *the* science on any complex topic where policy and expertise interact.[15] Expertise is fluid, varied and contingent on new evidence and fresh perspectives, and regularly expresses possibilities and probabilities

**How can the pandemic help drive the need for a real dialogue between knowledges so holistic expertise is brought to bear on the challenges of our time?**

rather than certainties. Policymaking is also contingent on new information, and also deals with potentialities. Experts and policymakers have different incentive structures, however, that can lead to conflicting approaches, perspectives and pressures. This is compounded in the urgent circumstances of an emergency where dealing with uncertainty becomes acute. Expertise is not equipped to act as an insurance policy for policymakers, nor to make political decisions. Such unrealistic expectations raise challenges for how to ensure expertise can be recognised as fallible or sometimes contradictory, and respond to urgent matters of life and death, and remain trustworthy.

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[15] Dominic Abrams, 'To Solve the Problems of this Pandemic, We Need More Than Just "The science"', *The Guardian* (29 April 2020, https://www.theguardian.com/education/2020/apr/29/to-solve-the-problems-of-this-pandemic-we-need-more-than-just-the-science).

The pressure of the pandemic has led also to a personalisation of experts and expertise in a way that is more familiar for politicians and politics in more normal times. It is possible to see experts becoming discredited because of their close association with policy. That close association, however, has value for policymakers in authorising the policies they are then able to communicate. This paradox is at the heart of effective expert policy advice, and results in different models of expert–policy relations utilised around the world.

Because the expert community is likely to contain differing views on complex problems, the establishment of structures separate from government policy units, such as the independent SAGE group, has an evident value as a response to this tension. The involvement of the humanities and social sciences is also critical, given the social, psychological and economic consequences of the pandemic. Technological and economic responses will not be sufficient and a first step is to recognise the need for integrated solutions that include the social and ethical aspects of the problem from the beginning. There are two pressing questions: first, how can the uncertainty of potential and risk be communicated effectively into policy decisions and in dialogue with the public? Second, can the pandemic help drive the need for a productive dialogue between areas of knowledge and expertise, so that an integrated response based on multiple forms and levels of insight can be brought to bear on the challenges of our time?

**How to engage and involve communities that have experienced a history of structural inequality and where mis/distrust is high?**

## Trust and trustworthiness

Expertise must encompass a diversity of perspectives, but also policymaking must be in dialogue with diverse publics and be able to communicate its messages effectively in a range of contexts. A single voice or method will likely lead to miscommunication, frustration and anger. It is not possible to communicate complex, urgent policy and guidelines to everyone in the same way. General policy and guidelines must be interpreted into the specific conditions of our lives and that requires translation and sensitivity to context and linguistic, political and social divides. The importance of language and cultural skills is also highlighted in Appendix 20 on communication in crisis. They are essential in ensuring that existing inequalities are not further exposed or neglected, particularly when mistrust and distrust in politicians and institutions are often high in communities experiencing such inequality.

**How can current structures for expertise and policymaking ensure they have sufficient diversity in their institutional outlook to make effective policy?**

The use of online and social media has been particularly prominent in the response to COVID-19 by experts, policymakers and the public. But there is still considerable learning needed on how online and social media has complicated and also diversified traditional models of expert–policy relations or its importance in building or undermining trust. Social media can be a powerful means of government communication of expert knowledge, as it can also be a driver of evidence, helping to engage non-experts; however, it can be also reactive and not thought through. It may then be dangerous and divisive, especially in communities where inequality and prejudice are strong factors. Serious research into the range of online communication and its efficacy is needed.

Consequently, we need stronger understanding of how to engage and involve communities that have experienced a history of structural inequality and where distrust is high. What's more, expertise and policymaking rely on the trustworthiness of those providing the expertise and making the policy. Do these figures have sufficient diversity in their institutional outlook to make effective policy? Finally, how is online and social media affecting expert–policy relations?

# Communicating COVID-19: when is there too much information?

*Shape the Future* workshop, 5 June 2020

*Discussion Chairs: Professor Cass Sunstein FBA and Professor Nick Chater FBA*

This workshop explored a framework for characterising individual differences in information-seeking, and how to consider biases that can lead to both insufficient and excessive information-seeking on the part of the public. In the current context of a global pandemic or other crises, the workshop explored how and whether such a framework might help policymakers to identify how much information is too much, or too little, how best to frame it, and what difference it will make. The workshop began with an introduction talk from Professor Cass Sunstein,[16] with the discussion moderated and chaired by Professor Nick Chater.

## The background context

Immense amounts of information are now accessible to people, including information that bears on their past, present and future. This raises the questions: how much information is too much, how should it be conveyed, and how should it be presented to particular audiences? An important research challenge is to determine how people decide to seek or avoid information. People may avoid information if they think it will make them sad, or clash with their current beliefs (and seek information they think will make them happy, or align with their current beliefs). In addition to the question of whether information is complete or accurate, public policy should therefore also consider possible impacts of information on people's subjective well-being, not just whether information is complete or accurate.

An example was provided in the workshop as a reference point: the experience of calorie-labelling in restaurants, cafes and movie theatres. Would one's experience of going to the movies be ruined by knowing how many calories were in a

**Should we 'ruin' popcorn? Is there a welfare loss in the face of too much information, and should this heterogeneity of the value of different types of information be considered by policymakers?**

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[16] The introductory talk and main part of the discussion drew on Cass R. Sunstein, *Too Much Information: Understanding What You Don't Want to Know* (MIT Press, 2020, https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/12608.001.0001).

tub of popcorn, and, if so, should regulators factor in this decline in the enjoyment of the experience which might affect one's mental health, against the health benefit of reduced calorie intake. There may be a welfare loss from 'too much' information and there is uncertainty with respect to the welfare consequences of information. Do we take all of this into account, and if not, should we?

## When is there too much information, and why does it matter?

The challenge is that, particularly in an era many argue to be filled with too much information from too many sources, more clarity is needed about what information is actually doing or achieving. Policymakers emphasise 'the right to know', but we might need also to take a different perspective, arguing that the focus should be on human well-being and what information contributes to it. Is there a framework of information-seeking that aims to integrate the diverse motives that drive information-seeking as well as its avoidance? Such a framework might rest on the idea that information can alter people's feelings and perceptions, and their actions in both positive and negative ways. People assess these influences and integrate them into a calculation of the value of information that leads to information-seeking or avoidance.

Recent research by Sunstein[17] suggests that there is a lot of diversity with respect to what information people want to have. He found that in most circumstances just under or over half of people would actually pay to avoid information about calories, fuel economy or genetically modified food. Moreover, rarely did people want to receive bad news about a diagnosis that would affect their health later in life.

**People generally distil information receipt down to its instrumental utility, but information receipt plays a large role in people's subsequent behaviour and welfare.**

The question is what is going on behind the data. Two suggestions are offered. First is to do with the receipt of information and the extent to which it is viewed as having a simple instrumental utility of 'good' versus 'bad', or 'pleasure' versus 'pain'. People generally distil information receipt down to its instrumental utility, but they may pay less attention to the longer term effects of not knowing that information. This leads to the second point, which is that the emotional valence of receiving information plays a large role in people's subsequent behaviour and welfare. Often these effects are positive—knowing more helps us shape our decisions more wisely. But sometimes the effects of receiving information may derail our future behaviour: a lawyer who learns that their client is guilty may be unable perform in their role; or a teacher receiving poor teaching evaluations may teach worse because they feel demoralised.

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[17] Sunstein, *Too Much Information.*

There are implications of this for mental health and well-being—too much information may make us miserable or anxious; and also, potentially, for regulatory policy. Should this be factored into policymaking, and how?

**What does this mean for policymakers in the context of a global pandemic?**

Policymakers tend, as we have noted, to emphasise 'the right to know', and largely ignore the impact of information; but some argue we might take a different perspective, arguing that information that bears on people's lives has

**Should welfare assessments of information provision take on board the subjective welfare loss of receiving information? What impact would this have on regulatory policy?**

instrumental value and the focus should be on human well-being and what information contributes to it. The argument put forward is that the welfare assessment of information provision must take account of the subjective welfare loss of receiving information—such a framework could help policymakers to consider how, in the current context of a global pandemic, they consider when how much information is too much, or too little, and what difference it will make.

However, as was pointed out repeatedly during the discussion, the issues are complex. In the case of the pandemic and publishing data, the Netherlands is an example where during the height of the COVID crisis, policymakers calculated a balance between the provision of data and anxiety management. While the provision of information is seen as a sign of respect, some of the data related to COVID-19 was not actively published. This led to a situation where there was a perception that policy was following the 'science' and there was a one-to-one translation of scientific insights into policy, but the reality was that a much smaller percentage of data was being shared with the public in a bid to reduce anxiety. Many mortality projections were dire and this information was only recoverable indirectly by the public. And there are parallels with mask-wearing as well, where policymakers may be tempted to emphasise benefits to increase take-up. The cost to the user of wearing a mask will be less than the cost of getting COVID-19 (or perhaps, from the policymaker's perspective, the social cost of spreading the virus), and so, despite immediate reactions of dislike about the actual act of wearing a mask, the longer term effects are worth the trade-off.

But there are clear limits to how far one can take this argument. It runs the risk of being self-defeating, because the public will second-guess that they are not being told the truth; and there may be values of being treated honestly and with respect that citizens value at least as much as subjective well-being. The issues are particularly tangled in the case of elections or other situations whether there are entrenched views on either side and the potential for political manipulation of the provision and receipt

of information. When does the withholding of information become a threat to public trust or institutions like democracy? And when is there suspicion that information is being withheld or distorted for partisan reasons, rather than for the public good? Thus, there will be other costs of withholding information beyond welfare loss, especially in the current, polarised political environment. Take, for example, data on deaths in care homes or in vulnerable communities. There are real inequalities in the access to information sources, and clear inequalities in how information is shared (see Appendix 16 on language and stigma, as well as inequalities). There are also challenges when governments are not the only source of information, or when trust in government is eroded. The extent to which we can manage those situations of information provision and receipt, and how this affects the overall framework, are still to be explored.

# COVID-19 and the value of (quality adjusted) life (expectancy)

*Shape the Future* workshop, 11 June 2020

*Discussion Chair: Professor Graham Loomes FBA*

This workshop explored the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on our understanding of the value of (quality adjusted) life (expectancy). It focused on three main points: how to calculate value in relation to human life, how the wider population understand this, and how COVID-19 has changed how we might view this in future. This note is intended as a starting point for further reflection and discussion, including within the *Shape the Future* initiative, and will build on and further inform work as part of the Academy's wider work on *health policy*.[18]

**The story of maths**

The Green Book—the guidance issued by the UK Treasury on evaluating policies—sets out a system of assigning monetary values to changes in risks of injury, illness or death. Various government departments and agencies use these

> **The OECD estimated loss of GDP to the end of the year is 12 per cent. In which case the 'economic' cost of lockdown will exceed £250 billion.**

values in their cost–benefit analyses, effectively weighing up trade-offs between health and the economy. One example is the Department of Health which uses a value of £60,000 per Quality Adjusted Life Year (QALY).

The UK lockdown on 23 March was presented as a means of preventing 250,000 COVID-19-related deaths. Researchers at the London School of Economics have suggested

> **Are QALYs relevant during a pandemic? If so, do we need to adjust their calculations or use?**

that each such death would have constituted an average loss of six QALYs, which would convert to a total loss in monetary terms of £90 billion. There are other health losses and gains associated with COVID-19 and with lockdown that can, in principle, be converted into money sums and set against the losses of income and output. But does such a cost–utility approach hold up in pandemic conditions? Arguably, the

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[18] https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/programmes/health-wellbeing/

Green Book guidance is for periods of normality, and may not be able to account for social values, public perception or politics.

## Natural experiment

COVID-19 has created a kind of natural experiment—almost all Western countries acted reasonably quickly to impose versions of lockdown. This allows us to examine what different countries have chosen to sacrifice—GDP, personal liberty, industry sectors—to reduce estimated numbers of illnesses and deaths.

The UK government made a series of decisions to close down industries, limit interaction, remove access to education, etc., all of which have an economic or social cost to individuals. As people have not risen up in revolt against these decisions, we could conclude that they more or less agree with the cost in return for the benefit; they judge these activities to be of lower value than the illnesses and deaths prevented.

**The difficulty with applying QALYs is that they are theoretical in nature, based on modelling of what might happen. But perhaps the COVID-19 pandemic has provided us with a real-life situation to observe, constituting a kind of natural experiment.**

Behavioural economics teaches us that people approach decisions very differently when they are explicitly asked what they are willing to pay, a method of getting at their values known as a contingent valuation.

## Contingent valuation

Presuming that people comply with policy is not enough to understand the monetary value people place on a human life. This is because the cost is framed as collective—an impact on the public purse rather than on the individual. Framing lockdown as an X per cent contraction of the economy, or a cost of £X billion, may mean very little to most people in terms of the real impact on them. But if we told them that lockdown meant they would be £X a year worse off for the rest of their lives, then this asks them to make a real decision about whether they are willing to pay that price.

Imagine a system where any government-incurred debt is immediately shared out across the population in proportion to tax liabilities, and then debited from people's accounts. Would people give the same valuation to saving lives if they experienced the cost personally, if they paid for it themselves? It may be that the levels of fear around COVID-19 have led people to accept decisions which are not in their economic interest. It might also be that a cost-per-QALY approach neglects moral issues, such as whether a civilised society should place extra weight on providing collective

protection of the elderly and vulnerable, even at a cost to the economic welfare of those who are at much lower risk, or whether this approach may exacerbate the inequalities discussed in Appendix 6.

## Bigger than money or health

When considering big policy interventions around global pandemics and lockdowns, the money and physical health outcomes are two factors. But we also need to think about the losses of freedom, the impact on happiness and well-being generally, the production of fear and stress. This is a problem for a purely QALY-based approach, made all the more difficult since these factors are hard to quantify and include in the calculations.

**QALYs were developed initially to apply specifically to prioritising scarce resources within a healthcare service: a way for government to decide how to assign publicly funded budgets to achieve better overall health outcomes.**

## The future of the value of health and life

The reality of the lockdown, here and elsewhere, is that governments across the globe have taken substantial financial losses to reduce the numbers of COVID-related illnesses and deaths. Implicit in this is some trade-off between money and health. On the basis of a standard cost–benefit analysis using current QALY values, the lockdown might be judged to have failed the test. One possibility is that the QALY analysis is inadequate. Another possibility is that governments are placing higher values on health. How might this play out in the months and years ahead?

In the near future, the direction of the trade-off will be reversed. Restrictions will be eased or lifted in order to produce economic and social benefits, but the easing is liable to raise infection rates to some degree, entailing additional COVID-related illnesses and deaths. What will the judgments involved in this balancing act tell us about the values being used and the factors being considered? Will the degrees of compliance—or non-compliance—reveal something about the extent to which individuals' values conform with—or conflict with—those implicit in the policies?

Looking further ahead, it is clear that the Green Book guidance will need to be revised in the light of the COVID-19 experience. Values should be reconsidered, other factors added to the balance sheet and it should not be presumed that once the pandemic has subsided that we will go back to 'business as usual'.

**Will the Green Book guidance be changed in the light of the COVID-19 experience? Will/should the values be adjusted?**

# Elections in the light of COVID-19

*Shape the Future* workshop, 22 June 2020

*Discussion Chair: Professor Sarah Birch FBA*

This workshop explored the impact of COVID-19 on elections. It focused on four questions. Should elections be held during the pandemic and what impact might postponements have? How might the circumstances of the pandemic impact the use of voting technology and whether this technology is likely to be successfully implemented? How might pandemic conditions affect both the pre-electoral and post-electoral periods, as well as vote choice and turnout? How will the pandemic affect post-electoral governance, with particular reference to the effects on trust in political institutions? The workshop highlighted issues that policymakers and researchers may need to consider in both the short and long term, as well as indicating areas that would benefit from further scrutiny in the immediate term as the crisis continues to develop. This note is intended as a starting point for further reflection and discussion, including within the *Shape the Future* initiative and the Academy's wider work on *Democracy and governance*.[19]

### How can elections be held during the pandemic?

In practical terms, there are ways of reducing the risk of holding elections in a pandemic, but there are no easy solutions that can be put in place in a short time period, particularly that do not then impact the way that the election could be perceived, both by those taking part and by international observers.

**Remote voting is not an easy solution—due process, time and funding are all necessary for it to be viable, and it does not necessarily resolve issues of accessibility.**

Remote voting could be one way of resolving some of the issues around holding an election in a pandemic in some contexts where it is possible, but it is by no means an easy solution. Particularly if this is being implemented for the first time, or substantially expanded from the way it was used in previous elections, there needs to be time for the process to be introduced. Procurement takes time—particularly if this is done in a transparent way. If the process is rushed, it allows for corruption in procurement and new ways of manipulating elections.

[19] https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/programmes/democracy-governance/

Variations in infrastructure also mean that remote voting is easier in some places than in others, and this variance is also open to manipulation. Remote voting technologies—even those not reliant on very technological methods, are also expensive, and can be prohibitively so. Implementing remote voting would need to go hand in hand with an effective voter education campaign, and thought put into how to prove to the electorate that it has been done securely—confidence will be difficult to gain and proving that data have not been manipulated will be difficult to prove.

It is possible to take precautions (for example in the form of temperature checks, handwashing, social distancing and the use of masks or personal protective equipment) to make in-person voting safer, but this does present problems in terms of those who facilitate the running of the election. All these precautions are likely to require more staff and volunteers to support the polling process. Given that many of the traditional volunteers for these roles fall into the more vulnerable category to the virus, this could create difficulties.

Given the complexities of holding an election, either remote or in person, during a pandemic, it is likely that the process will take more time than the public is accustomed to, with longer waits for results. This will throw into doubt results, particularly given the likely constraints previously mentioned, coupled with the trend we have seen in many democracies towards an erosion of trust in both the system and those in charge of it. This will be compounded by the difficulties of effective international election observation during a pandemic. Work needs to be done to try to mitigate this absence, including effective coordination with domestic observer groups and/or civil society groups, as well as remote electoral observation where feasible. As well as the challenges associated with this, the pandemic could present an opportunity in developing new practice around remote data collection and electoral observation.

In terms of risk, there is a need to focus on the impact of the pandemic on the enfranchisement of the most vulnerable and marginalised in society. As covered in depth in Appendix 6, many marginalised minority groups have already been disproportionately affected by the pandemic and

**Marginalised minority groups are at an even higher risk than normal of disenfranchisement, and extra efforts need to be made to put in place processes that ensure that their voices are heard.**

will also be impacted specifically by the conditions under which elections would take place in the context of the pandemic. Traditionally marginalised minority groups are less likely to be on electoral registers, and only with effective pre-electoral engagement and outreach has it been possible to engage people. The ability to do this will be hampered by the pandemic. Even if potential voters are registered successfully, the precautions necessary to hold an election will provide more obstacles.

Social distancing measures may require more polling stations to allow people to vote more efficiently. Where polling stations are located—and specifically where they

are not—can have a significant impact on voter turnout among particular demographics and is easily susceptible to manipulation. In conjunction with the way that some demographic groups are more at risk from the virus than others, and therefore as a group may stay away from the polls, elections held during the pandemic could be interesting to observe in respect of demography, but measures need to be taken to ensure that the most vulnerable are not disenfranchised. The same is true of remote voting in terms of access to the means of casting one's vote.

With the same objective, it is important to not only consider the registration and voting process itself, but also the pre- and post-election periods. In contexts where civil liberties are being curtailed by governments ostensibly to effectively tackle the virus, what systems can be put in place

**Is it possible to hold truly free, transparent, democratic elections where governments are justifiably limiting civil liberties to manage the spread of the pandemic?**

to ensure that this is not extended to allow the incumbent to shut down democratic opposition and legitimate protests, both before and after elections take place?

In addition, much campaigning takes place door to door and at rallies—how will the pandemic influence this? In some democracies these types of campaigning are only part of a wider picture of digital and print media, but this is not the case in many places, and smaller parties are particularly at risk of losing access to voters through the constraints that inability to travel and social distancing will place on the pre-election period. While these are worrying obstacles, many will be watching closely to see whether innovative practices around campaigning—and protesting—develop as a result of the pandemic.

It seems evident that the electioneering tools at the disposal of incumbent governments are powerful, and are in some ways magnified by the COVID-19 crisis. Of particular concern in some cases is the hold of the government over health

**Oversight of the distribution of health resources and access to relief is crucial to ensure it is not manipulated for political gain.**

resources and the way that the its distribution could be used in the context of an electoral campaign—as well as free cash transfers that are being used in some countries as relief in the face of the virus. There is an urgent need to develop systems to monitor whether these resources, and access to healthcare, are being distributed fairly and not manipulated for political purposes, and yet efforts to do so are hampered by the restrictions imposed as a result of the pandemic.

**Should elections be held during the pandemic?**

There are evidently risks, both in respect of electoral malpractice and in preventing further spread of the virus, in holding an election during a pandemic, but do these

risks outweigh the potential impact of postponing them? And are there ways of mitigating the risks or putting different systems in place that will allow elections to go ahead in the safest way possible, and keep on track the democratic process in a way that does not undermine it at the same time?

The risks inherent with continuing with elections have been outlined above, but the alternative of postponing an election is also difficult, particularly given the lack of precedence for the situation, which means that many countries are lacking in effective mechanisms that should be in place to allow elections to be postponed, leaving the decision to do so highly political and open to manipulation. Most of the discussion around the postponement of elections, or indeed the decision to go ahead with them without observation and potentially without effective systems in place, are taking place behind closed doors with limited input either from academics with expertise on elections or health officials who could give guidance on the most effective solution. Appendix 8 argues that restricting the input of certain types of expertise or disciplines, or the public more widely can lead to distrust. Postponing elections has been a traditional route towards dictatorship, and thus is a very dangerous route to adopt.

In this context, regional differences need to be examined closely, with the risks in holding elections playing out differently in different countries, both in respect of the political situation in the country and the prevalence of the virus. The way leaders might manipulate both the timing and the process of elections will be different on a case-by-case basis, using the pandemic either to postpone an election and stay in office beyond their term or use it as a means of rushing an election quickly through while international and domestic scrutiny is compromised.

**Decisions around elections are taking place without relevant expertise and behind closed doors—health experts should be involved in decision-making and the development and communication of electoral processes during a pandemic.**

For the decisions being taken regarding whether to hold elections or not—and the best way in which to hold them—to appear more credible, it would be useful to bring medical expertise to bear, and to demonstrate that decisions being taken are being based on that expertise, both for international observers and for the population. If an election is to be run, norms need to be developed, communicated and accepted by voters. This is complicated further by confusion as to whether health authorities are acting in a neutral and impartial manner or are politically motivated themselves, but such efforts are necessary in order to enfranchise the largest group of people as possible.

**Vote choice during a pandemic**

It remains to be seen to what extent the pandemic will be a valance issue, though there are some indications that the pandemic is impacting voter behaviour in specific ways.

Work on previous pandemics has shown that people who spend their formative years in the throes of a pandemic tend to trust their governments less in later stages of their life, creating a cycle in which it will be harder for governments to control public behaviour in future pandemics.

The COVID-19 crisis appears to be having an impact on the perception of populist governments in particular—driven by the sense that they have been less successful at handling the pandemic and have failed to deliver on the promises that got them into power. As trust in governments erodes, fake news becomes more prevalent, which in turn creates a cycle in which it is difficult for governments to deliver public health messaging in the face of misinformation about the pandemic itself. The relationship between trust, fake news and vote choice will be an important focus of research as the crisis develops further. Trust and expertise in policymaking are covered in greater depth in Appendix 8.

> **The relationship between trust, fake news and vote choice is important and is magnified by the pandemic**

### Future research and policy agenda

A future research and policy agenda should consider several questions. First, what practical support can be given to democracies about decisions to hold elections. If elections are to go ahead, what processes can be put in place not only to ensure that the election is conducted properly, but that best practice is developed that can be taken forward beyond the crisis? What opportunities are there to develop better processes for remote voting for policymakers, and for collecting and assessing data coming out of online electoral processes for researchers? Relatedly, how can health experts be involved in the decision-making process around elections conducted during the pandemic?

Second, we need to consider how the most marginalised and vulnerable can be engaged and enfranchised during the pandemic? How can decisions, norms and processes be communicated to the public to ensure that the election is supported?

Third, how can researchers use the constraints imposed by the pandemic to develop new practice around remote data collection and engaging with domestic observer groups and civil society who may still have access while international observers are absent?

### Further reading

Sarah Birch *et al.*, *How to Hold Elections Safely and Democratically During the COVID-19 Pandemic* (British Academy, 2020, https://doi.org/10.5871/bac19stf/9780856726507.001).

# COVID-19, peace and security

*Shape the Future* workshop, 24 June 2020

*Discussion Chair: Professor Simon Goldhill FBA*

This workshop explored both the challenges and the opportunities that the COVID-19 crisis might present for peace and security. It focused on the following questions. Trust is crucial to the development of effective technical solutions, but how can this be achieved in deeply divided societies? Which actors are best placed to support the development of trust and subsequent implications of solutions to the pandemic, and what would be the impact of their doing so on longer term peace and security? What role can international actors play in supporting communities overseas in conflict and mitigating the impact of the pandemic on them? In what ways will COVID-19 responses impact the existing global order? This note is intended as a starting point for further reflection and discussion, including within the *Shape the Future* initiative and the Academy's wider work on *Conflict, Safety and Security*.[20]

### State and non-state actors

The UN Secretary General's call in March in the relatively early stages of the pandemic for a global ceasefire has seen a range of responses globally, both in terms of actors initially heeding that call, and in the way that conflict situations have developed since that call was made, let alone the longer term outlook for peace. It has also been reported that, of those armed groups both state and non-state who did 'agree' to the ceasefire call, some of this was done for publicity reasons and has not translated into cessation of hostilities on the ground.

There have been some examples of locally mediated peace in some areas, but there are also contexts in which it appears that non-state actors are able to capitalise on their own networks and on the failure of those in authority to deliver

> So far, the impact of COVID-19 on the dynamics of power between state and non-state armed groups is reflective of wider trends in the face of all crises.

both much-needed relief and health resources, and to expend resources in countering the activities of non-state actors, to strengthen their own position and gain control of areas through the monopolisation of resources. It is worth noting that this trend is not

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[20] https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/programmes/conflict-stability-security/

unique to the COVID-19 crisis, but is reflective of the way that both state and non-state armed groups tend to respond in all crises.

There are concerns that the unpopularity of strict security measures associated with lockdown will lead to an entrenchment and emboldening of activities related to some groups, including cartels and gangs, that have in many cases been able to capitalise on the pandemic to strengthen their activities both through their response and the resources at their disposal, and in the absence of opposition from governments whose focus and resources are less available to be used in tackling organised crime.

## The scarcity of resources

Similar to how the pandemic has exacerbated existing inequalities and injustices as discussed in Appendix 6, the diversion of both aid and state resources towards mitigating the worst effects of COVID-19 are likely to exacerbate underlying factors that have been the drivers of conflict. Not only will this hit those already most affected by conflict hardest, but it also risks heightening pre-existing tensions to the point that conflict resumes in places where it has been paused. In already deeply

**The diversion of resources as a result of the pandemic will exacerbate underlying factors that have been the drivers of conflict.**

divided societies, the way that resources can be both withheld and allocated can be a powerful—and divisive—tool. At present it is not clear ultimately how large the differentials in COVID-19-related mortality will be across different countries, but the long-term economic impacts and redeployment of resources will weaken fragile states over time in a way that could be far more damaging than the immediate death toll from the virus.

## The international response

The pandemic has also placed restrictions on international actors' ability to respond to conflict situations and to monitor the situation. This is certainly true in the short term with staff being removed from affected countries, but also is likely to have an impact in the longer term as international organisations and government agencies that previously have been able to devote extensive resources to this are forced to re-deploy effort and resources elsewhere. There is a need to try to ensure that the most vulnerable groups are not forgotten while the attention of responders is directed towards the pandemic. The skills, knowledge and methods to understand people, including identifying the most affected or vulnerable, are central to SHAPE

disciplines, as highlighted in the recent *Qualified for the Future*[21] and *The Right Skills*[22] publications.

There is also a particular issue associated with the COVID-19 pandemic in that it is perceived in many countries as a disease that is brought into the country by foreigners, potentially fuelling some populist beliefs, as mentioned in Appendix 5, considering the impacts of COVID-19 on cohesion, and this is difficult to navigate for mediators and peace-keeping missions. Yet, while some international efforts are hamstrung by the pandemic, there are some positive signs that the crisis is leading in

**Regional and subregional groups have shown effective leadership at a time when the wider multilateral response has been lacking.**

some places—in particular in Africa—to increasing cooperation and cohesion between regional and subregional groups that may lead to the long-term strengthening of these entities and their capacities in the future. The relative success of some of these entities in comparison to the increasingly evident tensions that are undermining the likes of the Security Council and the World Health Organization could usher in changes to the architecture of future crisis response.[23]

**Future research and policy agenda**

A future policy and research agenda should consider how regional and subregional groups could be supported in their response, and their position be strengthened in the longer term. We should also look at how governments and civil society ensure that the most vulnerable are not doubly hit by the impact of the virus and the reallocation of resources to tackle it. Finally, though work is being done to monitor the impact of COVID-19 on ceasefires and peace processes, can the restrictions imposed by the pandemic to data gathering and on the ground research develop new practices that will outlast the restrictions?

[21] *Qualified for the Future: Quantifying Demand for Arts, Humanities and Social Science Skills* (British Academy, 2020, https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/publications/skills-qualified-future-quantifying-demand-arts-humanities-social-science/).
[22] *The Right Skills: Celebrating Skills in the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences* (British Academy, 2017, https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/publications/flagship-skills-right-skills-arts-humanities-social-sciences/).
[23] As explored in Roger Few *et al.*, *COVID-19 Crisis: Lessons for Recovery* (British Academy, 2020, https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/publications/covid-19-crisis-lessons-recovery/).

# APPENDIX 13

# Implications of COVID-19
# for children and young people

*Shape the Future* workshop, 24 June 2020

*Discussion Chair: Professor Anna Vignoles FBA*

This workshop explored how the COVID-19 pandemic has led to profound changes to the lives of children and young people throughout the UK. It focused on the medium and longer term impacts on children and young people's lives in different spaces:[24] family, community, education, environment, identifying the need for a policy lens that balances 'being a child' together with 'becoming an adult'.  The implications for policy development identified a strong focus on education and vulnerable children, as well as the impacts on young people who are transitioning into the labour market, further education, apprenticeships or higher education. A future policy and research agenda must consider how children and young people's voices have been heard during the pandemic and who has been representing their perspectives in the wider discussions on COVID-19. This note is intended as a starting point for further reflection and discussion, including within the *Shape the Future* initiative and the Academy's *Childhood Policy* programme.[25]

**The impacts on children and young people's lives cross different spaces and must be understood from their perspective**

There are a huge range of impacts on children and young people which we are only beginning to understand, from mental health to financial impacts and the implications for future employment. Appendix 17 on future skills considers the

**How can we capture and document the full diversity of experiences that children and young people, have encountered?**

impacts of the shutting down of the education system. Ensuring we capture and document the full diversity of experiences that children and young people have encountered, from their perspective, will be important.

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[24] It was explained that 'medium to longer term' meant that the workshop was looking beyond the most immediate issues of the next few days, but did include questions concerning the shorter as well as longer term impact on children and young people.

[25] https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/programmes/childhood/

For example, the mental health impact of COVID-19 on children and young people is likely to be profound. Initial research has already shown that many children are experiencing severe levels of anxiety, and linked issues such as trouble sleeping. Anxiety can include: the fear of catching COVID-19; fear of passing the virus on to others, such as elderly relatives; and anxiety about parents who work as nurses or in other 'exposed' roles. Children from minority ethnic backgrounds may be experiencing even more anxiety given the disproportionate impact of the virus on this group of adults. Children can also be affected by the increased levels of anxiety and stress experienced by some parents during the pandemic, on issues such as job insecurity and financial difficulties. Additionally, the impact of the lockdown on families can strain relationships between parents and children and between siblings.

Some of the initial financial impacts of COVID-19 and the lockdown have been softened by the furlough scheme and other measures. However in the longer term there will likely be rises in child poverty in the UK. Participants noted that it is not simply the numbers of children in poverty that will increase, but also that the depth and severity of the poverty that many children and their families experience will increase; as outlined in Appendix 6, the pandemic is exacerbating existing inequalities and vulnerabilities.

The media coverage of policy impacts on children and young people can be overly focused on long-term educational disadvantages (that is, a 'becoming' emphasis). This can mean than aspects such as the disruption of children's day-to-day routines or the fact that children are missing out on social interactions with their peers, which have implications for important social relationships (that is, a 'being' emphasis) can be underplayed.

**How do we ensure we preserve the experience of being a child, rather than looking at how we help children to 'catch up'?**

There are severe and/or distinct implications of the lockdown for specific groups of children and young people, including: children living in homes where domestic abuse is present; children who are estranged from their families; those LGBT young people who have a difficult relationship with their family; and children with parents in prison who they are unable to visit. Children with SEND/Education, Health and Care Plans may face particular challenges with remote schooling, or may be struggling partly due to having experienced higher levels of anxiety even before COVID-19.

However, it was also noted that some children have experienced positive impacts of lockdown. For children who had been experiencing bullying at school, or for some children with SEND (special educational needs and disabilities) where education provision and practices have previously not met their needs, the lockdown may have resulted in reduced anxiety through not having to attend school. This raises questions of what aspects of the education system do we want to reconstruct, and what aspects need to be constructed differently.

**Education and vulnerable children are key considerations for policymakers**

Education is a central focus of the issues policymakers must be considering at the moment with respect of children and young people. School does not only provide education, but also provides socialisation, routine and structure (and is a source of childcare). Policymakers must therefore consider all of these aspects, and avoid a narrow focus on school as education alone.

It is also important that curricula are as broad as possible and retain elements such as creativity and arts-based subjects, not least as these are important for children's well-being, which is of particular importance at the present time. This

**When children and young people return to school, what aspects of the curriculum should be prioritised, and how?**

theme of broad interdisciplinary curricula was also explored in the session on future skills, Appendix 17. Children being out of school and dependent on remote schooling will result in learning losses (which will affect some groups of children more than others). However, conversations on this can be dominated by adult's voices. It is vital that children's perspectives are heard and listened to.

The longer that part-time schooling continues, the more there will be a growing problem of inequality, with some children falling further and further behind, partly due to inability to access online education and resources. Some parents will be better able than others to provide support with online learning, while the provision of online learning resources will vary between

**How can we address the inequalities relating to children and young people that have been exacerbated by the pandemic?**

**How do we make visible those groups of children and young people that may be slipping through the cracks?**

schools. Technology is also vital in terms of children's socialisation and maintaining friendships. It was noted there is variability in the rate at which different groups (class, ethnicity, disabled) are choosing (or have a choice) to send children back to school. Policies will need to identify the children who are currently losing out, and focus attention and resources accordingly. Initial research from countries such as Hong Kong has revealed a widening of the attainment gap since schools closed due to the pandemic.

There is a problem of some vulnerable children currently being 'invisible' during the lockdown, with predictions that at a future point there will be a surge of demand for social care and child protection services. The increased pressures felt by many families (job insecurity, unemployment, cramped living conditions) will have only added to the pressure on many parents. This is an example of how existing inequalities have been exacerbated through COVID-19, as discussed in Appendix 6. On a related point, it was noted that many practitioners are already working at or beyond capacity,

and so an increase in demand will lead to burnout, exhaustion and an inability to keep pace with demand. Burnout and exhaustion are also a danger for parents who are having to 'step in' to roles normally provided by others, schooling and education being a key area.

Children have been forgotten in many policy conversations. There has not been a distinction made between families with children and those without children. An example is the failure of social security policy during the pandemic to provide any additional help specifically to meet the needs of children, despite growing evidence that families with children are being disproportionately affected. This is particularly acute for parents who are also full-time carers of disabled children. COVID-19 is a worldwide issue and from a UK perspective we must think about the impact of our actions on children in the rest of the world, for example, in terms of aid budgets.

**The shape of the future policy and research agenda must bring together a range of actors and reflect children and young people's voices**

To fully understand and address the impacts on children, it will be necessary to bring together a variety of policy actors. As there is no one government department focusing on children, interdepartmental working will be vital to prevent child-related issues 'falling between the cracks'. Institutions like the British Academy could have a role in convening a childhood-focused meeting of all relevant departments in order to stimulate discussion.

In order to understand and address the impacts of the pandemic on children, high-quality data are imperative. The aim should be to collect robust longitudinal quantitative and

> **How do we make data available so that we can effectively learn about the impacts and how to address them?**

qualitative data, and to make use of linked administrative data, particularly as the pandemic could continue in some form for years (for example, with elements of the lockdown being tightened and loosened over time in response to the evolving situation). It will be necessary to collect, share and ideally to integrate a wide variety of data sets, which raises questions of robustness, ownership and transparency of data. It will also be vital to have clear lines of responsibility and accountability so that all parties are clear who holds responsibility for which aspects. Linked to this, an overly rapid response now runs the risk of having unintended consequences.

The importance of learning from past events and policies in order to ensure that mistakes are not repeated was raised. The current pandemic will have some severe implications for those young people entering higher education or the workplace, and the importance of drawing on lessons learnt from previous economic downturns and recessions, such as that experienced by the UK in the 1980s, was highlighted.

The differing approaches taken by the four UK countries in relation to pandemic response will provide a rich source of research opportunities, and opportunities to compare the effectiveness or otherwise of different responses. One child-related example given was the differences between the countries in terms of children being able to have access to a parent who is in prison, and the differing use of virtual visits.

Involving children themselves in policy debates affecting them raises ethical dilemmas and questions such as: how to ensure that children's voices are at the forefront without

**How can children and young people's voices be heard in policy discussions on shaping a post-pandemic future?**

exploiting children as research subjects; when is the appropriate time to involve children in research; and what should the balance be between obtaining views from children directly and obtaining their views as mediated by parents/carers? There may be a need for an overarching 'umbrella' structure that could be put in place to facilitate and enable the involvement of children in COVID-19-related research, though of course there are many individual organisations who have these sorts of frameworks in place, including the research councils, National Children's Bureau and others. Intergenerational relations and issues of equity between generations were sensitive issues even before COVID-19, and have likely been exacerbated by the pandemic. Exploring the long-term implications of this will be important.

Finally, when thinking about research and policy in relation to children, it is vital to keep in mind that children are not a homogenous group, and also that different children will have experienced the pandemic and lockdown very differently. Specific groups of children may be affected in particular ways. There was strong agreement that children and young people need to be centred in any 'reconstruction' of society that follows the pandemic, and that in particular the mental health and well-being of children must be a priority for policymakers and for all other stakeholders.

**What should we do next?**

Many of the topics and themes discussed can be taken forward within the BA's ongoing *Childhood Policy* programme. This programme seeks to reframe debates around childhood in both the public and policy spaces and break down academic, policy and professional silos in order to explore new conceptualisations of children in policy-making. The core themes of the programme are children's rights, building the voice of the child into policy and balancing 'being' (a child) and 'becoming' (an adult). In addition, we should encourage the bringing together of a wide variety of policy actors in order to focus on and address the impacts on the pandemic on children and young people. As there is no one government department focusing on children, this will be vital in preventing child-related issues from 'falling between the cracks'. Finally, we

need to advocate for children and young people to be centred in any reconstruction of society that follows the pandemic, and to promote children and young people's voices playing a key role in policy discussions on what a post-pandemic future should look like.

## Some further reading

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https://www.ted.com/talks/sonia_livingstone_parenting_in_the_digital_age

V. Clemens *et al.*, 'Potential Effects of "Social" Distancing Measures and School Lockdown on Child and Adolescent Mental Health', *European Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*, 29 (2020), 739–42. https://doi.org/10.1007/s00787-020-01549-w

The Nurture Network (eNurture): Promoting Young People's Mental Health in a Digital World.
https://www.lse.ac.uk/media-and-communications/research/research-projects/enuture

Rip Stars: Disabled Young Researchers Who Have Been Looking at Quality and Rights in Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs). ripstars.net

Office for National Statistics, *Coronavirus and the Social Impacts on Great Britain*. Regularly updated statistical bulletin, reporting indicators from the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey in order to understand the impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on people, households and communities in Great Britain.
https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/healthandwellbeing/datasets/coronavirusandthesocialimpactsongreatbritaindata

# COVID-19 and the future of 'public' in public culture?

*Shape the Future* workshop, 26 June 2020

*Discussion Chairs: Professor Peter Mandler FBA and Professor John Sloboda FBA*

This workshop explored the implications of COVID-19 for public culture. 'Public culture' was defined as an attempt to bring together a set of interrelated subjects and problems: the fortunes of inner cities as crucibles of community and diverse interactions; a labour market increasingly dominated by cultural sectors such as hospitality, tourism, leisure, sport and the arts, and the special appeal of face-to-face interaction in an otherwise increasingly digital world. The workshop focused on the contradictory effects of the pandemic on a public culture that had been thriving but also riven with structural faults, and on ways in which government (which since the workshop committed to supporting arts and cultural venues with substantial grants and loans) might intervene strategically to stabilise and rebuild. This note is intended as a starting point for further reflection and discussion, including within the *Shape the Future* initiative.

**There has been an under-appreciated renaissance of public culture in inner cities in the two or three decades preceding the pandemic**

As a 2015 report from the Centre for Cities reminded us, British city centres were at a very low ebb about 1990, demographically and economically. Since then, they have rebounded with an unprecedented influx of population, spending power, and ethnic and cultural diversity. Students

**Since the 1990s, city centres have rebounded with an unprecedented influx of population, spending power, ethnic and cultural diversity.**

made up about half of this growth; young professionals and creatives most of the rest. New knowledge and cultural-sector jobs and leisure, cultural and hospitality facilities were the magnets.

This growth was rapid and exciting, but it led to some new structural fault lines. In some areas, notably London, housing costs became prohibitive. Less affluent people continued to flock to the centre on public transport but had to live further and further afield. In other areas, however, especially where the centres were attractive to

the young precisely because they had become so rundown and inexpensive, a better social mix was maintained. After 2008, employment in the knowledge and culture sectors held up, but pay weakened and precarity became a widely recognised problem. A gap was also opening up culturally between city centres and suburban and exurban areas, as the Brexit vote showed.

**The pandemic may have mixed effects—there are silver linings as well as dark clouds**

The remaining retail strongholds in city centres will undoubtedly be badly hit. What will replace them? Already before the pandemic, hospitality, tourism, leisure and culture were overtaking retail, and the national enthusiasm (perhaps excessive enthusiasm) for reopening has drawn healthy attention to the social as well as economic significance of these sectors. But are they enough to sustain the dense populations that have sprung up around them? How will pandemic-related aversion to public transport affect the wider audience for centre-city attractions? The future obviously lies with more pedestrian districts, a cleaner as well as decarbonised environment, and there is a clear desire for changes in our approach to the environment, as outlined in Appendix 15, but how can we make that happen without more reliance on public transport?

The imbalance between London and other towns and cities may shift. That would be a good thing in terms of narrowing cultural divides and making London more affordable. It might not be such a good thing in terms of attracting international visitors and revenue from study and tourism, which will be hit anyway by pandemic-related and carbon-conscious aversion to air travel.

The pandemic has clearly given an impetus to digital platforms for the creation and transmission of cultural products. Some good may come of that. Certainly the wider use of digital platforms will have environmental benefits in

> **We are social creatures for whom evolution has created unmodifiable needs for physical, not just virtual, communication.**

limiting unnecessary travel and improving access for geographically isolated audiences, and new reservoirs of creativity have been opened up simply by the wider propagation of new media and tools. But the collective audience experience is a vital and universal need which cannot be taken completely online, even if online culture grows substantially. The urge to congregate with others in public cannot be successfully suppressed for long without lasting damage to public life and human connectivity. We are social creatures for whom evolution has created unmodifiable needs for physical, not just virtual, communion. The younger demographic which is more comfortable with digital is also the group that has flocked to 'the public square' in

inner cities in the last generation. How can we ensure that which people crave so much can be made safer—renormalised—in the post-pandemic world? And what role can well-designed coordinated, peer-reviewed research play, in a context where scientists still disagree about the parameters of infection spread among both workers and the public?

**Government's recent commitment of support to culture is to be welcomed, but it needs to be carefully targeted**

People mean many different things by 'culture' or 'the arts'. The 'crown jewels'—museums, galleries, theatre and music venues, mostly in the capital—are important and highly visible but only a small part of the bigger picture. Ethnic and cultural diversity tend often to be concentrated in larger cities too and need to be nurtured. But just as important are the myriad of neighbourhood- and community-based arts and culture projects in every part of the UK. The use of creative industries and higher education for regeneration of 'left-behind' towns was already on the agenda before the pandemic, but mostly paid only lip-service; it ought to move to the forefront of government policy and cultural subsidy. Outside of London, towns and cities are more affordable. There is a lot of cultural energy there that could be economically cultivated, but it may need new mechanisms of channelling funding directly to artists rather than through established 'gatekeeper' organisations. Build it, and they will come.

Government aid to public culture ought also to be directed to addressing other divides that were opening up before the pandemic and may well be exacerbated by it. Recent years have seen an increasing disconnect between publicly funded arts institutions (including the BBC) and growing sectors of the population (young people, ethnic minorities). As other Appendices on inclusion and cohesion have argued, COVID-19 creates an opportunity to accelerate the priorities of such institutions as more representative of the cultural diversity of the UK. In this, mechanisms for capturing the critical voices of the participating public (rather than the established mainstream media critics) will be essential. The BBC needs to be strengthened by securing its funding and at the same time making it more truly national in both agenda and composition.

As argued in Appendix 17 on future skills, it's high time to recognise the centrality of the hospitality, leisure, tourism and knowledge sectors to

**Arts and culture give spice to our lives and serve as a 'national sanity service'.**

the 21st-century British economy—these are no longer marginal sectors at the fringe of an industrial economy but they *are* the industries of today—and at the same time

to recognise the interdependence of these employment sectors with arts and culture. The latter not only provide jobs, but they also give spice to the life of the many people employed in the former. Arts and culture serve, as Ian Christie put it at the British Academy's *Culture in crisis?* event,[26] as a 'national sanity service'.

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[26] Held as part of the *British Academy Virtual Summer Showcase* (June 2020)
https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/events/british-academy-virtual-summer-showcase-culture-crisis/

# APPENDIX 15

# Living with or against nature?
# COVID-19 and our relationship
# with the natural world

### *Shape the Future* workshop, 29 June 2020

*Discussion Chair: Professor Harriet Bulkeley FBA, with Dr Caroline Howe*

This workshop explored the implications of COVID-19 for our relationship with nature. It focused on three key questions. How can we rebuild trust and confidence in each other and how we steer nature? How can we satisfy peoples' appetite for change and what can we do better in the future? How can we address colonialism, racism and classism in our relationship with nature? Four themes emerged: how our relationships with nature has changed during lockdown; the opportunity to rebuild trust through valuing nature; the need to address the colonial histories at the core of many environmental interactions; and the need to align policy and nature. This note is intended as a starting point for further reflection and discussion, including within the *Shape the Future* initiative and the British Academy's wider *Environmental Sustainability* programme[27] and work on *Heritage, Dignity and Violence*.[28]

**Lockdown has thrown new light on our day-to-day relationship with nature**

What might a new ecological contract between people and nature that is not based on exploitation involve, and could this be a way to better live with nature in the future? We can problematise the human-centredness of our interactions with

> **How can we link the bottom and top of society through local and structural change based on what is a good life and what it means to work well with nature?**

nature by creating new narratives about the interaction between humans and nature and how our conception of our surrounding environment has changed through time. To build a more dignified relationship between humans and nature, heritage could be re-politicised in the public sphere; 'activised' as something not just for the past, but also for the future.

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[27] https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/programmes/environment-energy/
[28] https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/programmes/heritage-dignity-violence/

Town planning and other infrastructure projects can be designed in ways that can have a positive, rather than merely a neutral impact on our relationship with nature. In order to achieve these kinds of fundamental shifts, however, there will need to be structural changes at all levels of society. For example, will large concrete and glass towers still be regarded as an asset or, given the risks they pose in a context where we must live with COVID-19 and that fact that we can now work differently and more remotely, change this?

**Could a new ecological contract between people and nature be a way to live better with nature in the future?**

In designing new green spaces in urban areas, will the plants and trees included be suitable for those who have asthma? Appendix 2 on the impact of COVID on urban life highlighted the potential for environmental reform as cities 'build back better'.

Similarly, we need to challenge our expectations about where nature is to be found— here the prevailing rural–urban distinction is

**Why should there be a distinction between nature and culture?**

unhelpful. We can do much more to educate children and the public about green spaces and nature in urban areas. Urban parks have been a lifeline during lockdown, but since 2010 they have experienced a funding crisis, creating a discrepancy in expect-ations and demands on parks from urban citizens that have arisen during this crisis. Bringing together the arts and academia, through initiatives such as the Sustainability First Art and Essay Prize on 'Building from the corona crisis towards a more sustain-able future', can help us to express and understand the uncertainty of these times, reimagine the future and develop a compelling narrative for change.

COVID-19 has thrown our multiple and often contradictory relations with nature into stark relief. The pandemic has been seen by some as nature taking its revenge on society for the ills that society has wrought on nature and pandemics that start in this way are most likely to occur when there is exploitation of wildlife and nature taking place. The co-chairs of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES),[29] whose Global Assessment of Nature captured public and political imagination concerning the state of the natural world in 2019, have warned that diseases such as coronavirus are becoming more prevalent as a result of human exploitation and encroachment on nature. Increasing the space for wild nature and reducing human contact is part of their recipe for a post-pandemic world, where nature is safeguarded from human exploitation. A purification, if you like, where troubling forms of nature are removed from our social worlds and where society's perturbation into natural life is reduced.

Lockdown life has become vitally tied into the more mundane and everyday spaces of nature

**Has lockdown changed the way we value and interact with nature?**

[29] https://ipbes.net/

that have (and have not) been accessible as a means of escape from the confines of the home. From the simple entreaty to go outdoors, to exercise, to experience the life-enhancing properties of nature close-to-home, to contestations over which kinds of nature are a step too far, a form of beauty not to be enjoyed or a luxury that society can ill afford, how we live well together with nature has been central to governing the disease and securing society. These contradictory calls—to both immerse ourselves in and remove ourselves from nature—pose important questions for how society might come to understand itself and its relation to nature in a post-pandemic world.

The current crisis comes against the background of the Anthropocene and offers an opportunity to assess what impact we have had and will continue to have on the planet, climate and ecosystems. We need to make a narrative or model about peoples' interaction with nature through time and how they think about their surrounding environs through time. This would highlight the human-centredness of our interactions with nature.

**Satisfying an appetite for change and rebuilding trust through valuing nature**

There is an appetite for change in the UK and globally. People do not want things to return to what they were before. Although we are still in a pandemic, meaning there are still constraints to work within, the COVID crisis has demonstrated

> **Do the rapid changes seen in response to the COVID crisis offer optimism for the urgent need to tackle the climate crisis and the changes that will be needed at all levels of society?**

how quickly we can take decisive action, like lockdowns, mask-wearing and other behaviour alterations; and create progressive change when faced with a time of crisis; for example, initiatives such as temporary cycle paths, urban agriculture, or new uses of green spaces. Creative policies have been made possible through an exceptional set of circumstances, but there is a risk of a return to business-as-usual, resulting in further lockdowns and bringing about a strong populist backlash.

As explored in Appendix 8 on trust and expertise in policymaking, COVID-19 has shaken the public's confidence in the abilities of institutions to lead at times of such crisis. There is a

> **Do we need new or changed institutions in a post-pandemic world that work with nature?**

need to think about rebuilding trust and confidence in each other and in how we steer nature, leveraging the importance of institutions to improve trust in government and institutions at all levels through delivering on the nature agenda. It will be important to think about the concept of 'effective localism'. This is knowledge that will need to be grown together as a society.

There is a case to be made for green localism, where a strong regenerant nature can be part of life for thousands of people. At a local level, there is combination of people who have been very distressed by the condition of lockdown and a lot of potential nature that has not been accessible. Landowners and farmers are becoming more open to making more land and nature accessible. This gives people a sense of dignity and the feeling they have worth in relation to the community and the natural world and can access it without heavy reliance on polluting transport.

Looking beyond the UK, the way in which we live alongside nature is a global, international and transnational issue and this outlook will need to be central to any response. The carbon impact of COVID-19 is limited compared to the ongoing flows of transnational impacts. There is a difference between global *society* being closed and the global economy of carbon still running. There are also contradictions in attitudes towards natural heritage in the developed world. The designation of natural heritage sites severs indigenous relationships with nature, upsetting the important interaction between culture and place.

Technological and economic aspects still dominate much thinking on what the world will look like post-pandemic, but we must pay greater attention to the social and environmental aspects of any recovery. A bio-economy, for example, would need to focus on nature, society and sustainability, not just on economic deliverables. We also need to understand and articulate the ways in which nature links to other policy issues, such as health, rather than thinking about it in isolation. Green spaces have a positive impact on public health.

### Addressing the colonial histories at the core of many environmental issues and interactions

Environmental solutions must also address colonialism, classism, ableism and racism, as the environmental movement and environmental policies largely ignores, silences, or inadequately addresses issues affecting low-income, disabled

**Is nature in itself a colonial concept?**

**What would it mean to decolonise nature spaces in British society?**

and so-called Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities (for example, there is a #BlackInNature movement, shifting the narrative about who is in and who is using natural spaces). This could include re-evaluating traditions of agriculture, etc. that are from a historically colonised place, and incorporating local solutions proposed by communities without co-opting them. Kew Gardens has, for example, announced a plan to decolonise its collections, recognising their origins in an era of Empire and historical exploitation of the Global South, as well as helping to increase ethnic

representation and accessibility across their range of activities.[30] We need to not only draw on Western knowledge but include traditional and indigenous knowledge, as different cultures have developed systems of environmental management over generations.

Is 'nature' itself a colonial concept? Would it be beneficial to find a way of moving beyond this word and reproducing a lot of the colonial discourses that we want to move beyond. There is discussion in Latin America looking at indigenous people in conversation with philosophers and environmentalists about what it means to live a good life. This is something that we are behind on.

Is environmental crisis also a crisis of labour? The need to move away from centralisation in the UK to a green new localism but recognising the potential problems in this (such as different federal approaches in the US) means a 'green industrial revolution'—a return to and nostalgia that this evokes for an era built on colonial labour and forced extraction, not just of endeavour.

**Aligning policy and nature**

For the future it is vital to align the challenges we face and bring together various groups. We should aim at imagining a society, economy and a relationship with nature which is more holistic. The Welsh Future of Wellbeing Act[31] is a good example of this, but even before enshrining it into legislation more widely in the UK, we need to make sure to include those without a voice and that we have so far failed to listen to. This includes minorities and young people.

British colonial history and the history of racism need to remain central concerns that are linked to our relationship with nature. For example, speaking of the 'green industrial revolution' may evoke eras of colonial labour and the forced extraction of natural resources. The issue also extends to natural spaces and their decolonisation. It is key to have a discussion about these topics and involve local people and minority groups.

There are inevitable tensions between a desire to rapidly recover the economy we knew before and the imperative to make space for alternatives to emerge. Finding new openings where current economic conditions have changed the balance of what kinds of activity are valuable to do—for example, in downtown urban cores which are increasingly understood to require rethinking—where temporary and diverse kinds of alternative forms of nature can be generated is one possibility. Opening up

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[30] https://www.kew.org/read-and-watch/time-to-decolonise-botanical-collections
[31] Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 (https://www.futuregenerations.wales/about-us/future-generations-act/).

existing forms of urban nature which currently lie outside the formal public realm—for example, as owned by churches, utilities, water authorities and so forth—through new kinds of activities that open up access to different kinds of nature to diverse communities is another. Realising the potential for employment to be generated through new kinds of nature restoration projects as well as the possibilities for generating new capacities for health and well-being can also contribute to a really green recovery.

# Words, stigma and the coronavirus: implications of COVID-19 for holistic approaches to infectious diseases

### *Shape the Future* workshop, 30 June 2020

*Discussion Chair: Professor Charlotte Roberts FBA*

This workshop explored the implications of COVID-19 for our understanding of stigma around infectious diseases and holistic approaches to them. It focused on three key questions. What can insights from different disciplines teach us about COVID-19 and future pandemics and their impact on society? How can understanding historical and local conceptions of disease and its representation in language help us understand disease-related stigma? Can better, more nuanced approaches to public health messaging ameliorate stigmatisation and discrimination? This note is intended as a starting point for further reflection and discussion, including within the *Shape the Future* initiative.

**Intersectional analysis can help us understand the different variables that affect prevalence, health outcomes and stigma or discrimination**

COVID-19 has resurfaced discussions in the media and academia about stigmatised diseases past and present. The emergence of the disease into countries and subgroups has often been

**Why don't people use appropriate words and phrases when describing the origins and effects of the virus?**

accompanied early in the local epidemic by a blaming discourse. In 2015, World Health Organization guidance on naming new infections advised against naming them according to geographic location, people's names, species of animal, or food, or using cultural, population, industrial or occupational references. They advocated the use of language that does not incite undue fear. Stigmatising people with specific diseases can have profound and far-reaching effects on people's lives. Sadly, evidence of this has emerged in relation to COVID-19, from those infected to the people caring for them.

Infectious diseases are complex entities and moving beyond the disease (medical approach) to people and communities affected (a societal view) is ultimately more productive. Whilst science has provided us with facts or informed hypotheses on which

to base public health interventions about the virus, SHAPE subjects can potentially provide much more nuanced holistic appreciations surrounding how infections may be prevented and managed, and stigma avoided in future.

There has been relatively little published research to date specifically on stigma associated with COVID-19, since it is a novel disease. From the small body of existing literature, media reports and discussion in this workshop, how-

**Why are specific groups of people and places being targeted, blamed and marginalised for this virus and its transmission?**

ever, it is clear that COVID-19-related stigma has been directed towards certain groups of people, particularly those from Black or minority backgrounds, those of Asian descent, healthcare workers, those from areas with a high infection rate and those who have symptoms.

Stigma does not follow the same patterns globally. In sub-Saharan Africa white people and wealthier individuals who are more able to travel have been stigmatised. Where face coverings are not mandatory, men have been shown to be more likely than women to say that wearing a face covering is shameful, affecting their intention to wear one.[32]

Stigma and discrimination present a particular challenge in containing the disease, because they intersect with differential prevalences and prognoses for COVID-19 that are related to factors such as socio-economic status, ethnicity, age, gender and underlying health conditions. These inequalities are among those considered in Appendix 6. Understanding COVID-19 stigma requires an intersectional analysis across at least these five major fault lines. To understand the intersection of different kinds of stigma and discrimination, it is essential to be clear in messaging about what social categories are being used and why. The use of the term 'BAME' (Black, Asian and minority ethnic) obscures a lot of differences and nuances, and such categorisation can itself racialise people and create stigma.

**Concepts of disease at specific times and in different places can vary considerably**

Interdisciplinary and combined methodological approaches from the work of archaeologists, medical historians and medical anthropologists has helped demonstrate the many variables in the way infectious diseases are understood and

**What can we learn from stigma around other infectious diseases past and present, such as leprosy, ebola, and HIV and AIDS?**

managed. HIV and AIDS was initially stigmatised as a disease of gay men when it

[32] Valerio Capraro & Hélène Barcelo, 'The Effect of Messaging and Gender on Intentions to Wear a Face Covering to Slow Down COVID-19 Transmission' (2020). https://psyarxiv.com/tg7vz/; https://doi.org/10.31234/osf.io/tg7vz

emerged in the US in the 1980s. In countries like South Africa, however, HIV and AIDS, as well as leprosy, have been stigmatised as diseases affecting Black people.

Linguistic expressions about disease carries historical baggage: it can express and exacerbate stigma. In the past, people with leprosy (and those who were thought to have it) were commonly referred to as 'lepers', a word which retains a strongly derogatory meaning today. For example, a person in Leicester, when it was returned to lockdown as a result of a spike in COVID-19 cases, recently referred to themselves as a 'Leicester leper', to explain their feeling of being stigmatised. Stigma can also be situationally specific, relating to local conflicts or disease trajectories. Regional sectarian and geopolitical tensions have fuelled stigma relating to COVID-19 in the Middle East. In Zambia, COVID-19 was initially associated with the wealthy: people with larger houses and gardens who could travel for leisure or business and thus contract the disease. Belief systems also play a role in response to disease. Although science-led responses to COVID-19 have been effectively implemented in countries such as Vietnam and New Zealand, there are still communities who explain COVID-19 in religious or moral terms, for example as God's wrath against the LGBTQI+ community. Such belief systems, which may have historical roots into which modern scientific understandings may not penetrate, can make management of pandemics very challenging, even in cases where government policies are science-based and non-discriminatory.

**Public health messaging should be led by evidence and designed in coordination with the public and local communities**

Policymakers need to think about how public health messaging around COVID-19, at both the national and local level, can avoid polarising and

**We need examples of good practice, as well as looking at what has not worked.**

stigmatising those affected. International agencies such as the World Health Organization and UNICEF have focused on the importance of the language being used to communicate information about the disease in their published guidance on how to reduce COVID-19-related stigma. Broader messages around equality, diversity and social inclusion, as well as respect for personal circumstances should be part of any strategy. Narratives informed by insights from SHAPE subjects can be used alongside scientific data to make public health messaging more relevant and effective. For example, HIV/AIDS messaging around the reduction of sexual partners across Africa, as a preventative strategy, successfully deployed the vernacular phrase 'no grazing' to encourage couples to reduce the number of external sexual encounters.

Information about COVID-19 and related anti-stigma initiatives should be accessible to all. Translation should be a shared responsibility, coordinated centrally by

government for example, and not left to regional or local governments or non-governmental organisations. To date, little attention has been paid to cultural or language differences in how

**Is there a risk of governments seemingly selecting who is worthy of knowledge about the pandemic?**

messages are received, which may require information to be translated in different ways and for different audiences. The deaf or hard of hearing have also been identified as being excluded in government briefings in England. Lack of access to suitable IT, network connections and software can also create the problem of 'digital exclusion'. As Appendix 8 on trust and expertise in policymaking and Appendix 4 on inquiries argue, lack of wide inclusion in the consultation or policymaking can lead to distrust.

Policymakers need to consider the relationship between COVID-19 prevention, containment or treatment interventions and stigma, and mitigate negative effects through careful design. Research

**Should certain people be privileged by being certified COVID-free, or would this implicitly stigmatise all others?**

suggests that containment strategies, such as immunity passports, physical distancing or travel restrictions, could exacerbate stigma if they are implemented without due attention to addressing misinformation, avoiding 'othering' and engaging affected communities. This is particularly important because of the intersection between COVID-19 prevalence and prognosis and existing forms of systematic discrimination and disadvantage.

We need to balance the greater vulnerability of some groups with liberty, freedom and equity of treatment. Categorising people may lead to more stigma for some Black or minority groups, even without infection. How should the systems implemented, build trust amongst populations who recognise that they are stigmatised and subjected to racism already, particularly in a period when Black Lives Matter highlights the prevalence of racism? Track and trace assumes we should be targeting people, but there is justifiable opposition to the use of stop and search pressing in the opposite direction. Track and trace also requires support to enable those living in households with less space or other issues to self-isolate.

Policymaking should be led by evidence and knowledge of effective strategies, whether for COVID-19 or related conditions. Policy recommendations need to make sense to the public as well as government, offering answers to real, practical problems on the ground. We need examples of *good* practice, as well as looking at what has not worked. Government also needs to be co-producing the policy and research agenda with the public and with local bodies and community organisations.

**Policy and research will need to focus on social experience and community need in approaching infectious diseases and future pandemics**

Although a disease may be caused by a biological agent, it is the social experience that can have the most impact. COVID-19 provides a good opportunity to address how social categories are constructed and understood and the impact that they can have on quality of life and health outcomes. Researchers need to look at the systems and structures that influence the health inequalities seen during the COVID-19 pandemic and unpack these in order to avoid exacerbating them in our response to the pandemic. The assumptions should not be made that a white, male body as the norm for disease and other health concerns. Research should be interdisciplinary and aim for an intersectional analysis of the relationships between different kinds of stigma and pre-existing discrimination, including healthcare inequalities. This should involve researchers, advisors and participants from the communities being researched.

Intersectional perspectives and lessons from different disease contexts past and present can inform health policy, interventions and research on COVID-19 and associated stigma The policy problem or community need must be identified

**What are the 'pinch-points' in the system that make individuals or groups vulnerable to stigma and discrimination?**

first, and research programmes or policy responses focused on them. We need a more holistic and interdisciplinary approach to the impact of COVID-19. How does the use of words used around diseases and the reactions of people impact group identity? What are the triggers for COVID-19 stigma or discrimination? How do we address stigma associated with health interventions such as the wearing of masks? How do we engage people across generations and from a wide range of disciplines to address what a post-COVID-19 society should look like?

# APPENDIX 17
# Skills for the future

*Shape the Future* workshop, 30 June 2020

*Discussion Chair: Professor Sir Ian Diamond FBA*

This discussion by the British Academy's Skills Steering Group explored the implications of COVID-19 in relation to the future skills needs of our society and workforce. The Academy's *Skills Programme* aims to: develop a robust evidence base on the skills and career paths of SHAPE students, pupils and researchers; monitor and respond to changes in demand and supply of cross-cutting skills relevant to SHAPE subjects; collaborate with other academies and learned societies, careers advisors, subject representatives, employers and business groups to signal and champion the value of SHAPE skills to society and the economy; and lead public and political engagement on the nature and value of SHAPE skills.[33] In this context, the Steering Group held a wide-ranging discussion on the effect of the pandemic on the supply and demand of skills and the impact on the skills system, in the short, medium, and long term.

**A diversity of skills and understanding is, and will be, essential at every stage of the crisis**

A recurring theme in the discussions within the *Shape the Future* initiative is that, while science has provided us with medical and public health facts about the virus, SHAPE subjects can provide further insight on the wide-ranging impact of the pandemic on everyday life, how infections may be prevented and managed, and stigma avoided in future. A crucial area of knowledge and skills for recognising, responding to and rebuilding after the COVID crisis has therefore been rigorous methods for understanding people and behaviour. Such methods are central to knowing how human activities relate to and impact medical factors such as the R-rate, the decisions taken to mitigate spread, and the right way to recover and rebuild.

An example is the establishment of the localised lockdown in Leicester July 2020. This has required understanding local communities and languages, and also regional and local factors and outcomes to define the lockdown zone. Further social and cultural understanding, such as the effects of COVID-19 on particular groups, is also needed, though there seems to be a deficit of the skills required to achieve this.

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[33] https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/projects/flagship-skills/

Other impacts of the outbreak where understanding from SHAPE disciplines are key include the impact on local geographies including town centres, which has accelerated the decline of the high street, as covered in Appendix 2 on urban environments, and the implications for transport and the hospitality and leisure sectors.

These arguments are strongly aligned with those in Appendix 8 on trust, expertise and policymaking and the case made for holistic, interdisciplinary approaches to understand disease. Intersectionality and interdisciplinarity are crucial for identifying how particular groups and areas are being impacted more, and demonstrate the importance of language, both translation and transmission skills in the coordinated response to the pandemic.

**The impact of and the response to the pandemic has shown the need for SHAPE disciplines to be embedded in all curricula, at all levels, including in vocational further education courses.**

The impact of and the response to the pandemic has therefore shown the need for SHAPE disciplines to be embedded in in all curricula, at all levels, including in vocational, further education courses.

**While demand for skills is broadening, government policy focus is increasingly narrow**

Recent messages from government have prioritised both 'vocational skills' as defined as 'skilled trades' and the concept that employment outcomes are directly related to a particular subject of study, often focused on STEM disciplines. Financial pressures as a result of COVID-19 have meant that funding resources may be moved away from courses perceived as 'less essential' or as leading to lower paid work. The rationale is that these skilled trades are needed to deliver anticipated infrastructure investments as the economy emerges and recovers from the pandemic.

Similarly, there was evidence that education and research infrastructure funding may be being prioritised away from SHAPE disciplines. This seems counter to the inherent economic benefits of

**While demand for skills is broadening, government policy focus is increasingly narrow**

and contributions from pursuing SHAPE disciplines and the breadth and flexibility of career path they offer.

Government policy and the actions of individual universities must also ensure the long-term sustainability and value of smaller disciplines which may be vulnerable to short-term changes in demand, such as many community or heritage languages, skills in which are vital for the communication of public messages, as explored in Appendix 20.

**Future of industry, work and employment**

The UK's economy may have changed beyond recognition, and how the recovery unfolds will be hugely significant in driving changes in demand for skills and knowledge, with opportunities to build back in a different way, as discussed in Appendix 18 on inclusive recovery. The pandemic has drawn attention to the central importance of the hospitality, cultural, tourism and leisure sectors for the economy,  and our way of life. These sectors have economic value and the roles within them are often underpinned by SHAPE skills, but the contribution of their knowledge and skills must not be measured solely in terms of personal financial gain, nor wider economic benefit, but also broad cultural and societal vitality. The centrality of these sectors sits alongside the increasing importance of global networks beyond Europe, and a greater need for knowledge of different languages, societies and cultures.

The role of key workers during the pandemic had revealed that salary is not the main measure of value or success. Many critical roles and jobs of huge social value such as care workers, delivery drivers and teachers are not considered 'well paid'. It is possible that job satisfaction and attractiveness data may therefore start to show a different picture in the coming years following this crisis. The new questions in the Graduate Outcomes survey on satisfaction might be helpful in this regard.

The pandemic may be accelerating changes in ways of working, quickening what is often called the 'Fourth Industrial Revolution'. This is particularly visible for information technology and remote working, This shift represents a rapidly changing demand for skills, both in terms of the use of information technology systems increasingly in all work, but also the skills required to design, build, operate and maintain these systems. There is an important equalities dimension, since the ability to work in new ways (such as from home) varies by profession and sector.

The adaptability and flexibility of SHAPE backgrounds was also discussed as being a particular asset. Individuals with backgrounds in SHAPE can re deploy their talents as demand for different roles or from different sectors changes as highlighted in the recent *Qualified for the Future*[34] and *The Right Skills*[35] publications.

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[34] *Qualified for the Future:Quantifying Demand for Arts, Humanities and Social Science Skills* (British Academy,2020,https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/publications/skills-qualified-future-quantifying-demand-arts-humanities-social-science/).

[35] *The Right Skills: Celebrating Skills in the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences* (British Academy, 2017, https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/publications/flagship-skills-right-skills-arts-humanities-social-sciences/).

**Employment outcomes during the pandemic**

Labour market intelligence has shown that graduates have not been impacted nearly as hard as non-graduates while unemployment increased during COVID-19. Early indicators for autumn 2020 are that employers will honour offers made before the outbreak and graduate recruitment will remain high. It is, however, possible that recruitment will be lower in coming years to account for possible lower economic activity.

# Supporting a recovery from COVID-19 that is sustainable and inclusive

### *Shape the Future* workshop, 2 July 2020

*Discussion Chairs: Professor Sir Tim Besley FBA
and Lord Nick Stern of Brentford FBA*

This workshop explored how we support a recovery from the pandemic that recognises the challenges of sustainability and inclusiveness. It focused on three questions. What are the challenges and priorities for a sustainable and inclusive economic recovery? What policy and institutional changes are needed? What new policy and research directions should we pursue and how do we develop a shared policy and research agenda? This note is intended as a starting point for further reflection and discussion, including within the *Shape the Future* initiative and the Academy's *Future of the Corporation* programme.[36]

**The post-pandemic economy**

The economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is a clear example of 'radical uncertainty'—questions which we have no means of resolving. It will reflect the response of individuals, organisations and states to multiple concurrent health, economic, political, institutional and cultural shocks. While much of the economic damage is self-inflicted, it has not been helpful that some have presented this situation as a trade-off between public health and economic 'health'.

The more unusual features of this crisis on the macroeconomic level include the mixture of supply and demand effects, which are unevenly distributed across the country. As highlighted in Appendix 6 concerning inequalities and vulnerabilities, the consequences between different economic sectors, between rich and poor, and between generations are likely to vary significantly. This is also a global crisis, so policy responses in different countries must be well coordinated, with special attention given to developing economies.

'Building back better' promises to target a series of existing economic challenges which have been or risk being deepened by the pandemic. Substantial public and

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[36] https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/programmes/future-of-the-corporation/

private (government-guaranteed) debt means compounds the challenge. Policymakers must see restoring the public finances as a long-term (ten-year) rather than immediate policy aim, with encouraging growth as the overriding priority. As

**How could a national investment bank contribute to economic recovery and encourage government and private sector partnership?**

we move from rescue to recovery, we will need to focus resources on areas where unemployment is severe and invest in human capital and training at a state level, all within the context of the UK's target of net zero carbon emissions by 2050. One policy tool to explore more closely will be a national investment bank, which could help cover early-stage risk that is harder to manage in capital markets and thus encourage the private sector to partner with government on contributing solutions to social and environmental problems—responding to the framework for purposeful business set out by the British Academy's *Future of the Corporation* programme.

## Job creation and the welfare system

The overarching priority for government in the recovery phase should be job creation and investment in skills in the context of regional inequalities and low productivity, and the need for green

**How can we focus the jobs agenda on creating high-quality jobs that provide wage and career progression?**

jobs. The focus should also move beyond a pure jobs agenda to a focus on jobs that provide wage and career progression. There is evidence of a strong decline in earnings progression of younger workers over the last decade, resulting in relatively buoyant employment but low earnings and low earnings growth.

There is an urgent need to redesign of the welfare-benefit system with a focus on firm-based qualification training that follows workers into the first years of work, using local sector know-

**How can we reform and tailor the welfare system to encourage the best worker–firm matches and training?**

ledge of areas of growth in new technologies to design training to best complement these new technologies and drive the best worker–firm matches. Alongside this is the need for an enhanced job search authority to help maintain mobility and improve matches.

Continuing to prepare for 'net zero carbon' should remain an overriding priority in economic recovery and job creation plans, especially

**How can we effectively target investment in green jobs?**

as there is clearly an appetite for environmental reform (see Appendix 15). Governments should focus investment on green jobs in sectors where unemployment has been most severe. Many elements of the sustainability agenda are labour intensive and strong economic multipliers: for example, retrofitting buildings, improving cycling infrastructure, broadband and planting trees.

**Levelling up and regional strategies**

Regional strategies are crucial to an inclusive recovery from the economic crisis. Immediate priorities will be more emphasis on and resource

**How can we design effective local skills provision, tailored to local economies?**

for local governance and community action. Training and reskilling need to be tailored to local circumstances. Skills provision needs to feed into local economies and to be about lifelong education.

As Appendix 8 on trust in policymaking argues, local strategies need to involve whole communities without relying solely on 'leaders', and making particular efforts to include the growing numbers of disenfranchised, disempowered and devoiced people, many of whom are young, low skilled or unskilled. Any carbon tax being considered needs to be suitable for local projects and space should be available for

**How can we empower and listen to the voices of young and disenfranchised groups in designing local strategies?**

**How can the carbon tax be implemented in a way that gives autonomy to communities for local projects?**

local government to innovate and experiment with policies tailored to their areas. Central government must also accept that local priorities may differ from national ones, so a framework for risk-taking would be needed.

More remote working will create unintended consequences with radical implications for regionalisation agendas. In many cities, there will be a need to regenerate the economy in the central business district while inner-city and suburban economies could also be impacted long term by the shift in working patterns.

**Inequalities and social infrastructure**

If there is a shift at scale towards working from home, this could lead to segregation and less interaction along socio-economic, generational and racial divides. The impact of the pandemic has been particularly acute for women, who are more commonly bearing the pressures of additional caregiving.

**How do we deal with and understand the breaking down of geographical relevance?**

**How can we build policies to ensure that increased remote working does not lead to social segregation?**

Investment is needed in social infrastructure, particularly in the childcare sector and in alleviating the long-term impact on children from gaps in schooling. We need give attention to both the education and the experience of children.

**How can we target spending on the care sector to improve the experiences of children and reduce the burden on women?**

The pandemic has also shone a light on the weaknesses of the care sector: care homes are badly integrated with the NHS and under-resourced. Increasing the quality and quantity of care, improving infrastructure and giving care workers more respect and pay are essential to an inclusive recovery.

**What should the responsibilities of employers be in ensuring the health and well-being of employees and other workers?**

Finally, the pandemic has placed added attention on health inequalities and the recovery presents an opportunity to focus on the importance of integrating public health into policy development and redesign, such as looking at ways to encourage employers in supporting workers' health.

**Some further reading**

N. Stern *et al.*, Grantham Research Institute report: *Strategy, Investment and Policy for a Strong and Sustainable Recovery: An Action Plan* (Centre for Economic Performance, July 2020, https://www.lse.ac.uk/granthaminstitute/publication/strategy-investment-and-policy-for-a-strong-and-sustainable-recovery-an-action-plan/).

J. De Henau & Susan Himmelweit, *A Care-led Recovery from Coronavirus* (Women's Budget Group, June 2020, https://wbg.org.uk/analysis/reports/a-care-led-recovery-from-coronavirus/).

# Plagues, pandemics and crises in the lens of history: roads to recovery

*Shape the Future* workshop, 3 July 2020

*Discussion Chair: Revd Professor Diarmaid MacCulloch Kt FBA*

This workshop explored how we can learn from plagues, pandemics and crises through the lens of history. It explored how the world has faced past plagues, pandemics and crises, and the societal, cultural and economic impacts, responses and descriptions which followed. Initial contributions from a range of scholars gave us insight ranging from the work of Thucydides (Ineke Sluiter), economic shock and the nature of recovery during the medieval era (David Abulafia), social and economic history of pandemics in the 16th and 17th centuries during the Great Famine and the Black Death (Vivian Nutton), the effects of crises and shocks on political, social and intellectual history in the early 21st century (Pat Thane), crises and recovery in the American healthcare system (Martin Halliwell) and contemporary history of health policy and responses to infectious disease (Virginia Berridge). This note summarises the discussion and the insights which were drawn out.

**Plagues and pandemics give us important insights into human behaviours and patterns**

Plagues, pandemics and other crises have been a major feature of human history and across the world. No culture, country nor continent has escaped them; from the 8th-century Japanese smallpox epidemic, to the Black Death in the

> **History shows that, in extremely stressful circumstances—such as war or pandemics—human behaviour will frequently derail in predictable ways. What can we learn from that?**

mid-14th century and the Spanish Flu pandemic of 1918, these crises have had profound impacts, no matter when, or where, they occurred. To read the medical commentary of Galen, the vivid observation of Defoe and Pepys, or the modern novelisation of Pamuk, is to meet human beings like ourselves struggling to understand and overcome crises that are only too familiar to us now.

The Ancient Greek historian Thucydides (*c.* 460 BC–*c.* 400 BC) details an outbreak of typhoid in Athens during a war. In doing so, he offers many details of the illness, but also uses the episode to meaningfully explore the *condition humaine*. History shows that, in extremely stressful circumstances—such as war or pandemics—human

behaviour will frequently derail in predictable ways: we hoarded toilet-paper; the Athenians hijacked funeral pyres built by other families to cremate their own dead.

Later in 1349, following an epidemic of bubonic plague that ravaged Italy, Giovanni Boccaccio wrote the *Decameron*—a collection of stories told by a group of young men and women who had fled the city and confined themselves in the Florentine countryside to divert themselves from the horrific reality that surrounded them. Parallels can be drawn between ourselves and the men and women who fled the Black Death in the 14th century in several ways:

- isolating from others and self-containing in a voluntary lockdown or 'bubble' of sorts,
- ignoring what is going on and turning to fêtes and excessive alcohol consumption,
- self-protecting by carrying a posy of medicinal flowers to nose (the equivalent of face masks today?),
- fleeing the city as quickly as possible into rural isolation—still, today, a marker of wealth and status.

**The parallels between the responses of the men and women who fled the bubonic plague in the 14th century and those of today are striking. Are face masks the modern-day equivalent of a posy of medicinal flowers?**

In the 17th century, the ends of plagues were celebrated with thanksgivings; a concept related to 'plague saints' whom the Catholic Church called on for their intercession in sickness and difficult times. Such community-affirming responses in the COVID-19 context, while decidedly less religious, are already starting to emerge—for example, through the celebration of healthcare workers and the introduction of global 'teddy bear' scavenger hunts for children. History tells us that seeking social solidarity and community through collective activities—whether these be religious thanksgivings, 'Clap for Carers' evenings or, indeed, bear hunts—has long served as a way for humans to make sense of what is happening around them.

**Infectious disease is not just a medical problem; it is also a social and economic one**

Variations exist across disease threats and societies alike. Thus, not all plagues and pandemics affect us in the same ways. In fact, as Appendix 16 on words and stigmas explores, infectious disease outbreaks have consistently been linked to the scapegoating and blaming of certain groups—from targeting farmers during the Spanish Flu outbreak in 1918–19 to the stigma of poor immigrant urban communities during the polio epidemics in the 1910s and 1920s. The case of HIV/AIDS is another clear example of a virus which affected (and affects) some groups more than others. The end-result is cyclical: those who experience discrimination are made more vulnerable to HIV/AIDS, while those living with the disease are at greater risk of stigma and punitive legislation.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, we are seeing COVID-19 affect demographics in various ways, arguably in tension with unity catchphrases such as 'We are all in it together'. Poverty is increasing —particularly amongst Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups—following the decline of the welfare state. We have seen the politics that emerge from different religious identities and modes of behaviour: for instance, when the high-temperature worship services of some evangelical Protestant congregations become 'super-spreading events'. The pandemic has given greater publicity to social policy issues already well known to specialists: inadequate social care in residential homes and individual homes; isolation amongst older and disabled people living alone; cuts to NHS funding and hence to services and the pay of NHS workers; high rents and the shortage of affordable housing, causing homelessness; and cuts to youth and other local services.

**We know that pandemics are a socio-economic issue and that they can affect us in different ways. Often, those who already experience discrimination are made more vulnerable, while those infected are at greater risk of stigma. How can we apply lessons learnt to COVID-19?**

The issue of language is not unimportant (see also Appendix 20). We have seen in the US and UK a politicisation of public health messages, where scientists have been subsumed by governmental agenda—or, in the case of the US, at odds with it. In a similar vein, terms such as 'crisis' and 'emergency' converge and blur in public life— again, especially, in the United States—the former being a term that is often overused, and where the scale can easily be misjudged, skewed or not fully calibrated. In recent years, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) have attempted to use the rhetoric of crisis more carefully, although in political and media circles it remains frequently employed.

## Pandemics shape narratives and identity; however, these must be inclusive

Narrative (and narratives, plural) forms a vehicle for thinking about identity, and for making sense of the past and what this means for individual and society. Sixteenth-century art, literature, letters and diaries reveal individual responses to epidemics: from plague, smallpox and measles; to others new or unfamiliar such as syphilis, the English sweat, the Danish *sherbok* or the Moravian pestilence. They also raise the wider question of the role of the humanities in an epidemic—either in engaging our sympathies with the afflicted or, as in the story of Montelupo, a 17th-century Tuscan village that refused to obey the government orders for a lockdown, in revealing how authority is created, maintained and occasionally lost.

Previous historical events show that narratives can change over time and that they are not static; rather, narratives are dynamic and often renegotiated. This can be seen in the case of the Second World War, where different group perspectives are still being

added to the overarching 'story', and the construction of memory 'museums' in Latin America as a collective response to political and emotional trauma.

In the current context, mass observation will continue to be important and we can expect a flurry of post-COVID narrative-making. As Appendix 14 on public culture argues, it will be vital for local organisations, including schools and libraries, as well as system-level bodies, to

**Narratives form a vehicle for making sense of the past, the present and the future. In the post-Covid era, how can we ensure that processes around narrative-making are inclusive and equitable?**

ensure that these narratives are inclusive to ensure a representative cultural record. There is also a strong role for the SHAPE disciplines to capture these narratives. The Viral Archive project was flagged as one example—a photographic archive which is being put together by researchers in Coventry, Cork and London on Twitter to capture the changes occurring in the COVID-19 landscape.

## History has shown us that pandemics are complex, and that policy interventions must be multidisciplinary and intersectional

We must analyse the policy response to recent precursors of COVID-19, in particular swine flu 2009. Past plagues and pandemics can usefully inform the current response to COVID-19, not least: the interface between different health agencies; tensions between political and scientific perspectives; how expert committees are used; which disciplines are drawn upon; and how public communication is conveyed.

To date, however, the intersection between local government and history has been woefully underutilised. Public health as an entity transferred out of the NHS and back into local

**How do we ensure that new policies are based on contributions from a wide range of voices and disciplines?**

government in 2013. Historians of health were enthused by this transfer because of the role local government had played before the NHS, whereby infection and outbreak control were key foci. But historians with expertise in outbreak control and endemic disease do not appear to have been involved in government advisory committees in the initial response to COVID-19. Ensuring this representation may have avoided any delays around localised track and trace and planning.

The development of new policies must be based on contributions from a wide range of voices and disciplines, including but not limited to, history and/or those groups most affected.

# APPENDIX 20

# Communications in a crisis: languages other than English and public services

*Shape the Future* workshop, 31 July 2020

*Discussion Chair: Professor Neil Kenny FBA*

This workshop explored the implications of COVID-19 for the role of languages other than English in public services, drawing on experience in the UK and Australia. Three key themes emerged: effective communication in a crisis needs a broader conceptualisation in which languages are important, but they are not the only things that matters; proper resourcing and strategy are needed to enable communications to reach the populations who need to hear them; the COVID-19 crisis illustrates the need to address both crisis communications and wider recognition of the multilingual nature of society. This note is intended as a starting point for further reflection and discussion, including within the *Shape the Future* initiative and the Academy's wider languages policy activity.[37]

## Effective communication is about more than language

Effective communication in crisis situations is about the interaction between language ability and literacy, cultural knowledge, social class and access to technology. In the UK, there has been a particular intersection between the impact of COVID-19 on the Black, Asian and minority ethnic population and access to information in languages other than English.[38] However, the provision of public health information in English has also been lacking, with government announcements being confusing and difficult to access. As well as language, public communication needs to take into account levels of literacy: 20% of the UK population are not functionally literate in English, while some community or heritage languages are typically only spoken rather than written, such as Romani. Pictorial rather than text-based communications, such as diagrams or emoticons, and the design of apps,[39] can be effective.

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[37] https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/publications/towards-national-languages-strategy-education-and-skills/

[38] Public Health England, *Beyond theData: Understanding theImpact of COVID-19 on BAME Groups* (2020, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/892376/COVID_stakeholder_engagement_synthesis_beyond_the_data.pdf).

[39] https://www.science.org.au/covid19/covidsafe-app

In a multilingual and multicultural society, communication also needs to be culturally sensitive and reflect the social practices of different ethnic groups in order to reach deep into the community. Research has shown that international students understand the words used in communications to them from their universities, but may not be able to interpret the intended meaning. 'Social distancing' is a term which is difficult to translate

**Communication needs to be culturally sensitive and reflect the social practices of different ethnic groups**

linguistically and culturally.[40] Multilingual communities are likely to have strong international connections and may find it easier to access information in their native language from other countries, which may not reflect their local circumstances.[41]

The focus needs to be on explanation, not just translation, and on dialogue not just broadcast: individuals need to be able to engage, not just be passive recipients of information.

**Communication requires appropriate resources**

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted several different resource challenges to effective communication and the dissemination of good-practice examples, such as the Doctors of the World materials.[42] With much information being communicated via the internet, inequalities in access to broadband or wifi have been highlighted: for instance, in Home Office provided accommodation in the UK or in rural Australia.[43] For the British Sign Language (BSL) using community, social distancing requirements have led to a reliance on remote interpreting, which relies on good internet connections.

Translation of information into languages other than English has relied on a local response, led either by local government (for example, Leeds and Peterborough city councils) or local community groups (for example, with refugees in Bristol).[44] For BSL, information has often been produced by individuals, disseminated via Facebook, and then collected by the UK Council on Deafness for further distribution, and there are further differences in how each devolved government uses sign

**Health matters are the most difficult for children to translate due to their lack of understanding or vocabulary because of their age.**

[40] https://www.languageonthemove.com/essential-messages-for-our-time/

[41] https://blog.bham.ac.uk/socialsciencesbirmingham/2020/06/29/culturally-competent-what-does-the-pandemic-tell-us/

[42] https://www.doctorsoftheworld.org.uk/news/translated-guidance-joint-letter/

[43] J. Thomas *et al.*, *Measuring Australia's Digital Divide: The Australian Digital Inclusion Index 2019* (2019, https://doi.org/10.25916/5d6478f373869).

[44] See for example https://covid19graphics.info/

language for public announcements. There is a particular challenge where adults rely on children for language brokering, because health matters are the most difficult for children to translate due to their lack of understanding or vocabulary because of their age, alongside the sensitivity of the issues.

In Australia, national language policy recognises that society is multilingual and multicultural,[45] and this has led to the creation of institutions to facilitate communication across communities, such as broadcasters, social media channels and a telephone interpreting service. However, cuts in resources mean that the capacity of these services has been limited and the COVID-19 crisis has 'underlined a need for a coordinated national framework of interpreters and translation services for Australia's Indigenous languages'.[46] In the UK, translation and interpreting for public services have also been cut, with mass outsourcing since 2010 leading to loss of expertise in specific areas such as law and health. There is also a lack of accurate data on language needs, which makes it difficult to link up relevant language speakers with areas of need.

**There is an opportunity to improve communication and recognise our multilingual society**

In the short term, the organisation Doctors of the World has proposed an immediate action plan which would provide central resources in languages other than English, that would be kept up to date and could be customised at local level. The groups providing local solutions should be properly resourced for the functions they are carrying out.

However, longer term solutions need to be more than emblematic gestures, and there is an opportunity to create a national strategy for communication. In both the UK and Australia, this could build upon existing initiatives to

**Solutions need to be more than emblematic gestures, with an opportunity to create a national strategy for communication.**

strengthen linguistic capacity. Such a strategy should cover planning for communication during the different stages of a crisis, determining communication needs for information provision, trust building and minimising misinformation, and building capacity in the different languages and modes of communication required.[47]

Tackling effective communication can also be a route to community building, repairing fractures in society by creating connections through language. The need for

[45] J. Lo Bianco, *The National Policy on Languages* (Australian Government, 1987, http://www.multiculturalaustralia.edu.au/doc/lobianco_2.pdf).

[46] http://www.dynamicsoflanguage.edu.au/news-and-media/covid19-community-language-information/

[47] This is explored in a special issue of the journal *Multilingua*, and specifically in Y. Li *et al.*, 'Conceptualizing National Emergency Language Competence', *Multilingua*, 39:5 (2020), 617–23. https://doi.org/10.1515/multi-2020-0111

effective crisis communications has demonstrated the importance of language, both English and other languages, and this could be a tipping point for greater change, raising awareness and building acceptance of linguistic diversity, so that it can be more generally valued. There is opportunity to balance the emphasis on learning English, and appropriate provision for English as a Second Language tuition for those who need it, with supporting and celebrating languages other than English, demonstrating that these two things can sit side by side, and it is not a zero-sum game. Recognising and valuing a multilingual society is a stepping stone to addressing the root of wider issues such as structural racism and inequitable access to healthcare.

## Future research and policy agenda

In future, we need better data about demand for communication in languages other than English, which could in part be achieved through changes to the UK Census. There is scope to investigate the potential and limitations of communication through visual, non-linguistic means, including the extent to which this can be culturally appropriate, and to build a greater understanding of how different cultures access and use text. In order to learn lessons from this pandemic, we should explore the extent and effectiveness of local, community-based communications in languages other than English on radio and in social media. The application of emerging technologies should also be considered: for example, the potential and limitations of assisted translation using technology, such a pre-programmed kiosks. At national level, previous proposals for improving coordination of policy relevant to languages across government departments should be reopened and taken forward.

## Some further reading

FUEN (Federal Union of European Nationalities), *Do You Speak Corona? Survey Results on the Use of Minority Languages Under the COVID-19 Outbreak* (2020, https://www.fuen.org/en/article/Do-You-Speak-Corona-Many-European-countries-do-not-offer-information-on-the-pandemic-in-minority-languages ).

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A. Bruns, '"Like a Virus" – Disinformation in the Age of COVID-19' (2020). https://socialmedia.qut.edu.au/2020/05/19/like-a-virus-disinformation-in-the-age-of-covid-19/

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