COMMISSION
ON SCHOOL
REFORM

Challenge Paper

Catching up the educational losses from Covid-19

July 2020

Membership of the re-convened Commission on School Reform is as follows:

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Please note that all members of the commission participate in an individual capacity and that the views of the commission do not represent the views of any other organisation to which the individual members belong.

Summary

- **By the time that Scottish schools resume in August, pupils will have lost 21 weeks of proper education.**
- **There is an urgent need to plan for catch-up of the lessons lost.**
- **The costs of doing so are large but feasible, and the practical aspects can build on the experience of pupils, parents and teachers during the lockdown.**
- **The Commission on School Reform calls on the Scottish Government to start planning for catch-up now.**

Introduction

By the time that Scottish schools resume in the middle of August, they will have been closed for 21 weeks. That is the equivalent of three and a half years of summer closure. Despite the best efforts of thousands of parents and teachers, the educational losses for pupils will have been large. One estimate suggests that to make it up fully would require the school week to be more than doubled in length for a year.[1] What makes that estimate credible and relevant is that it was cited with approval by the Scottish Government's own economic recovery group.[2]

This Challenge paper proposes some less drastic ways in which schools might enable pupils to recover from the worst of the losses. All pupils will have suffered from the closures, but the impact will have been greater for those in straitened economic circumstances. Some estimates of the effect of the closure on socio-economic inequality are in an appendix.

Help for all children

Even the advantaged will have lost out. The report cited in footnote 1, which is by researchers at the London School of Economics, concludes from a review of the evidence on previous school closures under a range of circumstances that 'well over two additional hours per week might be needed over a year to compensate for each week lost to Covid-19'[3].

That is an astronomical figure. If we err on the cautious side and aim to compensate only for what has been lost directly as a result of closure (that is, ignoring the summer and Easter holidays), there will have been about 13 weeks of extra closure. That would need 26 extra hours of schooling every week for a year, a doubling of the current length.

The LSE report does say that this figure might not be accurate for well-developed education systems with local autonomy, but even if – being optimistic – it was halved the school week would have to increase from about 25 hours to about 38 hours. Clearly that is not feasible, not just because of pupil fatigue but also because of a lack of qualified teachers.

What might be feasible would be to aim for this over two years, because that would bring the extra per week down to a more manageable 6 hours. There are two main means by which this could be done: Saturday morning clubs and late-afternoon homework clubs (as are common in schools in deprived areas, where many pupils do not have study space at home, and also in independent schools). Both have their merits, but the management of late afternoons would probably be more feasible in most schools than using Saturdays. Late afternoons could be timetabled as an extension of the school day, thus integrating them into the school as a whole. Therefore they have several advantages over using Saturdays:

[1] p. 5 in Eyles, A., Gibbons, P. and Montebruno, P. (2020), *Covid-19 School Shutdowns: What Will They Do to Our Children's Education?*, Centre for Economic Performance, London School of Economics.

[2] p. 53 in Scottish Government (2020), *Towards a Robust, Resilient Well-being Economy for Scotland: Report of the Advisory Group on Economic Recovery*, Edinburgh: Scottish Government.

[3] p. 5 in Eyles, A., Gibbons, P. and Montebruno, P. (2020), *Covid-19 School Shutdowns: What Will They Do to Our Children's Education?*, Centre for Economic Performance, London School of Economics.

1. It is easier to persuade pupils to stay on for an extra couple of periods in the late afternoon than to get them to come out again on a Saturday.
2. Using weekdays would leave pupils free to get on with other activities on Saturdays – such as paid employment, or sport or music.
3. Making schools available on weekdays involves only keeping them open, rather than opening them specially.
4. In rural areas, school transport could be adapted on weekdays more readily than on Saturdays.

Planning of catch-up lessons

The planning of the catch-up lessons would be up to individual schools, because only the school will have an idea of how much has been lost and how best to recover from it. The needs of individual pupils will vary widely. Some will have made reasonable progress during the closures, aided by good-quality material from schools, frequent online interaction with teachers and peers, and parents who have been in a position to supervise their work. The majority have not had these advantages.[4] When the schools return, the first task of teachers will be the very difficult challenge of finding out who needs what.

Primary and early secondary

In primary schools, the main aim should be to recover losses in the core curriculum of reading, writing and mathematics. In early secondary, the losses might vary from subject to subject. Although there has been general research on pupils' losses during the shutdown, none has focused on how the losses might vary by subject. This aspect of the challenge in August – of establishing what each pupil needs – has not been debated publicly at all.

Highers, Advanced Highers and university entrance

The loss of coverage of the syllabuses may be particularly serious in the senior school years. Providing some compensation by means of online material may be more feasible at this level where students are more able to work on their own under guidance from teachers. But for many students, the loss of coverage of the syllabus may be too great to be made up in a year. In that case, they may have to postpone sitting Highers for a year, into school sixth year. In a few cases, they may even have to be offered the option of repeating the year. To allow flexibility in students' progress through fifth and sixth year, universities will have to adapt their entrance requirements, especially moving away from the insistence on specified numbers and types of Higher in a single year.

National and local leadership

Although the management of catch-up would be most effective if done locally, there should be national guidelines to ensure a minimum of provision. These guidelines should, if possible, be produced consensually, perhaps by the Scottish Government's education recovery group involving Education Scotland, the local authorities, and the teacher trade unions. Changes to university requirements will require leadership from the Scottish Funding Council.

The statutory and regulatory position regarding school attendance is very complex. Extending compulsory attendance to catch-up times might require a change to the law. This is something that the Scottish Government could investigate. In any event, a strong expectation of attendance would help, preferably including strong statements from Scottish ministers, local authorities and other national organisations.

Extra help to children in disadvantaged circumstances.

Although all children have lost out from the school closures, the impact is particularly great on children who are disadvantaged.[5] The estimates in the appendix to this Challenge paper suggest that the closures are probably the equivalent of imposing at least four years of extra educational inequality on children's progress. Catch-up

[4] Green, F. (2020), *Schoolwork in Lockdown: New Evidence on the Epidemic of Educational Poverty*, University College London.

[5] Green, F. (2020), *Schoolwork in Lockdown: New Evidence on the Epidemic of Educational Poverty*, University College London.

cannot solve all the problems of inequality, because about two thirds of it happens before children even start school. What might be feasible is to compensate for the addition to the other third which the lockdown has caused.

It is very difficult to give extra help to disadvantaged children in a way that is not invidious to them and is not unfair to other children who have also lost out but who are not disadvantaged. One way would be to have standard subsidies (see below) given as funding to each school – earmarked for catch-up lessons – with a supplement to that standard amount calculated in the same way as for pupil equity funding (which attempts to enable schools to deal with the effects of social disadvantage). Local councils would have a general oversight of the local plans, as employers of teachers and as owners of the schools. But the detailed planning should be under the control of headteachers. The reason to emphasise this local autonomy is that only the school will know how and in what ways their pupils were affected by the lockdown. Only they will know how to use the second tranche in a way that does not invidiously label the disadvantaged.

Who would staff the catch-up lessons?

The core staff would be teachers of the school, volunteering to take on the catch-up lessons either for a fee (analogous to supply teaching) or for time off in lieu. But to provide the number and range of staff that would be required, there would have to be other sources of staff. There would be some retired teachers, and some trainee teachers near the end of their courses. There could also be a role for other university students, not as accredited teachers but analogously to the way in which students work with schools to encourage widening of access to university. For either group of students, the universities ought to be offering this kind of work as a novel kind of course, with credit. For example, a student who worked on catch-up lessons could be required to write a long essay about it, or could write their Honours dissertation on it (which in most universities would require them to do some empirical research on what the children were learning). That work would replace some other option that the student might do, and so would cost the university almost nothing.

Another category of staff might be after-school-club staff. They would be valuable, but it is crucial for the credibility of the catch-up clubs that they are led by qualified teachers on the school staff. There would also have to be some general oversight by school management, unlike for most after-school clubs or holiday clubs.

The use of extra staff would be a matter for headteachers to decide. In some circumstances, it might be most effective to schedule some of the catch-up lessons during the normal day, with the core class teachers, and paying for cover for their other classes in that time. In the senior years of secondary school, it might be appropriate to use extra staff to provide dedicated tutorial help in the run up to the annual exams next spring. Some of the extra staff could be used to strengthen the support for children with additional support needs during the catch-up lessons.

How many staff?

This has to be at best an informed guess: only the local authorities could calculate more accurate numbers. If most of the work of the clubs would be revision and working on tasks set by the class teacher, then the role would be as much supervisory as direct teaching, and so staff-pupil ratios could be reduced from the norm. Unfortunately, many pupils would not attend optional classes, even if there was a strong expectation that they ought to do so. The staffing needs would be more intensive at secondary, because of the need for specialist knowledge. So it might be reasonable to assume that on average each primary school would require seven staff to supervise the work, and that each secondary would require 14 staff. There are about 2,000 local authority primary schools and about 350 local authority secondary schools. So the clubs would need about 19,000 staff.

Costs

This is very crude, but some rough calculations give an indication of what catch-up lessons might

cost, and thus of how feasible they might be. The average gross salary of teachers in Scotland is about £34,000 per year.[6] The agreement for supply teachers is that their daily rate is (1/235) of their salary, and so this would be £145 per day. Six hours of work is approximately equivalent to one day of work. If these lessons ran during 30 weeks, and assuming employer's costs of 18%, the gross annual salary cost of these would thus be about £97m.

It seems reasonable to assume no rental charge for the school premises, but there will be the cost of a janitor. Janitors are paid on average £9 per hour, and so this would be an extra about £54 per week in 2,350 schools. For 30 weeks with 18% employer's costs, this becomes £4.5m.

There would also be some smaller costs – for example, the cost of early registration with the General Teaching Council for student teachers, and the cost of protecting-vulnerable-people checks for other university students. But these would not be large in total, and many would already have been covered (for example, by accepting provisional GTC registration, and by accepting PVG checks for students who already work in university-access schemes). There would also be some administrative costs in starting up the scheme, for example communicating it to parents.

So the grand total is around £100m annually. Because these are gross costs, they would not be affected by the details of staffing, for example by the various flexible combinations of existing staff and cover staff mooted above. The estimates would have to be revised with more accurate information about costs. The sole purpose here is to indicate the scale of the challenge.

Conclusion

The reason to estimate the challenge is to say that it is not wildly impossible. The Scottish Government has already allocated £100m for educational recovery[7]. The UK Government has repeatedly said that it wants a more visible presence in Scotland: what could be more visible than this? It might also be possible to attract some funding from philanthropists, which would help to guarantee the independence of the work from government. All of these details would have to be worked out.

But the main point is this. Pupils will have gone 21 weeks without proper schooling. Inequality will have worsened. Schools know what is to be taught and teachers have great experience of enabling pupils to recover lost ground. The costs of doing all this are not inordinate. The main extra ingredient that is now required is leadership.

Appendix: educational inequality due to lockdown

There is quite a wide range of published estimates of how much inequality widens over the summer in normal circumstances, from which an estimate of the widening during the shutdown may be derived. This can become an uninformatively technical discussion, which is not helpful here, but it is useful to have a range, and also to know what part of total inequality is due to schooling and what not.

As a preliminary, we need an idea of how much inequality increases during the whole period of primary schooling in normal times. From research in England[8], using a variety of data sources, researchers have found that inequality probably increases by about 40-45% during the whole of primary (6 years in England). That would correspond to closer to 45-50% for the 7 years of

[6] There seems to be no published official figure on this, but an estimate appears on various job-search sites, and is plausible, because it corresponds to point 4 of the 6 points of the main teacher salary scale.

[7] https://www.gov.scot/news/return-to-full-time-schooling/

[8] Sacker, A., Schoon, I. and Bartley, M. (2002), 'Social inequality in educational achievement and psychosocial adjustment throughout childhood: magnitude and mechanisms', *Social Science and Medicine*, 55, 863-80; p.100 in Hobbs, G.T. (2007), *Investigating Social Class Inequalities in Educational Attainment: the Effects of Schools and the Validity of Free School Meal Status as a Proxy for Socio-Economic Status*, PhD thesis, Institute of Education, University of London.

Scottish primary schooling. Another way of putting this is that, by the end of primary in Scotland, about one third of total inequality has grown up during the primary years (the other two thirds having grown from conception to age 5).

The Educational Endowment Foundation estimates that the effect of the lockdown has been to increase total inequality in England by the end of primary school by 36%[9]. That is slightly less than the 40-45% estimated for the total inequality that arises during primary school in normal times, and so this EEF estimate implies that lockdown has imposed about the equivalent of 4-5 years of inequality.

A different way of arriving at a similar conclusion is to note that research from England[10], Ireland[11], Germany[12], New Zealand[13] and the USA[14] has suggested that most or all of the inequality in children's progress while at primary school arises during the long summer holiday. If the summer holiday is 6 weeks long, then 21 weeks of closure will have imposed about 3.5 years-worth of inequality.

In short, there seems quite general agreement – implicitly supported now by UK Government funding for the tutoring scheme in England run by the Educational Endowment Foundation [15] – that the growth of inequality during the lockdown has been similar to the growth of inequality during around 3-4 years of primary school.

[9] Coe, R. (2020), *Impact of School Closures on the Attainment Gap*, London: Educational Endowment Foundation.
[10] Eyles, A., Gibbons, P. and Montebruno, P. (2020), *Covid-19 School Shutdowns: What Will They Do to Our Children's Education?*, Centre for Economic Performance, London School of Economics.
[11] Doyle, O. (2020), *COVID-19: Exacerbating Educational Inequalities?*, University College Dublin: Childhood and Human Development Research Centre.
[12] Meyer, F., Meissel, K. and McNaughton, S. (2017), 'Patterns of literacy learning in German primary schools over the summer and the influence of home literacy practices', *Journal of Research in Reading*, 40, 233-53.
[13] Tiruchittampalam, S., Nicholson, T., Levin, J.R. and Ferron, J.M. (2018), 'The effects of preliteracy knowledge, schooling, and summer vacation on literacy acquisition', *Journal of Educational Research*, 111, 28-42.
[14] Alexander, K.L., Entwisle, D.R. and Olson, L.S.(2007), 'Lasting consequences of the summer learning gap', *American Sociological Review*, 72, 167-80.; Cooper, H., Nye, B., Charlton, K., Lindsay, J. and Greathouse, S. (1996), 'The effects of summer vacation on achievement test scores: a narrative and meta-analytic review', *Review of Educational Research*, 66, 227-68.; Downey, D.B., Von Hippel, P.T. and Broh, B.A. (2004), 'Are schools the great equalizer? Cognitive inequality during the summer months and the school year', *American Sociological Review*, 69, 613-35; Rambo-Hernandez, K.E. and McCoach, D.B. (2015), 'High-achieving and average students' reading growth: contrasting school and summer trajectorie', *Journal of Educational Research*, 108, 112-29.
[15] https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/covid-19-resources/national-tutoring-programme/