PEOPLE'S LOCKDOWN

INQUIRER

JUNE 2021

What Price Lockdown?

WE ASKED PEOPLE ON THE FRONT LINE

T here will undoubtedly be academic studies and data research for years to come, examining aspects of how policymakers responded to Covid-19.

But most urgently and immediately, we need to start discussing the non-measurable, qualitative impact on society.

This PEOPLE'S LOCKDOWN INQUIRY hopes to kickstart that discussion.

Whether you supported the UK government's lockdown measures or were more sceptical, one worrying development has been the demonising of dissent and the explicit and implicit attempts at silencing questions and inquiry.

It is important that this chilling effect does not stifle a full and frank discussion about what the costs of lockdown were and what lessons we can learn for the future.

The PEOPLE'S LOCKDOWN INQUIRY aims to create a legacy to reflect on once lockdown measures ease. Rather than suggesting that the costs of lockdowns outweighed the benefits, the aim of this project is to assess the (often hidden) collateral damage of policy decisions. Even if people believe these policies were necessary to deal with the pandemic, we must not forget what has happened over the past 15 months.

peopleslockdowninquiry.co.uk

academy of ideas at

THE UNIVERSITY OF
BUCKINGHAM

Commissioned by

THE
RECLAIM
PARTY

CONTENTS

Welcome to the Inquiry

WHEN THE ACADEMY OF Ideas was approached by the Reclaim Party to curate this project of Lockdown stories, we thought the idea prescient and inspired.

The past 15 months will have left long-lasting scars. Some will be dealing with the grief of losing loved ones to Covid-19 or battling illness from this potentially lethal virus. Everyone, sick or well, has been affected by policy decisions taken to tackle the pandemic and the resulting climate of fear. As we approach so-called Freedom Day on 21 June 2021, we hope people will resume normality with a renewed zest for life. But we should never forget what was done to society, and the huge costs it has extracted. More importantly, we need to debate what lessons we might learn from the experience of the pandemic. This collection of testimonies and insights is a contribution to our collective memory and a means of trying to understand what happened.

There will no doubt be a myriad of Covid-related inquiries. Ours makes no pretension at 'scientific' analysis (although the Academy of Ideas has taken advantage of its new project base at the University of Buckingham to ensure the content is fact-checked). This is a People's Inquiry, with a narrative form, to reflect the experiences of grassroots campaigners and ordinary citizens - not exclusively reliant on 'experts'.

The editorial decisions, commissioning and framing of the printed edition of the Inquiry, are the sole responsibility of the Academy of Ideas, warts and all. Contributors were given free rein to respond, resulting in a mix of styles. We asked them to consider any positive lessons learned, as well as costs, rather than indulging in listing grievances or playing the blame game. Most completed their contributions during April, in the early stages of the Prime Minister's 'roadmap for easing lockdown'. While there are insightful additional testimonies on film (see peopleslockdowninquiry.co.uk), inevitably not all stories or sectors are represented. However, we hope to give a flavour of what issues need to be considered. We want this to constitute a foundation for a more expansive archive that can be developed in months to come.

There's always a lot more to say. We know that there are influential figures who want to make 'temporary' and 'emergency' measures a permanent 'new normal'. The institutional embrace of the precautionary principle means that, despite reassuring data and the success of the vaccine roll-out, everywhere from GP surgeries to university campuses continue to delay resuming normal, face-to-face service. Any enthusiasm for the medical wonder of the vaccine is dampened by unethical arguments for coercive measures, and the demonisation of those who do not consent. The prospect of domestic vaccine passports or ubiquitous testing regimes to guarantee access to all areas of society does not bode well.

But the long-lasting outcome of the Lockdown is a script not yet written. It will not be determined by those in authority, but by the millions of citizens in the UK. To do this, we all need to reflect on the collateral damage of any further extreme measures brought in under the guise of public health. The Academy of Ideas hopes this initial Inquiry will help inform a full and frank debate on what happens next.

Claire Fox
director, Academy of Ideas; professor, University of Buckingham

Twitter: @instofideas

CLAIRE FOX
DIRECTOR, ACADEMY OF IDEAS

Claire Fox is the director of the Academy of Ideas, which she established to create a public space where ideas can be contested without constraint. For over a decade, she convened the yearly Battle of Ideas festival and also initiated the Debating Matters Competition for sixth-formers. She also co-founded a residential summer school, The Academy, with the aim to demonstrate 'university as it should be'.

In May 2019, she was elected as an MEP for the North West England constituency of the UK in the European Parliament elections. In 2020, she was made a visiting professor in professional practice at the University of Buckingham. In September 2020, Claire became a member of the House of Lords as Baroness Fox of Buckley.

Claire is frequently invited to comment on developments in culture, education, media and free speech issues on TV and radio programmes in the UK such as *Newsnight* and *Any Questions?* She has been a regular newspaper reviewer on Sky News and is a monthly columnist for *MJ (Municipal Journal)*. She was the longest standing panelist on BBC Radio 4's *The Moral Maze* for over 20 years until 2020. She is author of a book on free speech, recently republished as *I STILL Find That Offensive!* (Biteback, 2018).

Follow Claire on Twitter: @Fox_Claire

Foreword

THE LOCKDOWN of affluent societies across the world as a result of the Covid Pandemic has been the greatest social and public health experiment in history, the repercussions of which will take many years to unfold.

There are many wonderful companies across the globe digging deep into the data surrounding the efficacy of this Lockdown policy. The inconsistencies of the data between countries or states which did lock down and those which didn't are not in the purview of an actor and fledgling politician with a pretty rudimentary grasp of maths, data and graphs!

My interest is people and their stories. I want future generations to have a living time capsule of the effects on their lives and professional disciplines of the events of these past many months. To have a glimpse into the hearts of the people who have contributed to this report and to judge for themselves how they feel about it.

LAURENCE FOX
LEADER, RECLAIM PARTY

Laurence Fox is an English actor and political activist.

He was born in 1978 in Leeds, the third of five children, and enrolled at Harrow School at the age of 13 before moving onto the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art (RADA). Laurence graduated in 2001.

He is probably best known for playing DS James Hathaway in the British TV drama series *Lewis* from 2006 to 2015.

He has appeared in numerous films, first appearing in *The Hole* (2001), and been in national television features and theatre productions. Fox is a singer-songwriter and guitarist. His debut album, *Holding Patterns*, was released in February 2016 followed by *A Grief Observed* in 2020.

Laurence is an advocate of freedom – of speech, movement and assembly. He has been and remains an outspoken critic of woke politics, political correctness and cancel culture on national TV and social media. He has appeared on BBC's *Question Time*.

He is the founder and leader of the Reclaim Party.

In March 2021, he announced he was standing against Sadiq Khan in the London mayoral election to fight against the encroachments personal liberty inflicted by extreme political correctness and the Covid lockdowns.

Follow Laurence on Twitter: @LozzaFox

I spoke to Baroness Fox about this idea. To move away from data and move towards people. To create a 'People's Lockdown Inquiry' so that future generations may relive what we currently live in. Claire and her wonderful team at the Academy of Ideas and Buckingham University accepted my commission to assemble this moving, informative and in many cases heartbreaking report.

One thing that bothered me deeply and continues to do so throughout this time, has been the suppression of full debate around these policies. The countless stories and conversations that became forbidden as we charged headlong into coping with Covid.

It is only through the broadest possible debate that human beings can come to the most informed and sensible solutions. An individual's inalienable right to question narratives and be sceptical of enforced diktats, however uncomfortable, will be of benefit to mankind. Too often important questions, ideas and eminent experts with the 'incorrect' views have been silenced during these dark months, and as their voices once again begin to sing, so the truth will find its way out as well.

Freedom of speech, thought and inquiry is the best way mankind has found to prevent using other more brutal tools to make his point. Our shared commitment to it has seen peace given its longest reign for centuries. We dispense with it at our peril.

I am so grateful to all our contributors for their words here, and blessed that in each of our own small ways our voices have combined to give you this inquiry. An inquiry of the people, by the people and for the people. I hope it nourishes your heart and mind, as it has so deeply affected mine.

We must never forget.

Laurence Fox
Leader, The Reclaim Party

Twitter: @TheReclaimParty

A personal reflection

THIS PAST YEAR has been like watching the protracted death of a loved one. I have witnessed the dying, by a thousand careless cuts, of the society in which I have lived my whole life. The Britain I grew up in has been wounded, and dreadfully.

After a forest fire, new life emerges amid the devastation and that will be the case here; no doubt, there will be green shoots among the ashes. Life finds a way. This is not the same as recovery. There will be a beginning for something new, but what is gone is gone forever. That all of it happened on account of people in authority lacking the wit to stop and change direction long after it was obvious to anyone with at least one eye open that their strategies were causing catastrophic harm to people in all manner of ways only makes the losses harder to bear.

CREATIVE BLOCK

When prompted to categorise myself, I usually say I am a writer. Since most of my income in recent years has been from books, journalism and the public speaking opportunities drawn from both, I think that's accurate.

Writing was surely one of the means of earning a living that ought to have lent itself most readily to the locked-down world restricted in the main to home working, computer screens and keyboards, and yet I found those months the most difficult, creatively speaking, of my entire working life.

When lockdown began last year, I had just embarked upon the writing of a new work of non-fiction. I am married with three children – an 18-year-old daughter and two sons aged 15 and 12. My wife took on the home schooling and I was to get on with the writing, much as usual. I have written a dozen books and, given the time and space, this one could and should have been a breeze.

For reasons I still find hard to understand, far less to describe, the stopping of the world and the descent into those slow-motion weeks of forced hibernation and isolation from the world at large served instead to wrap my brain in cotton wool, and not in a good way. While on the face of it the quiet and the opportunity to spend uninterrupted hours in front of the screen might

have given me the perfect chance to romp through the pages, I found myself hobbled for the longest time. I forced myself to my desk most days and yet the words came only drip by drop.

On a good day in the old world, I managed 5,000 words or more. In locked-down world, it was 300 at the very best. It was soul destroying and confidence wrecking. Instead of archaeology and history, my mind was clouded by anxiety about the lockdown and everything associated with it – specifically the long-term consequences for my wife and me and our kids. Everything was viewed through a fog of doubt and uncertainty to the point where I took to doing anything – anything at all around the house or in the garden – so long as it provided an excuse to get away from the unforgiving blank screen. As any writer knows, a deadline is the most powerful force in the universe and, in due course, I got the job done. It had taken every ounce of determination I could muster.

KNOCKOUT PUNCH

I have been self-employed for most of my adult life and for all the past two decades at least. My wife and I long ago internalised the stresses that come with never knowing where the next paying job is coming from. We are adaptable, as self-employed people have to be, and so we had the experience necessary to find new ways to keep the wheels on the financial wagon. As the lockdown stretched ever onwards – broken here and there by half-hearted offerings of freedom that turned back to lockdown soon enough – we looked around us, and ahead towards the horizon of the unknown with increasing dread. It was not necessarily dread concerning our own circumstances and rather more to do with wondering what kind of world was being shaped for our children.

As weeks turned to months, and then a year, it was always obvious to us that the damage being inflicted on the economy (and on society) was damned near apocalyptic. We are part of the self-employed private sector and so attuned to the plight of those in similar circumstances. From the beginning, we understood that the damage being done to that private sector, to the self-employed especially, would have terrifying consequences for the economy as a whole. The public

NEIL OLIVER - HISTORIAN, ARCHAEOLOGIST AND PRESENTER

Neil Oliver is a broadcaster and qualified archaeologist whose fieldwork experience covers everything from the early Stone Age in Scotland to the examination of the World War II coastal fortifications of Kent and Northern France. He was lead presenter of the highly acclaimed BBC2 series *Coast,* which looked at both the natural and social history of the British coastline, as well as its spin-offs, *Coast Australia* and *Coast New Zealand.* His history documentary series for the BBC include *A History of Ancient Britain, A History of Celtic Britain, Vikings* and *Rise of the Clans.*

Neil's books include *Two Men in a Trench: Battlefield Archaeology* (2002), *Amazing Tales For Making Men Out Of Boys* (2009), *A History of Scotland* (2009), *A History of Ancient Britain* (2011), *Master of Shadows* (2015), and *The Story of the British Isles In 100 Places* (2018).

On the back of his latest book, Neil toured all over the UK, speaking to over 69 venues explaining what British history means to him and why we need to cherish and celebrate our wonderful countries. During lockdown he has had a regular slot on Mike Graham's talkRADIO show and in April 2021 joined the team of GB News, where he will be hosting a weekly current affairs and interview programme.

Neil lives in Scotland with his wife and three children.

Follow Neil on Twitter: @thecoastguy

sector depends entirely upon the well-being of the private. As the one dieth, so dieth the other.

We watched with rising dismay as billions were borrowed from centuries into the future and sprayed up the wall, as millions of people were made dependent upon the Monopoly money of furlough. At the same time, many of the self-employed were left with nothing – no support of any kind. It was an education in human nature to watch how those on furlough so easily and readily turned blind eyes and deaf ears to the plight of neighbours. 'We're all in it together', said the government-sponsored slogans, early on at least. Only we weren't. There was no 'we'. There was 'them' and there was 'us'.

> " 'We're all in it together.' But there was no we. There was them and there was us

Furlough is, anyway, a short-term gain, and a long-term loss. The large print giveth and the small print taketh away. On 6 August 1966, Muhammad Ali fought English boxer Brian London, in the Earl's Court Arena, in London. In the third round, Ali had London on the ropes. Into the face and body of his hapless opponent he unleashed a torrent of blows. Within less than two seconds, he had hit London 17 times. He stopped and stepped back and London fell, sprawling on the canvas. London had been KO'd from the first punch and held up thereafter only by the continued blows. He felt no pain because he was senseless. Viewed in slow motion he stays upright, eyes closed, while the punches connect. He looks like a man standing, but he is a man unconscious and only waiting to fall.

So it is with those furloughed, and with our economy. The furlough scheme has been sold as a good thing – and it has kept food on the table and roofs over heads. But when it stops, the people and the economy will fall over like poor old Brian London did.

PEOPLE NOT POLITICIANS

I am in the privileged position of having platforms from which to broadcast my opinions. I write a weekly column for a Sunday newspaper. I have appeared for a half-hour slot on talkRadio with host and friend Mike Graham every Wednesday morning for most of a year. I have my own podcasts and I am regularly invited onto those of others to discuss the state of the nation. I have successfully completed another book, lockdown

or no lockdown. These opportunities to let off steam have been godsends of a sort not available to many. I am grateful for having had the chance to speak my mind on a regular basis throughout this emergency – even if it certainly has attracted a fair amount of bile as well. Without those release valves, I might have cracked long ago.

When it comes to making amends and starting over, I shake my head at the enormity of what must lie ahead for our people. I am as apolitical as it is possible to be. I am cynical about politics and politicians. I would cut off my hand before joining a political party. Like Billy Connolly, I believe the spoken desire to be a politician should be enough to bar a person, for life, from ever being allowed to be one.

Already people are asking what the government might do to 'help the recovery'. Dear god, haven't governments done enough? If your house has been burgled, everything of value taken and a stinking mess left by the perpetrators among the sheets on the bed in the master bedroom, would you invite those same miscreants to tidy up and do the make over? If you've been bullied all year, frightened out of your wits in the playground, do you invite the bullies to take your hand and see you safely home?

If this country is to have any hope at all of getting beyond this mess, it is not more government that is required, but less. Vaccine passports, twice-a-week testing for all – these are just the latest ideas I read about at the time of writing. If I am honest, I just want to roar: 'Get these people away from me! Get them away from all of us and let us get on with doing what we can to mend our lives and our communities!'

If Britain is to have any chance of meaningful recovery, it will involve putting some sort of distance between those who can fix it – which is the hard working, entrepreneurial people of the country – and those elected representatives and their pet scientific advisers that have dragged the best of people kicking and screaming into disaster.

We have all learned to preface our every relevant comment with lines like, 'I'm no expert…' or, 'I'm no scientist, but…' Well, I am no expert either – neither a scientist, nor an economist or any of the other specialisations that apparently grant some the right to

an opinion while intimidating too many others into silence. What I certainly am is a human being and I look on at my fellows and wonder what on earth must happen to us next.

BROKEN PEOPLE

Most recently, I have been reading and re-reading coverage of the closure of the footpaths on the Humber Bridge. The move came in the wake of six deaths, of teenagers and twenty-somethings, in the month of March, along with other incidents described as emergencies. Inquests are yet to be held, and so there is no way of knowing yet what sequence of events in each case led to a young person's body being recovered from the river. I have been on the footpath of the Humber Bridge, for part of the filming of a TV documentary. It is a long way down to that brown water, long enough for thinking in the space between life and death. What would prompt a person to decide that that drop into oblivion was the only option? I dread to think. Inquests will be heard right enough, but the testimony of grieving friends and relatives already given has its own story to tell:

'He was the kindest person I ever met.'
'She lit up every room she walked into.'

Those incidents, those deaths, are just the most recent ones I stumbled across during random surfing of news online. I have heard and read of many others during these long months, and I am sure most of us have. People have been broken, are being broken, and will continue to be broken by the government's solution to the problem.

Lives have been ended by all of this – by Covid, of course, but also by much else. Untreated physical ill health, untreated mental ill health. Other lives have been damaged, destroyed, compromised and blighted by the destruction of livelihoods.

I have never contemplated the future with such uncertainty. I look at my children, with their lives in front of them, and wonder who will emerge to lead us back to the light. Whoever it is, they and we have a long way to go ■

Official messaging

'THE PERCEIVED LEVEL OF personal threat needs to be increased among those who are complacent, using hard-hitting emotional messaging.'

CAMPAIGN OF FEAR

In one of the most extraordinary documents ever revealed to the British public, the behavioural scientists advising the UK government recommended that we needed to be frightened. The Scientific Pandemic Influenza Group on Behaviour (SPI-B) said in their report, *Options for increasing adherence to social distancing measures,[1]* that 'a substantial number of people still do not feel sufficiently personally threatened'. The authors saw people's proportionate responses to risk as a problem that needed to be overcome, lamenting that people felt reassured by low death rates in their own demographic groups. Using fear to encourage adherence to emergency lockdown regulations was one tactic in a suite of behavioural science approaches during the epidemic.

> ## Shots of panicked medical staff were interspersed with dystopian images of abandoned streets

Governments have long used fear to encourage docility in populations. But fear is a particularly exploitable emotion in an era characterised by diminishing moral certainty regarding the correct conduct of life and the decline of widely shared traditional, religious and even political identities. Citizens are increasingly encouraged to act on the basis of emotion rather than rational judgment. As Dr William Sargant said in *Battle for the Mind*: 'Whoever can be roused either to fear or anger by politician, priest or policeman, is more easily led to accept the desired pattern of "co-operation", even though this may violate his normal judgement.'

From the beginning of lockdown, the UK population was deliberately frightened to encourage compliance with the law and, potentially, to deflect criticism from these policies. Various tactics were mobilised in this 'campaign of fear'. In this brief essay we discuss several: ministerial speeches; uses of metrics and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs); advertising campaigns; Ofcom regulations; suppression of debate and challenges to government narratives.

THE TACTICS

Throughout the epidemic, language appears specifically formulated to maximise alarm and compliance. Boris Johnson's words in his 23 March 2020 speech to the nation were designed to call fear and death to mind: 'invisible killer', 'lives will be lost', 'funerals', etc. We were told we must follow the rules to 'save many thousands of lives'. Threats of power and penalty littered the latter part of the speech: the police would have powers to enforce the rules; we must follow the rules. He told us we were 'enlisted' – very specific wartime language, evoking the Blitz spirit, but also emotionally manipulative.

References to war followed in other speeches and briefings. 'War' requires populations to be resilient, make sacrifices and obey their leaders, like soldiers obeying the chain of military command. Martial language reminds us of this.

The government has spent more than £184 million on Covid communications since the start of the pandemic.[2] Via TV, radio, press, outdoor and social media they deliberately promoted fear following a two-pronged approach:

1. democratisation of risk, and

2. emphasising the risks individuals pose to each other.

The UK government began its attempts to increase and generalise fear at the end of March 2020. A video[3] released in April appears crafted to both heighten panic and spread a sense of personal threat to everyone. Opening with an ambulance and sirens wailing, shots of panicked medical staff are interspersed with dystopian images of abandoned streets. A male actor's sombre voice warns audiences that coronavirus is 'life threatening for people of all ages' as a cropped-headed patient is wheeled by. The coincidence of this statement and the 'headless

patient' invites viewers to place themselves on the gurney. The message is clear: 'This could be you.'

While risk is patterned, a common approach in public-health messaging has been to expand risks so the entire population feels equally threatened. For instance, government epidemiologists inflated and expanded the risk of AIDS in the 1980s, claiming that in 10 years, everyone would know someone who had died from the disease.[4] These tactics avoid singling out any one group, evading criticisms of discrimination. More importantly, they encourage anxiety and heightened risk awareness as desirable and healthy attributes of the good citizen. These citizens adopt the stance that any risk, no matter how small, must be imagined as likely to happen and act accordingly.

However, the more dominant approach has been to emphasise the risks individuals pose to each other. This predominantly other-directed tactic was first made clear in a series of posters,[5] press and social media ads also released in April 2020 featuring a yellow and red filtered NHS worker in full PPE. She is wearing a surgical mask, but its shape is reminiscent of a World War II gas mask. Beneath this grainy, dystopian image is the message:

> *If you go out,*
> *you can spread it.*
> *People will die.*

You are at risk. But more importantly, you are *a* risk.

Yellow/red and yellow/black chevrons on advertising evoke disaster cordons, signifying: 'do not cross'. In this way, UK citizens are constructed as health hazards.

This is particularly clear in the Look Into My Eyes campaign, where extreme close-ups of coronavirus patients in oxygen masks evocative of horror film imagery are accompanied by messages like, 'Look him in the eyes. And tell him you always keep a safe distance.' If things have gone wrong, it is not because of government failures to, for example, protect care homes[6] or prevent the virus leaving hospitals.[7] Rather, it is the actions of selfish individuals that are to blame, pitting people against each other.

In a manner startlingly similar to the cycle experienced in an abusive relationship,[8] these fear tactics were

LAURA DODSWORTH
**AUTHOR OF A STATE OF FEAR: HOW THE UK WEAPONISED FEAR DURING THE PANDEMIC**

Laura is an author, journalist, photographer and filmmaker. Her latest book, *A State of Fear*, starts a much-needed conversation about the ethics and impacts of the behavioural psychology, manipulation and official strategy of fear during the past year.

Follow Laura on Twitter: @BareReality

DR ASHLEY FRAWLEY
SENIOR LECTURER IN SOCIOLOGY AND SOCIAL POLICY, SWANSEA UNIVERSITY

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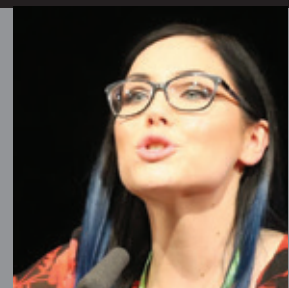
Follow Ashley on Twitter: @AshleyAFrawley

applied and removed at will, ramping up fears and relieving them according to the policy at the time. As summer 2020 approached, the tone of ads shifted to an upbeat, whistling tune accompanying images of people enjoying outdoor activities.[9] The stern male voice was replaced by a woman cheerfully reminding us to 'enjoy summer safely'. As winter approached, another sombre male voice returned, signalling rising tension. In January, the first male actor's stern voice reappeared in radio ads[10] that made a shocking (and false) claim: 'Someone jogging, walking their dog, or working out in the park is highly likely to have Covid-19.'[11] Another ad warned: 'Don't let a coffee cost lives.'

Thus, even ostensibly permitted activities were portrayed as deadly. If policy is not working, it is because of the people, not the policy. Moreover, the UK public is encouraged to believe that deaths of loved ones are their fault. Whether or not campaigns actually succeed in inducing fear, the overarching message is clear: fear is the correct moral stance. The insufficiently fearful are guilty of an offence akin to murder. Even children were not exempt from such blame. Indeed, they were explicitly targeted with messaging warning them 'Don't kill granny'.[12]

> **We've become afraid of each other. Humans are now vectors of transmission, agents of disease**

In broader communications, 'big numbers' were chosen by government, public health officials and the media to maximise alarm. New cases and hospital admissions were reported, but not recoveries nor discharges. Daily deaths were communicated without the context that about 1,600 people die every day in the UK anyway.[13] Death predictions and 'worst case scenarios' based upon modelling were delivered in 'shock and awe' presentations by health and government officials.

Seemingly designed to push numbers up, the main government Covid Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), as reported on the government dashboard, were 'cases' (positive PCR test results), hospitalisations and deaths. 'Cases' on the dashboard were in fact positive PCR test results, not cases. A medical diagnosis of 'case' would normally involve symptoms *plus* a positive test. 'Case' thus semantically evoked illness where there might be none.

'Patients admitted' actually included people admitted to hospital with Covid symptoms, people who were routinely tested after being admitted for a different reason and found to be positive, and people who were diagnosed subsequently, including hospital-acquired Covid infection at 17-25 per cent of the total.[14] 'Patients admitted' is a broader umbrella term than it might appear, and therefore a misleading public-facing metric, which exaggerated risk and could inflate fear.

Deaths were frequently communicated by 'date reported'. However, due to time lags in death registration, these figures were sharply volatile. Naturally, the 'big numbers' were reported. For instance, news and social media reported 981 deaths on the 30 December.[15] However, this figure included a lag in death registrations over Christmas. In fact, 719 died that day.[16]

In March 2020, Ofcom, the UK's communication regulator, issued strict guidance about Covid coverage. It asked broadcasters to be alert to 'health claims related to the virus which may be harmful; medical advice which may be harmful; accuracy or material misleadingness in programmes in relation to the virus or public policy regarding it'. Yet, scientific advice evolves and inhibiting broadcasters from these discussions is dangerous. Open debate should have been allowed, in sensible and contextual ways, to inform the public, stimulate scientific debate, acknowledge that consensus moves and challenge the one prevailing fear-mongering narrative.

This contributed to a generalised climate of fear and suppression among the public and opinion leaders, journalists and scientists who may have wished to challenge policies.

In addition, the media used descriptors like 'covidiots', 'selfish morons' and 'granny killers' to describe anyone ostensibly behaving irresponsibly, effectively scapegoating individuals for increasing cases and/or deaths. Those questioning lockdowns were called 'lockdown sceptics', a re-framing which made people seem silly rather than sceptical, as though they denied the existence of the virus, or 'lockdown deniers', conjuring the callousness of Holocaust deniers.

Punitive fines were introduced to discourage law-breaking, with fines of £10,000 for offences like breaking self-isolation, hosting a party, or even – literally – organising a snowball fight.[17] Fear of penalty thus inhibited previously normal social activity and public health became a criminal justice matter.

Academics, scientists and journalists who challenged official policy were publicly execrated, which had a silencing effect on other academics. Professor Ellen Townsend, a psychologist at Nottingham University and a member of HART said, 'the culture of suppression and scapegoating of dissenting academic

voices in this crisis has been dreadful. Leading experts have been cast as outliers by those in power because their theories and evidence do not fit the official Covid narrative.'[18]

IMPACTS

Lockdown has greatly affected the mental health of the nation. As many as 10 million people, including 1.5 million children, are thought to need new or additional mental health support.[19] And strikingly, 15 per cent of people reported depression, anxiety or fear as a direct result of government Covid advertising.[20] Compounding the issues, 161,699 fewer people per month in 2020 were able to contact mental health services than in 2019.[21]

The numbers show the scale of the crisis, but personal stories illuminate the tragedy. In our investigations we have collated tragic testimonies. In one startling consequence, some particularly vulnerable individuals who have fallen ill and, unable to bear the thought of 'killing' their loved ones, have even taken their own lives.[22] How do we weigh the potential life saved from Covid with a life deliberately ended by overdose in a hotel room or a jump from a bridge? Can we justify protecting someone from physical sickness, fever and fatigue, if the methods of protection caused someone else to develop a fear of leaving their house, or made them waken sick with dread each day?

FEAR OF EACH OTHER

From roadside signs telling us to 'Stay Alert', the incessantly doom-laden media commentary, to masks literally keeping the fear in our face, we've become afraid of each other. Humans are now vectors of transmission, agents of disease. We have become afraid of our own judgement about how to manage the minutiae of our lives, from who to hug to whether to share a serving or a spoon. Yet the larger fear might be government side-stepping of rational debate in favour of emotional manipulation.

Fear messaging has created undue health anxiety within the population. Research also suggests that fear can create negative psychopathological outcomes and impact the immune system.[23] Through visceral imaging, it deflects blame away from the potentially deleterious effects of government policy on both the spread of the virus and wider society and onto individuals, justifying further heavy-handed approaches.

Behavioural psychology assumes that we are not rational, that we know this, and we welcome the release from anxiety and guilt. According to a Cabinet Office report on behavioural science, when the government guides our decisions for us it 'acts as surrogate

willpower and locks our biscuit tins'.[24] Using nudge to help us lock up biscuit tins is arguably patronising and deserves debate in itself, but locking *us* up is a serious measure. The behavioural science framework for making the population comply with being locked down involved powerful techniques which deserve public consultation.

Fear is not sustainable. And, as it wears thin, it is revealed to be in an inverse relationship with the growing awareness of how it was weaponised. We call for an independent inquiry to be conducted by a third party into the use of behavioural psychology during the Covid pandemic. Of course, behavioural psychology didn't start during the pandemic, but rather, the pandemic response has revealed the psychocratic influence deeply embedded in various government departments, the NHS and Public Health England. An inquiry should start with a historical literature review of behavioural psychology and the use of it by government to understand its trajectory and to contextualise use during the pandemic.

Behavioural scientists and politicians have called for public consultation in the past. It has not happened. The Science and Technology Select Committee's 2011 report into *Behaviour Change*[25] noted that there are 'ethical issues because they involve altering behaviour through mechanisms of which people are not obviously aware' and 'ethical acceptability depends to a large extent on an intervention's proportionality'. David Halpern, the head of the Behavioural Insights Team, has said that 'if national or local governments are to use these approaches [behavioural psychology tools], they need to ensure that they have public permission to do so – ie, that the nudge is transparent, and that there has been appropriate debate about it'.[26]

There should be a full analysis of the tactics used and their impacts from experts, including psychologists, behavioural scientists, mental health specialists, politicians, political scientists, sociologists, civil liberties organisations, lawyers, as well as representatives of the public.

The use of behavioural psychology and specifically the weaponisation of fear are symptoms of a government that has given up on trust and transparency. A crucial part of the United Kingdom's recovery must be the restoration of trust and transparency, and this will only happen once we are honest about the tactics that were used, the impacts they had, and the ethical considerations ∎

Data and Statistics

TO UNDERSTAND WHAT IS happening with the pandemic, we need data. Not just any old data, either – we need accurate, timely and pertinent data. And we need to understand properly what that data actually means. For example, if case numbers suddenly shoot up, that could mean the virus is spreading faster, but it could also reflect a big increase in testing.

First, some good news. While we got off to a slow start in terms of data (more of that below), the crisis has provided us with ample, easy-to-access information from a variety of sources. In the early days, the Johns Hopkins Covid dashboard was a must-check source of what was happening around the world.[27] While it was only as good as the information provided – for example, different countries might choose to define a 'Covid death' differently, especially in the absence of reliable tests – it did at least give a sense of how the Covid pandemic was developing.

Other sources of information have been vital, too, most notably the UK government's own coronavirus dashboard, which provides daily updates in a comprehensible way.[28] Presentations of data from the *Financial Times*,[29] *Spectator*[30] and Our World in Data,[31] among others, have allowed everyone to get a sense of how things are unfolding, including case numbers, hospital admissions, deaths and vaccinations.

Particular praise should be given to King's College London and ZOE for quickly repurposing an app intended to study twins into a way of logging and tracking the epidemic.[32] By asking people to report symptoms, the app was the first confirmation that loss of taste and smell was a distinctive symptom of Covid. While relying on symptoms to guess how many people have Covid is an imperfect way of assessing the spread of disease, the data from the app has been very useful in giving a general sense of direction in the epidemic, often ahead of official data. The fact that it doesn't rely directly on testing has also provided a useful double-check throughout the course of the pandemic.

ERRORS ON BOTH SIDES

Yet there have been mistakes along the way, too, particularly when it comes to the way the worst-case outputs from models have been used. Conclusions from models have too often been treated as gospel and used in an alarmist way to scare us into accepting lockdowns and other restrictions. This reveals a disturbing attitude in government towards citizens. After all, the real data has often been scary enough – so why inflate it in order to exaggerate the dangers?

But some humility is required by those of us who have been consistently critical of the government and lockdown, too. By and large, claims made by 'sceptics' (in reality, a very diverse group) in relation to the pandemic, including the data and the models, have tended to be wrong. I should know because I've been one of those sceptics. When it started, like many

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people, I assumed that this would be yet another overblown scare story, that Covid would go the way of bird flu, swine flu, variant-CJD and many other 'time bombs' that proved to be damp squibs.

While the government presentation of data has often been designed to scare us, emphasising the worst case, broadly speaking this pandemic has proven itself to be the much-threatened 'big one', killing millions of people worldwide. (Just over three million Covid deaths had been reported worldwide at the time of writing.) It has been nothing like as deadly as 'Spanish flu' a century ago, which killed a much bigger proportion of the world's population at the time[33] (perhaps 0.9 per cent compared to 0.04 per cent so far for Covid), but that's hardly cause for celebration.

Many sceptics stuck rigidly to particular arguments – about false positive tests, apparent herd immunity, the effect on the pandemic of lockdowns, and more – long after those arguments seemed to have been disproven. Scepticism is vital, but science demands testing hypotheses against evidence and a willingness to accept when those hypotheses have proven to be false.

TESTING

The biggest problem at the start of the epidemic in the UK was a lack of data. It quickly became obvious that the public-health system was incapable of testing nearly enough people to reveal the true extent of what was going on in a rapidly changing situation. As a result, the opportunity to introduce more modest social-distancing measures, short of lockdown, was missed. On 12 March, community testing was stopped and the limited testing capacity was focused on testing people in hospitals and protecting health workers.[34]

> " The conclusions of models have too often been treated as gospel

That was a reasonable decision in the circumstances, but it confirmed that the UK's much-vaunted pandemic preparedness was a sham.

Even before then, community testing was limited. Basically, you might be able to get a test if you had symptoms, but thousands of people went untested. So, while ministers and advisers were assuring us that we were 'three weeks behind Italy',[35] the reality was that the virus was already widely present in the UK and spreading fast. The countries that did best in that first wave introduced some elements of social distancing quickly. If we had had better data, might the UK have moved faster, too? This might have avoided a full lockdown, or at least shortened the time needed to get case numbers down to a more manageable level and reopen again.

Instead, it was only on 16 March that we were told to work from home if we could and to avoid pubs, cinemas, theatres and other gatherings,[36] by which time tens of thousands of people (at least) were infected.

ALARM BELLS

The turning point in the UK was the release of 'Report 9' by Imperial College London on 16 March.[37] The most-quoted figure was that if the government did nothing to restrict the spread of the disease, then 500,000 people could die. This wasn't the most important figure, however. Whatever the government had done, people would, and did, act to protect themselves.

What really set alarm bells ringing was the claim that 'the most effective combination of interventions is

predicted to be a combination of case isolation, home quarantine and social distancing of those most at risk (the over 70s)' but that even this would lead to 'an eight-fold higher peak demand on critical care beds over and above the available surge capacity in both GB and the US'.

In other words, a mitigation strategy – trying to keep the virus under a degree of control, but also allowing some degree of spread – would still overwhelm health services and lead to hundreds of thousands of deaths. Instead, what would be required was a 'suppression' strategy: 'a combination of case isolation, social distancing of the entire population and either household quarantine or school and university closure' with these measures in place for five months. This would be the best approach 'short of a complete lockdown which additionally prevents people going to work'.

> **Some things can't be measured – like freedom, sociability and human affection**

The flipside is that such a strategy would be only a temporary fix. 'The more successful a strategy is at temporary suppression, the larger the later epidemic is predicted to be in the absence of vaccination, due to lesser build-up of herd immunity.'

Instead, the authors suggested a system whereby restrictions were turned on and off according to the state of the epidemic. Even with such a system, however, the report suggested that severe restrictions would have to be in force for two thirds of the time until a vaccine became widely available and would still have led to tens of thousands of deaths.

MODEL MISHAPS

There was plenty of criticism at the time about the value of this modelling. In retrospect, some balance is required. While we can never know how many people would have died with a different approach in the UK – for example, Sweden had a far greater emphasis on voluntary behaviour change and remained more open throughout than the UK[38] – the Imperial College report was broadly correct about the *order* of deaths that might occur – not hundreds, not thousands, but hundreds of thousands in the absence of severe restrictions.

At the time of writing, the number of deaths where Covid is mentioned on the death certificate is just over 150,000, according to UK government figures, despite the UK being in lockdown or similar restrictions for at least seven months. That said, the death toll shot up with the rise of the more infectious 'Kent variant' (B.1.1.7) in late autumn 2020,[39] with just under 65,000 deaths up to the second national lockdown in England in early November, compared to almost 90,000 deaths since – again, despite the lockdown for most of that period. So perhaps this new, more infectious variant, made the original models look better than they really were.

However, although the modelling proved to be better than many sceptics like me predicted, there have been mistakes and over-statements along the way. For example, in early July, it became clear that Public Health England had been counting all deaths as 'Covid' deaths if someone had *ever* had a positive test – even if it was weeks or months earlier.[40] In particular, it gave a false impression about the relative situation of England versus the other UK nations. By changing the definition to 'within 28 days of a positive test', the death toll was cut overnight by over 5,000.[41]

On the other hand, the '28 days' measure seems to undercount deaths; the number of deaths as measured by mentions on death certificates has always been higher. For example, at the time of writing (15 April 2021), there had been 127,161 deaths by the '28 days' measure and 150,419 deaths where Covid was mentioned, either as the underlying cause or a factor in causing death, on death certificates. Most commentators accept that the death certificate data is better, as it is based on the judgement of a doctor with knowledge of each patient, rather than by applying a fairly crude statistical cut-off.

Moreover, ONS statisticians have argued that there may well have been more deaths in the spring 2020

wave of the epidemic that should have been written up as Covid deaths, but were not due to a lack of testing. All things considered, we can be reasonably confident that the number of deaths from Covid in the UK has been well into six figures and being able to divine the exact number probably would make little or no difference to the policies adopted.

JUSTIFYING LOCKDOWN

More worrying has been the use of data to demand lockdowns or to call for caution in lifting lockdowns. For example, on 21 September 2020, at a UK government press conference, the chief scientific adviser, Sir Patrick Vallance, presented a graph suggesting cases would double every seven days, leading to 50,000 cases per day by 13 October.[42] But in reality, cases rose to about one-third of that level.[43]

That said, Vallance was wrong about the timing, not the outcome. Cases by specimen date did pass 50,000 per day on 29 December (in fact, that was the peak of the epidemic, thanks to Christmas delays in testing and reporting, with 81,531 positive tests that day).[44] That was despite the November lockdown and widespread local restrictions before and after. Vallance's other claim is perhaps more important – that deaths would reach 200 per day on 13 October. In fact, deaths reached 200 per day just over a week later, on 21 October.[45]

The government seemed to strain even harder in the run up to the November lockdown. Models were presented at the press conference that suggested up to 4,000 deaths per day might occur without another lockdown. These claims were rightly ridiculed in some quarters, including the government's statistics watchdog,[46] based as they were on out-of-date models and data. The lower end of these models, suggesting 1,000 deaths a day, were frightening enough without such exaggeration. Thanks to the 'Kent variant', we did see the death toll rise over 1,000 per day during January.

More recently, there have been similarly suspicious claims in relation to an 'exit wave', suggesting tens of thousands more people might die *in summer* as restrictions are lifted.[47] It was clear that the models had taken no account of seasonality and had made very conserv-ative assumptions about the effectiveness and uptake of vaccines. Though later versions of these models give less pessimistic results, they were used as justification for sticking to a very conservative 'roadmap' for opening up.[48]

SCARED INTO SUBMISSION

Over the course of the pandemic in the UK, a worrying aspect of the government response has been a shift from treating us like adults who can take responsibility for each other to one based on scaring us into submission. In the early news conferences in March 2020, the tone was one of trying to explain the government's thinking and bring us along with it. But it was soon clear that the government thought it better to scare us and patronise us, with constant reminders to behave ourselves, rather than convincing us of the necessity of a certain path.

Going back to 'Report 9', the proposal that society would be opened and closed according to reaching certain data points is an alarming one. Judgement, like assessing the balance between the damage of the disease and the damage caused by restrictions, would be by-passed. Yet it has felt as if many in government would rather like a system in which judgement and engagement with citizens could be avoided.

That's one reason why it is always important to keep questioning everything we are told, whether it is from official sources or from critics of government policy. Necessity is the mother of invention, and the pandemic and the lockdown policies associated with it have taught us much about how we can get better data and, hopefully, how to interpret it wisely.

In the obsession with a handful of key data points, it has been easy to lose sight of other important trends. In assessing our response to this pandemic, we need to keep an eye on all the impacts of both the disease and the lockdown – healthcare more generally, education, and much more. Above all, some important things are simply not amenable to be measured – like freedom, sociability, human affection and more. Data is vital, but it's not everything ▪

Media

THE PANDEMIC HAS BEEN A reminder of how essential a free media is in times of crisis. As lockdown began last spring, journalists were designated key workers[49] and lent a renewed sense of moral mission. Many rose to the challenge as viewing figures and clicks soared. But the pandemic also exposed more malign trends in both the economics and practices of the UK media. This essay will address the latter, exploring how the pandemic exposed and exacerbated trends towards conformism and partisanship, and how this contributed to a narrowing of the debate on lockdown.

Undoubtedly, the immediate threat to journalism at the moment is economic. Print sales for the UK's biggest national newspapers slumped by 39 per cent in April 2020.[50] A temporary surge in online traffic offered little relief to publications that had always struggled to make money from online and saw advertising budgets slashed.[51] Some outlets have rebounded, but others have made brutal cuts. As Professor Rasmus Kleis Nielsen, director of the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, wrote in March 2020: 'To be brutally honest, I think a lot of news media won't make it.'[52]

But as British journalism begins to recover, it needs to address the question of what it is for as well as how it might be funded. Public trust in journalists remains low. As Alan Rusbridger, former editor-in-chief of the *Guardian*, put it last spring: 'Nearly all surveys – pre-Covid and today – show a similar picture. A lot of people still rely on mainstream news, but consistently place journalists as the last people they would place their faith in.'[53] A Sky News poll in April 2020 found that 64 per cent of the British public did not trust TV journalists and 72 per cent did not trust print journalists.[54]

In the Downing Street press conferences in the run-up to 23 March, lobby journalists appeared to have decided lockdown was the only option. That Dominic Cummings's drive to Durham became the defining scandal of the first wave reflected a media with warped priorities. A pro-lockdown skew is unlikely to have put off audiences in itself, given the policy enjoyed

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overwhelming support in the polls. But the media's behaviour has nevertheless helped to undermine the principles on which their authority rests. Meanwhile, as I explore towards the end of this essay, more sceptical outlets bore the brunt of Big Tech censorship. Taken together, this worked to stifle democratic debate at a time when we needed it most.

ADVOCATES FOR LOCKDOWN

Whatever one thinks about lockdown, it represented an unprecedented suspension of civil liberties and economic life. Leading epidemiologist Neil Ferguson has admitted that it took Italy following authoritarian China into shutdown for him and his colleagues to feel they could 'get away with it' in Europe.[55] Looking back on the daily No.10 press conferences in March 2020, it is hard not to conclude that the media also helped to shift the dial. The media seemed to cross the line from challenging the government on its more voluntary approach to demanding to know when it would go further – from playing devil's advocate to becoming advocates for lockdown.

> " The government was contemplating stripping us of our liberties, and all a fearful, conformist media did was egg it on

In the week before Boris Johnson issued his 'stay at home' order[56] on 23 March, the press conferences were dominated by the potential need for more restrictions. On 17 March, the BBC's Laura Kuenssberg asked chief scientific adviser Patrick Vallance if he had 'any regrets about not taking more draconian measures sooner'. In the same session, ITV's Robert Peston asked the prime minister if there is 'ever an urgent reason to go to the pub' (at that point the government was urging the public to avoid going out, but had stopped short of forcing venues to close).[57]

As the days went on, leading questions morphed into something more like demands. On 18 March, when Johnson announced the closure of schools, Beth Rigby of Sky News said: 'Prime minister, just in terms of further measures, a third of the deaths are now in the capital of London. Buses are still full, the Tubes are full, bars are full. London is not listening to your advice. You've shut the schools today. When will we see wider enforcement to shut down London properly?'[58] She continued in this vein the following day, asking 'on behalf of Londoners' if Johnson thought 'it is now right to move to a more substantial lockdown of the capital like they have done in Italy and Spain and France'.[59]

This idea that people were not adhering to government guidance was asserted on the basis of mere anecdotes. 'At the moment though you're still advising people to follow these measures rather than imposing them, and I just wondered what evidence you're basing that on given that it's clear that some people aren't listening?', asked the BBC's Vicki Young on 22 March.[60] This point was picked up more pointedly by the *Daily Mail's* Larisa Brown. 'Prime Minister, people aren't acting responsibly. So, when are you going to get tougher and bring in the police?', she asked.

Before Covid, British news audiences were largely spared the tedium of press conferences. As we saw at the height of the crisis, journalists are sometimes given to asking the same questions in them, one after another, in order to push on an obvious weak spot or address what is perceived to be the key question of the day. But even so, the one-dimensional nature of the questioning in those feverish early days was particularly striking – not to mention unedifying – given the gravity of the situation. The government was contemplating stripping us of our most fundamental liberties, and all a fearful, conformist media did was egg it on.

> " YouTube and Facebook clamping down on what they judged to be misinformation had a chilling effect on discussion

DRIVE TO DURHAM

There were plenty of scandals in the government's early handling of the pandemic that might have caused heads to roll. The failure to protect care homes during the first wave and the initial decision to discharge patients into care homes without the need for a negative test come to mind.[61] But in the end, the central media scandal of those early months focused on Dominic Cummings, the prime minister's then chief adviser, and his now notorious drive to Durham.

A joint investigation by the *Daily Mirror* and the *Guardian*, published on 22 May, revealed that Cummings had driven from London to Durham after his wife had come down with Covid at the end of March.[62] They spent their period of isolation on his parents' property, in a separate dwelling. The *Mirror* headline declared that Cummings had been 'investigated by police after breaking coronavirus lockdown rules'. A follow-up story, published a day later, revealed that Cummings had also been spotted at Barnard Castle, 30 miles away from his parents' home.[63] It was also claimed that he made a second trip up to Durham after he had returned to London.

This dominated the agenda for more than a week, leading to calls for Cummings's resignation and culminating in a rose-garden press conference watched live by 5.5 million people.[64] But key aspects of the story fell apart. Durham Constabulary said they attended the property, but only to advise on security issues, at the request of Cummings's father.[65] Police later issued a statement clarifying that they did not consider Cummings's drive from London to Durham a breach of law.[66] (The drive to Barnard Castle, which Cummings claimed was to test his eyesight before the drive back to London, 'might have been a minor breach'.) Meanwhile, the explosive 'second trip to Durham' claim appeared to have been based solely on one couple's account; police said they had 'seen insufficient evidence to support this allegation'.

This unravelling revealed how partisanship can warp journalistic practice. Supposedly impartial broadcasters also let their distaste for Cummings, the mastermind of the Vote Leave campaign who often expressed contempt for the lobby, get the better of them. A few days before Durham police issued their statement, *Newsnight* presenter Emily Maitlis declared him guilty in an opening monologue: 'Dominic Cummings broke the rules. The country can see that, and it's shocked the government cannot.'

She went further: 'He was the man, remember, who always got the public mood. He tagged the lazy label of

"elite" on those who disagreed. He should understand that public mood now.'[67] After a wave of complaints, the BBC issued a statement saying the monologue 'did not meet our standards of due impartiality'.[68]

Of course, Cummings should have been criticised for his conduct. The fact that he bent the very lockdown rules he had a hand in writing struck many as unfair. Parts of his explanation, particularly the Barnard Castle eye test, stretched credibility, to put it lightly. But the ensuing media circus revealed the myopia of many journalists, and their desperation to get a 'scalp' at the expense of what really matters. The media appeared more enraged by these minor potential breaches of lockdown than they were by the deadly consequences of government policy. That, for instance, health secretary Matt Hancock has never faced anything like the same level of pressure to resign over the deaths in care homes he presided over is revealing.

TECH VS FREEDOM

As I have outlined, during the pandemic, internal trends within the media towards groupthink and bias afflicted even those journalists and outlets who pride themselves on impartiality and independent thought. But to make matters worse, some of those who took a more sceptical line found themselves falling foul of social-media giants. Platforms like YouTube and Facebook have become essential to the modern media, and the decision of these firms to clamp down on what they judged to be misinformation about Covid had a significant chilling effect on discussion.

In April 2020, YouTube CEO Susan Wojcicki said her platform would remove 'anything that is medically unsubstantiated' as well as 'anything that would go against World Health Organisation recommendations'.[69] This led to the censorship not only of conspiracy theorists, but also of dissenting experts and journalists. In May 2020, an interview by the online publication *UnHerd* with Karol Sikora, a former adviser to the WHO no less, was taken down.[70] More alarming still, in January 2021, British radio station talkRADIO, which platformed various lockdown

sceptics, had its channel deleted. talkRADIO was reinstated by YouTube following the intervention of the British government.[71] But this case revealed the alarming power of corporate giants to deprive even an Ofcom-regulated, mainstream media outlet of a key way in which it reached its audience and generated revenue.

Facebook's attempts to suppress Covid misinformation also impacted upon more lockdown-sceptical voices in the media. In November, Facebook labelled an article in the *Spectator* about the efficacy of masks, penned by Carl Heneghan and Tom Jefferson of Oxford University's Centre for Evidence-Based Medicine, as 'false information'.[72] In all this, we saw the power of social-media oligarchs, whose content policies have become increasingly censorious in recent years, to extend their writ over more traditional forms of media that are increasingly reliant on them.[73] This bodes ill for the future of media freedom, and must be tackled as a matter of urgency.

COLLECTIVE FAILURE

The point here is not that the media should have campaigned against lockdown. The point here is that there was a clear collective failure, influenced by internal and external forces, even to subject the lockdown policy to the level of scrutiny such unprecedented measures demanded. This contributed to a shutting down of discussion of potential alternatives. And it stifled a media debate that, if nothing else, might have better exposed the costs and trade-offs involved in locking down society. As George Orwell wrote in his preface to *Animal Farm*, discussing the scourge of self-censorship during the Second World War: 'The enemy is the gramophone mind, whether or not one agrees with the record that is being played at the moment.' [74] And in times of crisis, conformism can cost lives ∎

Schools

ON 1 JANUARY 2021, I tweeted: 'I want to go to school. I want to teach the children in my class. I don't want to watch them, and their parents, struggle remotely, whilst trying to give positive and helpful feedback. My school was open and Covid-free all last term.' This tweet got 7,800 likes, and was retweeted by 1,200 people.

This surprised me for two reasons. Firstly, I am not a reporter or celebrity, but a teacher in a village primary school with a mixed Year 5/6 class. I have never had such a strong reaction to a tweet before. Secondly, my personal and political experience during the pandemic was that to argue for schools remaining open was not popular. This tweet seemed to uncover the feelings many people had, but were not happy to air.

MISSING COMMUNITY

When the first lockdown happened, in March 2020, I was at the point of gearing up my Year 6 students for their end-of-year SATs exams. Just like any other year, they were beginning to buckle down and develop mature intrinsic motivation for their learning, something that I believe the SATs exams experience brings. There was excitement in the air about the transition moments to come. Indeed, our last event as a class was to attend the local secondary school for a dance celebration. It seemed as if it would be a year like any other.

Then lockdown happened and the community, that is school, was no more. It started with home learning in various forms. The provision varied from school to school (as did the support and guidance from the local authority) and there was no expectation that the children do the work. My role changed to planning work accessible at home by the parents and children, and providing email support to the parents. Schools did what they could to keep morale high and weekly phone calls were made home to ensure no children were 'lost'. Key workers' children and vulnerable children – such as those in social care or having special educational needs – were attending school and teachers who did not feel at risk were on a rota to teach them.

There followed a year of disruption to schools. At each stage, there was frenzied media discussion and a push by the unions to put more safety measures in place or keep schools closed. This was exhausting and undermined the community feeling of the school, its children and parents that 'we are all in this together'. In fact, schooling became privatised. For the child, it was an individual act completed at home; for the teacher, the job became planning and writing feedback and sending it remotely, hoping it was read and acted on. It was alienating for all involved.

A SHADOW OF SCHOOL LIFE

In June, Reception, Year 1 and 6 were invited back into school along with key worker and vulnerable children. We set up 'bubbles' (up to 13 children) with socially distanced desks, hand washing, packed lunches, and separate teaching staff. The children were 'waited on' by teachers. This undermined the independent spirit I routinely instil in the Year 6 children in preparation for the transition to senior school as well as the independence first developed in Reception. We were also providing home learning for the rest of the school.

For Year 6, there was no proper transition. Instead of fun trips, and a sense of accomplishment, we rushed them through a distanced awards ceremony (which parents could not watch in person) and sent them on their way. As a school, we tried to give them the best send-off possible, but we simply could not replicate the experience of previous Year 6s.

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In September, our school opened, this time in class 'bubbles' with different start times, playtimes and lunchtimes for each one. PE was restricted to one hour a week. It had to be outside, but due to timetabling to keep the bubbles separate, playground usage was high and so not always available.

Anything children brought in from home had to be quarantined for 72 hours. The Christmas production was cancelled. No visits, residential trips, assemblies or singing were allowed. The windows in the classroom had to stay open and the heating was restricted as the school budget is tight. This was the closest to normality we experienced.

January came, and teachers organised home learning again for the majority, with vulnerable children and critical workers' children attending. This became a contentious issue to many parents who were desperate to send their children back to school. Provision was compulsory and extra IT was supplied by the Department for Education (DfE).[75] A daily lesson was carried out by each teacher on Zoom as well as providing the work in a new format via Microsoft Teams, which was funded by the DFE.

SCHOOL ON A SCREEN

During this time, I felt as though I never stepped away from my computer. I spent hours a day responding to confused messages from students and parents whilst at home in the evening and at school during the day where I was teaching my small group. I was also trying to plan and deliver interesting and interactive learning for my students. The work kept piling up. My only respite was the short lessons I taught the children via Zoom, but even those became a source of anxiety as I knew the parents would be listening.

In the first lockdown, the results were variable. Some students had the full support of their parents and were able to make progress, and others did little to nothing. I was balancing the difficult task of trying to give helpful feedback to children while also trying to protect their young egos, please parents and keep the students motivated. It soon began to feel as if I were in a call centre liaising with parents, a far cry from the one-to-one engagement I was used to with my students.

> " It felt as if I were in a call centre liaising with parents, a far cry from the one-to-one engagement I was used to with my students

In September, when they returned, I realised my students' focus had deteriorated during the school lockout. Their practical reading, writing, and even social skills had suffered. OFSTED released a report that autumn, based on interviews with head teachers, supporting this observation.[76]

Due to the first lockdown, secondary school teachers have reported that Year 7 were behind when assessed, particularly in English.[77]

The latest lockdown was the hardest for all concerned. Unlike the first lockdown, there was very little sympathy for the parents and teachers. The masks, visors, Covid tests and constant vigilance of other adults destroyed the sense of 'we are in this together'.

EDUCATIONAL NEGLECT

Despite the best efforts of individual teachers and parents, educating children has been seriously neglected during the pandemic. The discussion focused on the safety of teachers or children as vectors. Children have been shut away at home, unable to socialise or build up the independence necessary for existence in normal society. There has been no parity of learning – classrooms create equal access for the children whatever their home circumstances. There have been no discussions about subjects. A clinical completing of tasks has rightly felt empty for the parents. In the classroom, a teacher can ensure all the children are working within the same parameters and receive support if needed; children enrich each other's understanding; and grammar taught in a classroom with a class via the reading and discussion of a book is very different. While the focus has been on mental health, with plenty of well-being sessions, the well-being of students that comes from a sense of achievement in their learning has not been considered during this time.

In April, *The Times* reported children being so behind in their learning the government is planning a four-year catch-up plan.[78] This is unsurprising as at no time could I call what I have been doing substantive teaching. However, illiteracy, which it focuses on, does not come from one year of missed school and I do not believe tutoring (particularly online) to be the answer. Teaching is much more than this. As Lee Shulman wrote in the mid-Eighties, 'teaching necessarily

begins with a teacher's understanding of what is to be learned and how it is to be taught… though the learning itself ultimately remains the responsibility of the students. Teaching ends with new comprehension by both the teacher and the student.'[79] It is something that cannot be done electronically and in an alienated way. It needs a community and social engagement with teachers and their students.

REBUILDING SCHOOL LIFE

Some positives have come out of this pandemic. New technology and IT resources have appeared due to this internet-heavy lockdown. Also, having a small group of critical-worker and vulnerable children in the class gave them space and more attention, which allowed them to make good progress. Attendance had never been higher than that winter term and our school stayed Covid-free (other schools in the area were not quite as lucky). Parents and children appreciated school more.

To improve our situation, we need to bring schools back together as a community. Our Reception children do not know anyone in the school and have no understanding of what school life really is. Our teachers are bickering – for example, some want everyone wearing masks, some don't. Our students have lost their independence.

We need to remind politicians, unions, parents and even some teachers that teaching is a vocation where children's learning of substantive subjects comes first, not the safety of teachers. We need to remove all buzzwords and psychological frippery from the curriculum and focus on teaching a broad set of subjects in a social school context and allow teachers the freedom to bring the pastoral in when necessary. Education policy should not be focused on safety, but on learning. During this pandemic, the safety of our children became the safety of our adults and the children disappeared. We need to organise so that never happens again ∎

Children

THOUGH CHILDREN ARE not immune from Covid, the pandemic has touched comparatively few children seriously. But our pandemic response has crushed them.

Schools first closed on 20 March 2020 as a temporary, three-week measure. One year later and a total of 840 million[80] school days have been lost. The Institute for Fiscal Studies has estimated the economic cost to be £350 billion over the lifetime of the nine million pupils affected.[81] For two years in a row, exams have been missed; schools across the board have ceased or pared back sporting activities, music and arts. According to Youth Sport Trust,[82] after the first lockdown just 19 per cent of children were meeting the chief medical officer's guidance of partaking in at least an hour of physical exercise a day.

VITAL LIFELINE

School is a vital lifeline for vulnerable children and those with Education, Health and Care Plans and Special Educational Needs. The impact of closures meant that in many cases these children simply had no access to an education at all. During the 2020 closures, 94 per cent of vulnerable children were not in school;[83] during the 2021 closures that figure hovered around 40 per cent.

The Child Poverty Action Group highlights that low-income families were twice as likely to report that they lacked the resources needed to support learning at home, with 40 per cent reporting they were missing at least one essential resource altogether.[84] The Social Mobility Commission has commented that 'the inequalities in our schools are widening by the day'.[85]

MOLLY KINGSLEY
CO-FOUNDER, USFORTHEM

Molly Kingsley is a parent, campaigner and writer. In May 2020, she co-founded UsforThem, a campaign for children's needs to be prioritised in response to decisions on coronavirus, and beyond. Before that was an adtech entrepreneur; before that, a lawyer.

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The impact of school closures extends well beyond learning. In January 2021, the Covid-19 Psychological Research Consortium found, among 13- to 18-year-olds, a six-fold increase in abnormal anxiety levels and a three-fold increase in abnormal depression levels;[86] the Prince's Trust reported that one in four young people said they felt unable to cope with life.[87] Professor Russell Viner, president of the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health (RCPCH), conducting a review of 72 papers before the Education Select Committee in February, relayed that the consistent story told is of 'considerable' mental-health harm.[88]

Many have cautioned that the impacts may be long-lasting. A University of Bath study highlights that children who experience loneliness as a result of school closures are three times more likely to develop depression in later life,[89] and though studies on historic lengthy school closures are hard to come by, those there are do not reassure. For example, a report on the impact of the Pakistani earthquake of 2005 states 'the disaster can leave long-lasting scars on children, even when government interventions compensate households for the shock and facilitate a speedy economic recovery'.[90]

International bodies have been universal in their condemnation of school closures as an acceptable policy lever to combat Covid. UNICEF says 'nationwide closures of schools should be avoided at all costs'[91] and UNESCO notes that a schools shutdown is particularly severe for the most vulnerable and marginalised boys and girls and their families'.[92]

CHILDREN DEPRIORITISED

Schools have devoured the majority of the column inches, but in fact school closures are simply a microcosm of the wider ecosystem. From cradle to career, every touch point that the state has with children has, for the last year, deprioritised children. Pregnancy, maternity and baby services have been closed or scaled back. Nurseries and early-years settings have been closed; many have yet to reopen. Money and resources allocated to children's services have been diverted elsewhere. Universities switched to remote learning and, 13 months later, many are showing little prospect of switching back. Across the board, children and young people have spent a year under unprecedented social and educational isolation.

Most damning of all, these restrictions have eroded children's ability to play, which is such a fundamental building block of a good life that we thought fit to incorporate it into the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.[93]

People say that children are resilient, but many of these impacts do not look that way. Great Ormond Street Hospital recorded a 1,493 per cent increase in abusive head trauma for children during the first lockdown;[94] the president of the British Paediatric Neurology Association has spoken of an 'explosion' of children with lockdown-induced disabling tics disorders and Tourette's syndrome.[95] Studies now speak of permanent eye damage in children from increased screen time.[96]

It is hard not to concur with the conclusion of Anne Longfield, until recently the children's commissioner for England, when she laments it is 'impossible to overstate how damaging the last year has been for many children – particularly those who were already disadvantaged'.[97] It is a shame she felt she could not speak up sooner.

ONGOING DISRUPTION

At the time of writing, the damage we are inflicting on children and childhood is ongoing and grave. Schools, though open, are operating far from normally and their Covid protective measures not only restrict operations, but in some cases look uncomfortable, even unconscionable, from a child welfare perspective. The prolonged use of face masks throughout the school day – a 'recommendation' that has just been extended – has led to numerous reports of children struggling with light headedness, fatigue and facial rashes;[98] school leaders have spoken not only of how hard it is to teach children in masks, but also of their capacity to disrupt education.[99]

Peer-reviewed papers detailing potentially far-reaching serious physical harms – pulmonary issues, breathing issues,[100] eye issues and skin issues[101] – have been consistently ignored. Some children will now be required to sit what remains of their 'tests' in masks

– including oral language exams. The equality and discrimination implications are profound: children reliant on exemptions have been asked to segregate from others and in some cases to wear distinguishing badges and lanyards.[102] Alarmingly, we have heard anecdotal reports that this has been a yellow star in some schools.

NEVER AGAIN

Darkness on this scale would have been unimaginable a year ago, as it should be now. Yet when I think back a year, I see a grim predictability. A betrayal of children on this scale relies on a perfect storm. Latent, structural failings in policy making and pandemic planning; systemic weaknesses in how we protect children's welfare relative to other interests; and a school system overly reliant on highly politicised unions.

Fixing these issues could be the work of generations, but we could start by appointing a cabinet-level children's minister, incorporating a right to play into the Human Rights Act, and enacting a binding and irrevocable commitment that children's health, welfare and educational needs should be given equal weighting relative to other considerations in policy decisions affecting children.

We must also not shirk the deeper questions. How have we allowed for an environment where the smearing and silencing of those speaking out against flagrant and systemic safeguarding failings has not only occurred, but been encouraged? What are the media failings that have contributed to this? And how do we ensure that such a void of independent advocacy for children never again takes hold both within government and across society at large.

One silver lining might be that the scale and nature of the task ahead is now clarified. If the past year has taught me anything, it is of the desperate need for parents, grandparents and educationalists – people with children's interests at heart – to insert themselves into politics and policymaking to nurture and protect the children who are this country's future ■

> " The restrictions eroded children's ability to play, a fundamental building block of a good life

Further education

FEW PEOPLE REALISE THAT further education is actually the largest part of the country's education system. Twice as many learners undertake a course of study at a local FE college / independent training provider, or take up apprenticeships each year, than enrol in our universities. In numerical terms, the pandemic has impacted the lives of 2.2million students in further education, with over 700,000 people of all ages involved in workplace apprenticeships.[103]

Compared to schools and higher education, FE rarely gets the attention it deserves. The impact of successive lockdowns has only accentuated this feeling among those who work at the front line. After all, we are four years on since the former prime minister, Theresa May – launching the Review of Post-18 Education – said the FE sector had been 'overlooked, undervalued and underfunded'.[104] Despite encouraging statements from ministers in Boris Johnson's government, FE is still no closer to receiving the attention or investment that experts, like Philip Augar, have said the nation desperately needs.[105]

> ## " Lockdown showed us who the real 'key workers' are

A wealth of independent research provides a clue as to why FE is so often the 'forgotten middle-child' in the wider education debate. One obvious challenge is the stop-go cycle of public investment in 16-19 provision and adult skills over the past two decades. The Institute for Fiscal Studies found that funding in FE is down around seven per cent over the past 10 years, compared to the period prior to 2010. Adult and community learning has suffered the most; a loss of two million learning opportunities. Meanwhile, higher education budgets have increased by 50 per cent over the same period.[106]

MEDIA BLINDNESS

The other key observation, which is as much cultural in nature, relates to coverage of FE concerns by the mainstream media. What gets written about also gets talked about in our national life. A recent study by the Social Market Foundation (SMF) concluded that 'the shift to graduate entry' in professional media and 'the decline of regional journalism' have contributed to the neglect of further education by the journalists who help shape public opinion. All this was evident during each national lockdown.[107]

With perhaps a few notable exceptions, peers and MPs were far more likely to talk about the impact of Covid-19 on schools and universities in debates than the effects on further education. In a detailed analysis of national newspaper titles, like the *Guardian*, *The Times* and the *Telegraph*, researchers found that mentions of HE far outweighed similar mentions of FE by up to six or seven times more. The same report cited the fact that compared to 1968 (when it was estimated only 10 per cent of journalists had a degree), it is now estimated that over 90 per cent of UK-trained journalists have obtained a graduate qualification.[108] Moreover, it has become almost mandatory to have a MA in journalism to get on the ladder of working for one of the big national media organisations.[109] Today's journalists appear only to write about where they themselves were educated: in schools, sixth-forms and universities (with FE the missing middle in the equation).

Such empirical insights, like those of the SMF, are really crucial in understanding the wider context of what happened in FE when the coronavirus crisis hit in March 2020. The initial focus of ministers and officials at the Department for Education was on schools: what to do about the academic summer exams and how to

TOM BEWICK - CHIEF EXECUTIVE, FEDERATION OF AWARDING BODIES

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Tom has led various skills initiatives in his 25-year career. In the 1990s, he advised ministers on post-16 education, including the creation of sector skills councils. He spent seven years as CEO of Creative and Cultural Skills, where he introduced the first creative apprenticeships. From 2011, Tom worked as a skills expert in the international arena, leading major projects around the world.

In 2013, Tom was part of an advisory team to the US government working on the expansion of apprenticeships. As founder of the Transatlantic Apprenticeship Exchange Forum and co-founder of a US firm, Franklin Apprenticeships, Tom continues to be recognised for his publications and policy influence on both sides of the Atlantic.

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bail out the universities in a way that ensured student liability to continue paying fees. These issues took up the majority of bandwidth of government officials, many of whom felt immediately under siege. And they were besieged, in part, by a liberal mainstream media that wanted answers to school pupil and teacher safety concerns, ferociously hounded by well-organised trades' unions.

BACK OF THE QUEUE

The situation wasn't helped by an embattled secretary of state for education, Gavin Williamson, who struggled to stay across his entire brief, as demands from across the whole education and skills system started to escalate. It led to the FE sector having to wait in a growing queue for important coronavirus guidance and policy-related decisions to be made.

Take the totemic issue of access to free laptops so that students could take part in online learning after all educational settings were forced to close (except for vulnerable students and key worker families). From the start, 16-19 learners in FE colleges and independent training providers were completely excluded from getting access to free devices.[110] It took until the announcement of the third national lockdown, in January 2021, before FE students in full-time education, including apprentices (that is, those in receipt of child benefit), were finally given the same treatment as their school pupil counterparts.[111] This manifest inequality of treatment went almost unnoticed outside FE circles.

Through the course of the pandemic, we see this pattern of 'afterthought' for FE on a regular basis. The summer exams fiasco, as seen from the perspective of mainstream media coverage, was all about predominantly middle-class students undertaking academic GCSEs and A-Levels feeling 'downgraded' by the original process. Undoubtedly, these students had legitimate grievances about the imposition of the feted algorithm. The impersonal judgement of a computer programme should never have been allowed to trump the informed assessment of a learning centre, with results moderated by the relevant exam board.

There was hardly any public outcry about the tens of thousands of young people who had their vocational results affected by Gavin Williamson's eleventh-hour decision to order that teacher-assessed grades to be used instead. It meant thousands of BTEC students, for example, had to temporarily have their results pulled for a short period while a recalculation was done based on teacher assessment.[112] The fact that

the secretary of state didn't even give this important aspect of the post-16 examinations system much cause for thought, does itself speak volumes about the academic, liberal-biased world-view of education at the top of the Department for Education.

A similar anomaly or outright unfairness has opened up with the second summer of cancelled exams. Those taking GCSE maths, for example, will be able to rely on teacher-assessed grades.[113] But those people, many of whom include low-paid workers in childcare and social care settings, will have to sit an exam in functional skills. With lockdown and social distancing restrictions preventing many settings allowing people to congregate, it's not surprising that up to 50,000 functional-skills learners have found themselves stacked up in the system, unable to take exams or progress in their chosen careers.[114] Despite the injustice, ministers just can't bring themselves to apply the same moral standards to vocational students as they have to ones studying for academic routes. The same is also true of apprenticeships, where they have allowed opportunities for young people to plummet during the pandemic instead of introducing a proper 'skills guarantee', as has happened in Australia and France (as a specific Covid-related measure to support apprentices).[115]

KEY WORKERS

It feels to me that we won't make real progress with the 'skills agenda' until we begin to fundamentally address what authors like David Goodhart called for during the lockdown, with the publication of his excellent book, *Head, Hand and Heart*.[116] In it, Goodhart chides the 'cognitive class' who run our education system, including the educational backgrounds of metropolitan elites who occupy positions of influence as technocrats, politicians and journalists.

As office workers were ordered to work from home, society found out who the real 'key workers' were. Unsurprisingly, we discovered that it was the NHS and social care professionals, the shop-workers, warehouse operatives, delivery-drivers and other key workers who keep the utilities supplied to our homes. These are the people who we *actually* rely on.

Such realisation – about the real value of vocational and practical skills – begs an obvious question: is it really too much to ask for a skills and FE system that is better funded and more valued by society? Perhaps this is the only positive legacy of the pandemic and its aftermath that is still up for grabs ∎

Universities

SOME OF THE MOST GRAPHIC images of lockdown in the UK have come from the higher education sector. It is hard to forget pictures of students locked in university halls of residences,[117] prevented by security from leaving,[118] or of fences erected around their halls, treating the students inside like 'prisoners'.[119]

Universities were not allowed to open in the first lockdown, with 72 per cent of students reporting that their universities made all classes available online.[120] All graduation and matriculation ceremonies were cancelled or postponed. Some universities did partially open in the interregnum between lockdowns, with face-to-face learning in heavily sanitised spaces, coupled with online learning. (Although, anecdotally, during this period faculty reported students reluctant to attend in person because of fear of illness; many staff reported also feeling the same.)

In the third lockdown, universities are once again closed, with teaching back online and students forbidden from coming on to campus with a few exemptions: those on practical courses such as medicine and creative arts; those with mental health problems; and those who don't have the required study or research facilities away from campus. For such students, libraries and study spaces have been opened, with social-distancing measures reinforced throughout, including Perspex screens to impede any face-to-face interactions.

LONELY CAMPUS

As a new vice-chancellor appointed during lockdown, I have felt dismay at the eerie quiet of the empty campus. I've felt for students who have had their social life destroyed or who see online learning as second best. From my perspective, the impact of lockdown appears to have been mainly negative. Data, in the main, support this observation, although there are some positive findings.

> **❝ I have felt dismay at the eerie quiet of the empty campus**

Students have faced increasing mental health problems since face-to-face teaching was stopped in March 2020. In the Student Academic Experience Survey (SAES), students surveyed after lockdown reported lower levels of happiness than those surveyed before that date; the difference was statistically significant.[121] Two surveys reporting in November 2020 found parallel results: a Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) publication reported that 58 per cent of students considered their mental health in a worse state since the beginning of lockdowns (while 14 per cent reported it was better, and 28 per cent said it had remained the same).[122] The Office for National Statistics conducted the Student Covid Insight Survey (SCIS). This found 57 per cent of students reporting a deterioration in their mental health and well-being since the start of the autumn 2020 term.

The number of students who report feelings of loneliness increased from May 2019 to October 2020. The proportion of students who felt lonely daily or weekly increased, from 39 per cent to 50 per cent.[123] Students have felt more isolated too. Comparing 2020 to 2019, a larger proportion of students reported that they do not feel part of the university community (50 per cent to 40 per cent).

Student satisfaction may also have suffered. The Student Covid Insights Survey, conducted at the end of 2020, found that 29 per cent of UK university students were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with their university experience, although we are not able to directly compare this with previous survey results.

**PROFESSOR JAMES TOOLEY
VICE-CHANCELLOR,
UNIVERSITY OF BUCKINGHAM**

James Tooley is vice-chancellor at the University of Buckingham, with previous academic appointments at the Universities of Oxford, Manchester and Newcastle. His ground-breaking research on low-cost private education in developing countries has won numerous awards, including a gold prize in the first International Finance Corporation/Financial Times Private Sector Development Competition, the Templeton Prize for Free Market Solutions to Poverty, and the IEA's National Free Enterprise Award. His book based on this research, *The Beautiful Tree* (Penguin and Cato Institute), was a bestseller in India and won the Sir Antony Fisher Memorial Prize. His other books include *Education: War and Peace* and *Liberty to Learn*.

Building on his research, Tooley has pioneered models of innovation in low-cost private education. He has co-founded chains of low-cost schools in Ghana (Omega Schools), India (Cadmus Education), Honduras (Cadmus Academies) and, most recently, in England (Independent Grammar Schools). He is also involved with large associations of low-cost private schools, including as patron of the Association of Formidable Educational Development (Nigeria) and chief mentor of the National Independent Schools Alliance (India).

Follow James on Twitter: @james_tooley

Two-thirds of these reported that this was down to dissatisfaction with the learning experience. Their social experience was, not surprisingly, a source of even greater dissatisfaction, with over half (53 per cent) reporting themselves dissatisfied or very dissatisfied. In particular, they noted limited opportunities for social or recreational activities, to meet other students, and limited access to sports and fitness facilities.[124]

At the most basic level, the move to online teaching and learning led to the problem that some students were not properly technologically equipped. An Office for Students (OfS) survey found that during the first lockdown 52 per cent of students reported that their learning 'was impacted by slow or unreliable internet connection', with eight per cent 'severely' affected. Furthermore, the OfS found that 18 per cent 'were impacted by lack of access to a computer, laptop or tablet' – four per cent reported being 'severely' impacted.[125]

DROPOUTS AND FINANCES

The impact on dropout rates has not been as marked as might have been expected, at least for home students. A survey conducted in October 2020 found 34 per cent of all students considering dropping out, with 13 per cent saying they thought about it either daily or weekly.[126] Another survey found that 66 per cent of students had either personally considered dropping out or knew someone who had considered it.[127] However, data from the Student Loans Company (SLC) showed that the number of students withdrawing from courses had in fact gone *down* from 2019 to 2020: about 5,500 students withdrew from courses across the UK in autumn 2020, compared with 6,100 in autumn 2019.[128]

Moving away from students, lockdowns have had a severe impact on university finances. The higher education model in the UK is predicated on income from student fees, student accommodation revenue and catering and conference income. According to the Institute of Fiscal Studies, the total size of the university sector's losses could lie between £3 billion to £19 billion, i.e., between 7.5 per cent and 47.5 per cent of the sector's annual income.[129]

Much of this shortfall is from the loss of some international students. These typically pay higher fees than home students, so travel restrictions have cut off important university income. International student deferrals increased by 130 per cent from 2019 to 2020 (from 1,990 to 4,635).[130] One survey from November 2020 found that two-thirds of prospective international students said that lockdowns had changed their plans to study overseas.[131] For many universities, this is a double whammy as income from international students is often used to cross-subsidise research.[132] Overall losses from a decline in international students were estimated to be between £1.4 billion and £4.3 billion.[133]

Universities have also had to incur considerable expense in creating 'Covid safe' campuses. For instance, King's College London estimated over £14 million of expense required on making their campus safe during the 2020-21 academic year. For creating social distancing spaces: £5million; for masks, sanitisers and similar equipment: £4million; for additional cleaning: £2.5million.[134]

POSITIVES

Some do argue that there have been positive gains from lockdown. Some are social: a pro vice-chancellor at Kingston University, for instance, argued that 'we've sucked students into universities and they all mingle with each other, and that's great, but it is also sucking the best talent out of other parts of the country'. [135] If courses are online, students can stay in their communities without having to move to another city and take their skills and talents with them.

Other gains concern online learning: Professor Ronald Barnett of UCL has argued that 'the pandemic is heightening practices that have already begun to emerge worldwide in higher education, in the use of digital technologies'.[136] He argues that digital modes of communication have much to offer both pedagogy and scholarship through students being brought together in a digital space from cultures and societies right across the world. It must also be said that in a recent BBC survey (reported on 1 April 2021), 54 per cent of students polled reported that they were satisfied with online learning, slightly lower than the 59 per cent reported in a HEPI survey of November 2020.[137]

A JISC survey conducted in the autumn term 2020, questioning 22,000 students, was even more favourable. It reported 81 per cent of students learning online. (Given that campuses were closed to most, can one assume that a not-insignificant minority were not learning at all?) The report says that it is 'encouraging that 68 per cent of students rated the quality of online digital learning on their course as "best imaginable", "excellent" or "good" and 62 per cent of them also rated the support they received for online learning equally highly'.[138]

Anecdotally, one hears of academics who realise that the old ways of conducting lectures – sometimes in two- or even three-hour slots – was not a good way of engaging student interest. Inspired by what is possible online, they have broken lectures into 15-minute sections and used quiz tools, such as MS Forms, Mentimeter and Kahoot, to make online sessions interactive. The same tools are used to provide weekly quizzes to reinforce learning, or to elicit student views on teaching and learning. Some academics have used the online provision of textbooks and other resources to gain data on, for instance, how long students on average spend on each text, which pages they spend most on, etc. Experiments with different types of assessments online have been conducted, with some staff and students giving favourable reviews to open-book exams conducted in a 24- or 48-hour window, sometimes with electronic proctoring.

Some academics go as far as to say that the lockdown has shown them that a hybrid model of online lectures with a mixture of face-to-face and online tutorials and seminars may be the way forward for their universities.

Two thirds of students considered dropping out or knew someone who had considered it

Clearly, lockdowns have also reduced the requirement for faculty to travel distances to attend meetings, seminars or conferences, instead enabling these to take place remotely over Teams or Zoom. While this may be a great beneficial side-effect, the loss of being able to meet others informally over coffee for others more than offsets this gain.

Personally, assuming lockdowns come to an end, my best guess is that many will embrace again the social experience of learning that hitherto we have thought so important and eschew these new methods once it is possible to do so.

LEGACY AND RECOVERY

As well as the moves to online learning, another trend that has been intensified by the events of the past year is that of making universities closer to a prospective student's home more attractive. The *Guardian* reported a UCAS survey of over 20,000 school pupils planning to go to university which found nearly a quarter (23 per cent) would choose to study close to their homes, 'accelerating a longer-term trend'.[139]

I have been present at many online briefings and sessions, organised in particular by Universities UK. As a new university vice-chancellor, I picked up quite quickly that people speaking were overwhelmingly in favour of lockdowns, so I tended not to speak up. I have also been aware of other academics who presented what appear to be valid arguments against lockdowns finding themselves fighting to be heard. My aim has been to do everything I can within the law to get my university open and functioning as close to normal as quickly as possible.

Many of the university representative groups, such as Universities UK, the Russell Group and the UCU, have come up with plans for the government to support the sector for recovery.

Universities UK, for instance, early on in lockdown reported that 'without government support some universities would face financial failure. Others would come close to financial failure and would be forced to reduce provision.'[140] Universities UK has also called for a 'transformation fund' to support universities over the next two to three years to reshape or potentially merge with other higher-education institutions.

These are potentially good ideas. However, I have been struck by the way that many universities have been able to adapt and innovate, swiftly and effectively to deal with the unexpected and undesired. My sense is that any university worth its salt will be able to pull itself together very quickly once lockdowns are lifted, here and overseas. If students are able to quickly come back to campuses, for face-to-face teaching, if international students are able to travel once again, and if universities are able to gain income once again from student accommodation, refectories and conferences, then there will be no need for any further government support.

There have been lots of discussions about potential mergers and acquisitions during the lockdown period, and these can beneficially continue. Stronger universities can absorb or partner with weaker ones to ensure that sufficient universities emerge to survive and prosper.

If lockdowns continue, needless to say, the sector will find it very difficult to recover and drastic changes, such as fully online learning as a permanent feature, with its concomitant problems concerning student mental health, will be the order of the day ■

Lecturing

O
N 18 MARCH 2020, THE government announced that universities were to close two days later. All teaching then went online for the rest of the academic year. Exams were done at home. Extensive 'no detriment' policies were rapidly enacted so that students' grades would not suffer even if their education did.

When the new academic year started in September, heavily socially distanced campuses opened for some teaching, although for many it remained solely or predominantly online. A switch to wholly online teaching for all was announced for 9 December, and has continued since. The only exception has been limited exemptions for certain practice-based subjects. As I write, the government has announced universities can reopen on a socially distanced basis on 17 May. For the vast majority of students, this is after their year's teaching has finished.

Education has suffered greatly. Online teaching is simply not an adequate substitute for the lecture and seminar room in most cases. While lecturers were able to draw upon generally reliable online systems to hold virtual classes, in my opinion, this is not generally an adequate way to impart knowledge and cultivate students' critical faculties. Mature and motivated students have coped, while weaker students and those less committed have struggled and in some cases not really engaged with their course.

GRADE INFLATION

With poorer educational opportunities, one would expect grades to suffer. However, that was not the case for the 2019-20 academic year. In fact, 2020 degree classifications improved markedly. The number of firsts increased from 28 per cent in 2019 to 35 per cent in 2020.[141] This is a result of the 'no detriment' policies put in place at the start of the pandemic. Typically, these ensured that grades achieved after the start of the pandemic would only count if they improved a student's average over the year. It is likely that lecturers, well aware of the plight of the students – often presented as customers with defined 'learning outcomes' and 'student experience' expectations to be met – will have marked sympathetically and made informal allowances, too.

It is likely that formal and informal concessions made in the current academic year of 2020-21 will mean

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He has also written on a diverse subjects including citizenship, free speech, decoloniality and education. His latest book is *Volunteer Tourism: the lifestyle politics of international development* (Routledge, 2015).

Jim is also a union rep in the University College Union (UCU) and volunteers with a charity for young asylum seekers.

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that high degree classifications from students who complete in 2021 will continue – these are students who both missed out due to Covid-19 and benefited from 'no detriment' policies and sentiment over each of their latter two years in the case of a three-year degree course. Coupled with loss of education through the (well justified) strikes during their studies, they have missed out greatly.

Many will deem this generosity to be fair, but as with school students who have missed out on important development in reading and writing, university

students have also missed out on the development of expert knowledge in their field. If that is the case, should not grades fall to reflect that?

The context for considering that question is that, notwithstanding the single year prior to Covid, when university leaders acknowledged the issue, grade inflation has been a long standing phenomenon.[142] A degree as something paid for and consumed vies with its role as an objective and consistent measure over time of knowledge and capability. Stating that standards should remain constant in these extraordinary circumstances can sound unfair given the difficulties that young people have experienced during the pandemic. But if a society locks down students, diminishing education as a result, it should be honest enough to admit the loss and look to make up for it through additional study opportunities.

HYBRID CAMPUS

Online learning has come to the fore. The World Economic Forum asserts that 'It is clear that this pandemic has utterly disrupted an education system that many assert was already losing its relevance' and makes the positive case for change.[143] One online provider argues that the pandemic could be a 'driver' to pivot faster and more effectively than ever before' towards online provision.[144]

The advocacy of more online learning, often as part of asynchronous and 'blended' strategies, is shared very widely across the sector's leaders, and is far from new.[145] A greater role for it is often presented to lecturers as an orthodoxy and an inevitability, and this has support from some lecturers.[146]

❝ Society should admit the loss to education and make up for it through extra study opportunities

These changes have implications for universities, their staff and the campus itself, with one report floating the notion of a 'hybrid campus' with staff and students present a good deal less.[147] There are pressures on many students that may make online learning attractive, and there is a place for it. However, my 'new normal' would be one where classroom time would be extended (and staffed) rather than diminished, and where virtual resources were built around that. It is especially important that staff are empowered to teach in the way they deem most effective to ensure univer-

sities develop a higher level of knowledge, skills and critical understanding.

The corollary of the advocacy of online encounters is the longstanding denigration of lectures, caricatured as simply a formal transmission of knowledge and not much more. There are pedagogic disagreements here, but I don't accept the view of one learning technologist that that a lecture is 'passive narrative learning'.[148] Once the lecture has been stripped of its intellectual potential, and is presented as mere repetition of facts, it is not a leap to talk up online provision as its equal or superior.[149] I hope that the discussion of teaching and learning post-Covid is led by academics' views of knowledge rather than metrics, 'learning outcomes' or cost savings.

EXAMS AND JUDGEMENT

Assessment has had to adapt during Covid too. Exams have often been done (if not replaced by other types of assessment) 'at home' over a number of days rather than in two or three hours in the lecture hall. Some have welcomed the forced shift from formal exams to 'at home' assessments, and see Covid as an opportunity to move further in this direction.[150] Indeed, the shift from exams to other forms of assessment (group work, presentations, posters, etc) is a long-term trend. Formal exams have often been caricatured as simply the regurgitation of others' rote-learned ideas.[151] This view rather assumes the critics have not stayed up late struggling to work through logical arguments and difficult concepts to prepare for them.

Judgement is an intrinsic aspect of a lecturer's role, and formal written exams are often the best way to assess knowledge and understanding. The emerging 'new normal' should empower and encourage lecturers to teach and assess as they see fit – something we have been unable to do since March 2020. The approach to exams and assessment generally should be one we determine unencumbered by the deadweight of student-experience metrics and league tables that skew academic judgement. Covid was an aberration, not a model for the future.

HYGIENE THEATRE

Students are at university to learn – that is where a lecturer's responsibility lies. But university is important in other ways too. For many, it is a unique period in their lives: free from the authority of parents and teachers, meeting new people from around the UK and the world, making friends and mistakes, learning from both. This has been lost. The conviviality of the campus was replaced by what some cynically

labelled 'hygiene theatre' at university and 'Zoom fatigue' under lockdown from students' bedrooms. My abiding memory going to teach my first socially distanced class was speaking to an upset, disorientated student, away from her east coast town for the first time, looking for her first-ever university class. All the potential excitement and opportunity to try new things and meet new people as she ventured into adulthood was replaced by masked strangers and a campus devoid of atmosphere and excitement.

Many lecturers, and indeed students too, have been sensitive to the impact lockdown is having on their students and peers. Mental-health services have been strained as isolation and the dispiriting effect of lockdown have kicked in. I hope that universities, communities and government will take this seriously, not only through the provision of good medical services, but also through promoting open, convivial and inspiring cultural events and speakers to ensure that students get back some of the opportunities they've missed out on over the Covid period.

Celebrating our communities and educational obligations to one another would help to draw a line under Covid and counter a residual legacy of loneliness and fear. Disconnection from one's classmates and from the intellectual life of classes is likely to contribute to loneliness, depression and, in some cases, mental-health issues. As academics, our role can be to redouble our efforts to create a culture of powerful knowledge, inspiring ideas, crucial skills and excellence – a focus for us and our students through which they can be part of something unique that enables them to make and remake themselves and their society.

FINANCIAL ABYSS

Finally, the financial plight of universities is not a new issue, but Covid has made this much worse.[152] Lockdown created new concerns that student enrolments would fall as many felt online learning from a bedroom was simply not worth the money nor intellectually satisfying. International student fees – very important in most university balance sheets – have, of course, fallen away almost entirely. University of Exeter Vice-Chancellor Steve Smith stated that universities were 'looking over the edge into a very significant financial abyss'.[153] Another view of the business of higher education argues that while all stakeholders are likely to do whatever they can

to avert insolvencies, that may include 'making the difficult decisions that previously were not palatable, such as compulsory redundancy programmes or alliances … or mergers'. Some have called on the government to bail out the universities, as they have with other important industries. Universities may find the government willing to act as lender of the last resort, but with an expectation of severe cost cutting.

> ❝ Let's create a culture of powerful knowledge, inspiring ideas, crucial skills and excellence

During Covid, universities have pushed on with restructuring – and job losses – in areas they see as not delivering financially or strategically. This has been doubly difficult to take for staff who may have been working hard to adapt to online learning and spent a great deal of time over and above that contracted hours trying to ensure their students were keeping up with their course. It is heartening that some universities' staff have pushed back on redundancy plans.[154] The next few years could be very difficult for lecturers and our union.

MAKING AMENDS

The experience of Covid has been a disaster for education. Good formal grades in part mask that reality. I am also concerned that the experience of lockdown feeds into longer-term cultural trends that militate against us coming back together as an educational community. The social distancing imposed to avoid a virus may leave a legacy of wariness and fear. We also have the less tangible threat of a sort of *cultural* distancing implicit in today's campus identity politics that tend towards defining us by our differences rather than what we have in common – these, unfortunately, have continued apace regardless of Covid. Trust, conviviality and freedom of expression need to be affirmed if our students' potential and that of universities is to be met.

We can make amends. We can make sure a 'new normal' places our duty to educate and academic freedom at the top of the list of priorities. No one should have to accept 'this is how you "deliver" your course', or 'here's how you assess your students'. Neither should we accept the job losses proposed in line with corporate restructuring. Drawing a line under Covid means also challenging some of the trends that have accelerated over the period of the pandemic, but long predate it ∎

The economy

2020 WAS A HORRENDOUS year for the British economy, with annual output down about one-tenth.[155] This collapse in economic activity is widely attributed to the coronavirus pandemic. In November 2020, for instance, the BBC's *Newsnight* described how the UK was facing 'the worst recession in 300 years as Covid crisis continues'.[156]

It reported the chancellor Rishi Sunak warning that the 'economic emergency' caused by Covid has only just begun. Similarly, Andy Haldane, chief economist at the Bank of England, summarised how 'economies have taken a huge hit as a result of the Covid crisis'.[157]

However, such short-hand portrayals are not sufficient, especially for assessing the lessons of the pandemic for any similar future health crises. The coronavirus that dreadfully killed so many people did not itself have a significant direct impact on economic life. The 'huge hit' of 'the worst recession in 300 years' did not result from the disruption arising from all the tragic deaths and from infected people being unable to work. Rather, the economic devastation was primarily the consequence of the restrictions imposed on societies by manygovernments, including by Britain's.

It is no service to grieving families and friends, and to the many more who have been devastated by the financial hardships of the past year, to blur this distinction between the disease itself and of how governments decided to respond to it. We might not be able to prevent another coronavirus pandemic, but from the alarming experiences of this particular one, we can choose to respond better next time, including avoiding so much economic hardship.

PREPARING FOR A PANDEMIC

The pertinence of particular government decisions is illustrated by the correlation between the economic performance in different countries and the varying use of national social restrictions, in particular lockdowns. Partly informed by their earlier experience of SARS, many countries in east Asia were better prepared for the pandemic than Britain and other developed countries in North America and Europe. Several of them adopted a successful targeted approach, including making effectual use of test, track and isolate procedures.

Proficient control of Covid in these Asian countries avoided economy-wide lockdowns and allowed much of industry to keep running, minimising the economic damage. Hence the contrasting economic outcomes. While in aggregate the advanced economies that mostly used extensive and prolonged shutdowns contracted by almost five per cent in 2020, countries that were able to avoid such indiscriminate social restrictions performed much better. For example, South Korea also contracted, though only by about one per cent, while China expanded by over two per cent, and the Vietnamese and Taiwanese economies each grew by about three per cent.[158]

This comparison shows that it was humanly possible to address the same global pandemic and be more effective than Britain has been in limiting death rates as well as mitigating the economic losses from the confinement actions taken. These different approaches to managing the pandemic further illustrate that the mortality-versus-prosperity trade-off that was used against those who questioned the costs of lockdown was not just morally invidious but was also empirically unwarranted.

UNDERLYING PROBLEMS

While the 2020 headline contraction in British economic activity was significant, the economic repercussions of the lockdown are more far-reaching than the changes to gross domestic product (GDP). In fact, it is feasible that during 2021, the GDP metrics will bounce back quite rapidly from their lockdown lows. Reopening societies and letting people resume their social and economic lives, even if not fully, will translate directly into higher levels of output. Nevertheless, beyond the GDP figures, and

regardless of how long some social restrictions are extended, the effects of the lockdown have already amplified several long-running economic problems.

These existed well before the appearance of Covid, and are likely to be more pronounced even after the post-lockdown resurrection of economic activity. Three in particular have been exacerbated by the lockdown experience: first, the British economy's zombifying dependence upon debt; second, its diminishing capacity to deliver decent living conditions for its citizens; and third, the failure of government, so far at least, to confront the long economic depression with policy actions of commesurate radicalism and substance.

PHIL MULLAN - WRITER, LECTURER AND BUSINESS MANAGER

Phil Mullan is a writer and business manager, who researches and lectures on the interplay of economics and politics. His work is informed by over two decades of experience in senior management and advisory roles in international business.

His latest book *Beyond Confrontation: Globalists, Nationalists and Their Discontents* (Emerald Publishing, 2020) addresses the crumbling of the post-1945 world order and the intensification of international rivalries.

He previously wrote *Creative Destruction: How to Start an Economic Renaissance* (Policy Press, 2017) and *The Imaginary Time Bomb: Why an Ageing Population Is Not a Social Problem* (IB Tauris, 2000).

Currently working independently, in 2014 Mullan completed eight years in senior management roles with Easynet Global Services, an international communications services company. Previously he had been chief executive of the internet services and training company Cybercafé Ltd.

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More important for growth and prosperity prospects than the direct economic impact of the lockdown will be what it means for the direction of government policy. Big crises offer opportunities for fresh thinking, something which for several decades has been sorely absent in the economic arena. Since the 1980s governments of all political stripes have avoided taking responsibility for shaking the economy out of its malaise of declining business investment and flagging productivity growth. Instead, they have pursued the seemingly easier path of using policy – monetary, fiscal and regulatory – to try to preserve the status quo.

This has worked to keep most of the old economy going, though at the expense of intensifying its drawn-out atrophy and causing ruinous consequences for living standards. Low-productivity and underinvested economic activities have been kept afloat. These are the zombie businesses that are just able to cover servicing their existing debt, sometimes reliant on a bit more borrowing to do so, but without the means or the incentives to invest in future growth. Moreover, they also act to clog the economy up and crowd-out growth by stronger firms.

The expansion of corporate indebtedness during the lockdowns has reinforced this constraint on economic expansion. Research published by the Bank for International Settlements indicates that the zombie share of British firms had grown from low single-digit percentages in the mid-1980s to about one-in-five before the pandemic arrived.[159] Even against this backdrop, emergency public support measures were an appropriate response to the lockdown since firms and workers were being hit by government decisions over which they had no control.

THE DEBT DILEMMA

However, the inevitable consequence of their implementation has been to extend further the corporate dependence on debt. This deserves to be very high in government focus because when the exceptional state measures are wound down, we are likely to see a jump not only in business insolvencies and redundancies but possibly also an even bigger one in companies left in a zombified state.[160]

As a result of the lockdown, the debt trap has expanded not just for these businesses, but for policymakers, too. Responding to the economic contraction, the government and the Bank of England acted in tandem to extend debt across both the public and private sectors of the economy. During 2020, the Bank of England announced a further £450 billion in its quantitative easing programme of purchasing bonds, mostly of government issue. This scale of increase is hard to fathom, but it was slightly more than the total amount of assets purchased *over the preceding 10 years*, taking the target stock to £895 billion – equivalent to over 40 per cent of GDP.[161] Regardless of the continuing protestations about central bank 'independence', this expansion of liquidity has facilitated the increase in public borrowing during lockdown, which is expected to total about £350 billion in the year to the end of March 2021.[162] However, easy monetary policies do more than expedite government deficit spending. They have been enabling and subsidising the whole economy-wide expansion of debt.

> ❝ Big crises offer opportunities for fresh thinking, something long absent in the economic arena

The debt dilemma that has been multiplied by the lockdown measures arises because an increasingly debt-dependent economy becomes precarious, reliant upon the continued support of lenders. Nevertheless, trying to reverse this dependency is likely to be just as destabilising, because it risks pushing debt-reliant operations close to, or over the brink of collapse. One aspect of the conundrum is that the central bank is reluctant to tighten monetary policy for fear of accelerating financial and economic instabilities. The lockdown repercussions have exacerbated these policy tensions, including the concerns of central bankers in Britain and elsewhere, that tighter policies could crash asset prices that are even more inflated following the emergency stimulus of the past year.

INCREASING POVERTY

Second, following on from the failing economy, the lockdown has magnified the resultant impoverishment of wider sections of people. The social impact of the long depression since the 1970s is expressed as a broadening shortfall in the economy's capacity to

deliver productivity growth and therefore prosperity for its population. For the past half-century, an increasing proportion have been finding themselves unable to attain work that provides for a standard of life in line with customary expectations. For a start, some key employment rates have fallen. Fifty years ago, more than nine of every ten men of working age were employed. In most years now it is less than four out of five.[163]

Just as striking has been the decline in the *quality* of employment for those in jobs, bringing lower pay and decreased security for many. Slower growing, flatter productivity makes for slower growing, flattened incomes. Real wage growth has become so sluggish that on the eve of the pandemic, median weekly earnings for full-time employees remained lower in real terms than a decade previously.[164] The Resolution Foundation think-tank highlighted that the past few years have been particularly harsh for low-income households, whose typical income was no higher in 2018-19 than nearly two decades earlier in 2001-02.[165] An assessment made by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation before the pandemic was that the number of workers in poverty had almost doubled since the mid-1990s to reach four million.[166] Significantly, this was not predominantly due to the much-discussed gig economy and zero hours contracts; almost half were in full-time employment.

The economy's waning ability to provide good jobs for people who want and need them has made it tougher for people to manage their financial affairs. As a result, more are being forced to resort to the ordeal of personal indebtedness, or to the dehumanising dependence on meagre state handouts, or to both. The lockdown impact has reinforced these dissimilar financial circumstances of people arising from an already weak economy.

This went beyond the obvious bifurcation in lockdown experience with white-collar and professional workers often able to work from home, while many production and labour-intensive service workers did not get that choice. The differing sectoral effects of lockdown saw lower-earning parts of the workforce, notably in hospitality, non-essential retail, leisure, the arts and personal services worst affected. The follow on was that lower earners concentrated in these most impacted sectors were more likely to be furloughed or to become unemployed.[167] A House of Commons

Library briefing summarised that among workers, those from an ethnic minority group, women, the young, the low-paid and the disabled were the most negatively economically impacted.[168]

Uneven financial means were therefore aggravated by the lockdown. Unsurprisingly the Joseph Rowntree Foundation's assessment of the pandemic experience found that people already struggling to keep their heads above water have often been hit the hardest.[169] Recall that the furlough scheme, while immediately preferable to people than redundancy, compounded financial woes by consigning millions of lower-paid workers to live on only 80 per cent of their previous earnings. And that excludes the deprivations caused to the unknown number of self-employed out of a potential pool of 2.5 million, according to the Institute for Fiscal Studies, who were unable to claim due to the restricted conditions of the self-employed support scheme.[170]

Post-pandemic recovery expectations for a release of "pent-up" demand point to how the lockdown removed many spending opportunities and produced a jump in household savings. However, the Bank of England itself showed this was far from universal.[171] The already less well-off, including the furloughed and the unemployed, bore the biggest financial brunt and had to eat into any existing savings and, for many, go further into debt.[172] Far from cutting spending during lockdown, the Resolution Foundation found that many low-income households, particularly families with children who were shut out of schools, increased their expenditure on food and other essentials.[173]

It seems the legacy of the lockdown for many people – those who do not find themselves newly unemployed from business closures – will be a return to their previous inadequate employment with even more personal debt commitments to juggle. As it was before the pandemic, the quality of employment provided may remain a more significant measure of the economy's strength than the absolute numbers in some type of work. Employed or not, many people's material autonomy to live well is likely to be further impaired, even with a bounce-back recovery.

A RADICAL ALTERNATIVE

Third, because of how the lockdown has amplified these two tendencies of economy-wide indebtedness

and of individual and family hardship, politicians and policymakers now have a choice to make. They can continue with the decades-old muddle-through approach. This seeks stability in the present at the cost of tolerating the legacy of nearly five decades of decaying productive capability, with the greater financial and economic instability that this portends. Or, learning from how the lockdown has brought pre-existing economic quandaries closer to the surface, politicians can resolve at last that their evasiveness must end.

This radical alternative requires that government turn its mantra about 'building back better' into a comprehensive programme of structural transformation. The crucial focus should be *creating* good-quality jobs. This includes state institutions stopping their actions that extend zombification. It means the government sponsoring, with sufficient long-term, venture capital-style funding, the creation of new businesses and quality jobs across many befitting sectors, including transport, health, energy sources and improved agricultural, construction and production techniques. And third, it requires state support for people during the inevitable dislocations of the transition from the old economy to the new. One of many benefits of pursuing economic renewal along these lines would be to create the wealth for providing the stronger healthcare and social care systems that would have saved a lot more lives during Covid, and can help save more in any future public-health crises.

However, the initial signs from government are not propitious. Existing budget plans to pump more money into the economy can spur GDP expansion in the immediate post-lockdown period, but they won't fix the long-running structural economic problems. Emergency government interventions can be necessary in a crisis, but permanent artificial stimulus is counter-productive as it drains away resourcefulness and initiative.

A bigger dose of ongoing state stimulus measures is likely to reinforce decline by propping up incumbent businesses and sustaining low-quality jobs. Over the longer-term that is no better for people than if the fiscal hawks took control and sought to balance the Treasury's books precipitately. Under both scenarios, the government would continue to evade tackling the productivity slump. Initial signs of persisting preservationist practices are matched by the government seeming to have given up on substantive productive transformation through abandoning its own already limited industrial strategy, launched only four years ago.[174]

The lockdown's consequences have highlighted Britain's economic fragilities, but maybe not to those who have become inured to the social realities of economic depression. This government may still change its ways, but its approach so far indicates that it would be imprudent to wait for a Whitehall-initiated economic renaissance. A more constructive way forward could extend the People's Lockdown Inquiry into a people's inquiry into economic renewal that encompasses local and regional forums for change set up all around the country ■

**BARONESS HELENA MORRISSEY OBE
FINANCIER, CONSERVATIVE PEER**

Helena has over three decades' experience in financial services, including 15 years as CEO of Newton Investment Management, during which time AUM grew from £20bn to £50bn. She is lead NED at the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office and on the board of Green Park, an executive search firm specialising in diverse appointments. In July, Helena will become chair-designate at AJ Bell, the FTSE250 firm.
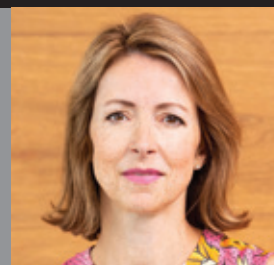
Helena is well known for her work on inclusion and diversity. In 2010, she founded the 30% Club, a campaign for better gender-balanced boards. Since then, the representation of women on FTSE350 boards has risen from less than 10 per cent to over 30 per cent. There are now 17 30% Clubs throughout the world. Helena chairs the Diversity Project, aimed at improving diversity across all dimensions in the investment industry.

Helena entered the House of Lords in September 2020 and was appointed a Dame in 2017. Her first book, *A Good Time to be a Girl*, was described by *Forbes* magazine as one of the five most empowering books for women in 2018. She posts daily career dressing advice on Instagram.

Helena is married with nine children.

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Investment

O N THE FACE OF IT, THE investment and savings industry has escaped relatively unscathed from the pandemic. Asset managers earn fees based on the value of funds under management; as the first lockdown loomed, global equity markets fell 30 per cent,[175] but after governments and central banks worldwide responded with an unprecedented US\$20trillion stimulus and vaccines were announced, the global index ended 2020 up 14 per cent.[176] There were massive divergences between the 'winners' (such as technology stocks) and 'losers' (including airlines and bricks-and-mortar retail), but overall, it was an impressive recovery.

And a big initial concern – that the industry wouldn't be able to make universal remote working actually *work* – quickly subsided, as we readily adapted to Zoom and Teams. In fact, remote working seemed to make us *more* productive, with less time wasted on commutes or travelling to meetings. The giant enforced working-from-home experiment proved that working from home can be both efficient and cost-effective.

Hopes have grown that the experience paves the way to more modern ways of working in what's been a very traditional industry, shifting the basis of promotion and reward away from hours spent in the office to results achieved. This is good news for diverse talent,

women and other under-represented groups whose ability and willingness to play office politics and spend endless hours being 'present' in the office are often less strong than their ability to perform. The opportunity to 'build back more fairly' remains one of the potential silver linings to the pandemic's dark cloud.

FADING OPTIMISM

But it's not quite that straightforward. I chair the Diversity Project, an initiative to create a more inclusive, more diverse and more equitable investment and savings industry. Each autumn, we hold a seminar; 2020's was, of course, completely virtual – and bigger, with over 1,000 people signed up. I asked attendees whether they thought the pandemic created more of an *opportunity* to further diversity and inclusion in the industry or more of a *threat*. Seventy-two per cent felt it was more of an opportunity.

But as the pandemic wore on and lockdowns wore us down, that optimism faded. In February 2021, I asked the same question again at another webinar, this time specifically on gender issues. Now, the majority (56 per cent) felt it was more of a threat. Women working in asset management have – like women in other sectors – borne the brunt of home schooling, domestic duties and eldercare. Many tell me their aim is 'survival'; career aspirations have taken a back seat.

At the same time, despite good intentions, the promise of mentoring, work experience, apprenticeships and entry-level jobs for less privileged and ethnic minority students and graduates has been difficult to keep. Our 2020 'women returners' programme – already overwhelmed with applicants – was cut in half.

This is just the tip of the iceberg in terms of the impact on people working or aspiring to work in the industry. Early in the first lockdown, the Diversity Project realised that many of our member firms were – understandably – prioritising operational resilience and the servicing of clients, so we staged a series of 'Ask Me Anything' sessions for their employees. These revealed the scale and severity of the impact of lockdown. Our most in-demand sessions have been on mental health, the issues affecting working families, and women. Questions are submitted in advance – usually anonymously – and answered by a panel of both experts and industry practitioners. This is a 'stiff upper lip' industry, but the revelations are heart-breaking. Lockdown has created anxieties about just about everything that matters to us – vulnerable elderly parents, young children falling behind at school, lonely friends and colleagues, victims of domestic abuse, withdrawn teenagers, anxious university students, and – increasingly – worries about job security. These are the concerns we hear about in every sector, every company, every family – fund management is no different. A financial firm that uses Rungway, a digital workplace advice platform enabling employees to seek help, was shocked to see 'panic attack' as the most frequent tag for questions.

And now, after a full year in what's increasingly felt like captivity, with most people in the fund-management industry spending their entire days in the virtual world, the impact on our mental health has accumulated. Lockdown has taken a heavier toll on those living alone, those in cramped shared accommodation, and those just starting out in their careers. Many can't wait to get back to the office. There are other, less obvious issues. Board meetings – an important

Many tell me their aim is 'survival' – career aspirations have taken a back seat

oversight of management – have become more formulaic and less effective online. It's impossible to 'read the room' or have those side alley conversations that might really get to the heart of an issue. The 'raise the hand' etiquette prevents naturally flowing debate. Relationships with colleagues that once seemed close now feel distant. There's no immediate impact, but we are storing up potential problems ahead.

DANCING ON A TIGHTROPE

Finally, and critically, caution is now setting in about the market outlook and business prospects. Equity markets defied 2020's economic decline, but few practitioners are complacent. Stating the obvious, there is an awful lot of government debt to service. Sovereign debt ratios in developed countries are approaching an average 125 per cent, up from 84 per cent pre-Covid.[177] In the US, President Biden's 'think big' stimulus – 10 per cent of GDP – is expected to take that ratio to 135 per cent.[178] Central banks have so far disguised the problem by soaking up debt issuance almost pound for pound, dollar for dollar: the Bank of England now owns nearly half the gilt market. The whole edifice is built on the premise that debt will remain cheap to service, that is, that bond yields will remain low; the 'plan' is to buy time, keep stimulating until sustainable growth is achieved and only then tighten our belts and get debt under control.

It may just work, but we are dancing on a tightrope. Excessive economic stimulus carries the risk of inflation – anathema to bond markets. Since last August, the 'reflation trade' has already caused the worst sell-off in US Treasuries in a century. Equity markets continue to cling to the greater hope of growth from the stimulus, but at a certain, indeterminable level of bond yields, the fear of an unsustainable debt mountain would dominate. The investment community is hunkering down, cutting costs (ie, making redundancies) and watching those rising bond yields nervously. Lockdown has wrought damage on many businesses and people's finances. Sadly, the worst may yet be to come ■

**PARA MULLAN
FELLOW, CHARTERED INSTITUTE
OF PERSONNEL & DEVELOPMENT**

Para's expertise is in people management. She retired in early 2021. Her last post was at EY-Seren, as operations director. Previous to that she worked as a senior project manager at the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development. Para is a fellow member of the CIPD.

Her main research area is into the future of work, investigating work on cultural, social, technological and organisational levels. She is a regular contributor to the Academy of Ideas Economy Forum.

Other interests include current political affairs. Para is passionate about free speech and the right to speak one's mind without being ostracised.

Working life

THE ENFORCED LOCKDOWN imposed by the government on 23 March 2020 had a huge impact on the world of work. In particular, it affected different parts of the workforce in distinctive ways. The first lockdown broadly split people into three similar sized groups. About three in ten workers continued to work from home, and about the same proportion continued to travel to their work, earning the broad-brush label of 'essential workers'.[179] The remaining third were people unable to work, including the 30 per cent of the workforce that were furloughed.[180]

Over time, there has been some adaptation to government restrictions both by employers and employees. By the third lockdown, whereas the figures for people working from home remained pretty stable, more people were travelling to work, rising to about four in every ten.[181] This was partly due to more manufacturing plants and construction sites being able to continue their operations. This adjustment contributed to the share of workers furloughed falling to about two in ten.[182]

This differential impact of lockdown has opened up or magnified divisions within society. While most professional and white-collar workers were able to work from home and assumed their jobs would remain secure, many furloughed workers were worried about their future. Unsurprisingly, lots were anxious about losing their jobs when their workplaces were closed down indefinitely. Others were concerned about losing their skills or not being able to progress with their career and earn promotion.

Divisions also formed within the same workforce between those who retained their jobs, usually on full pay, and those who were laid off on furlough with their incomes cut, usually by a fifth. Meanwhile, some of those who were able to, and expected to continue working, were envious of their furloughed colleagues who were being paid for doing nothing.

LIVING AT WORK

Workers' experience of the lockdown depended both on which broad grouping they were part of, as well as being influenced by their personal and household circumstances. In the first instance, many of those working from home were excited about not having a daily commute, about having more time with their families, to enjoy nature and even have some autonomy in managing their week. However, these novelties have somewhat diminished over the year, especially by the time the third lockdown was imposed.

Working from home began to become more arduous. One person I interviewed described the experience as being like 'a hamster in a cage'. The distinction between work and home life became more blurred than ever. With no commute to physically separate work from home and no distinctive office surroundings, the sensation of living at work became more tangible.

Also, with the pervasive use of digital tools, the trend seemed to be towards 24/7 working, including the constant checking and responding to emails, as well as being tied to Zoom calls for much of the time. The overall impact encroached on people's leisure time. Without adequate time to think and reflect, for many their sense of autonomy and control by continuous working from home was not extended, but undermined.

Parents and young workers had additional challenges to handle. Due to the prolonged closure of schools for the children of home workers, one survey of the lockdown period found two-fifths of all working parents were having to balance home schooling with a full-time job. On average, these parents spent three hours a day schooling, having to make up lost work hours in the evenings after their children had gone to sleep.[183] Many parents with less spacious homes, as well as younger workers with or without children, had to use their kitchen tables as the 'office', resulting in inevitable work disruptions from the clatter of household life.

> ## " One person described working at home as being like 'a hamster in a cage'

ISOLATION

Younger people with less previous working experience often found home working especially atomising and demotivating. Remote working has therefore been most challenging for new recruits and especially those taking their first job, with their recruitment, onboarding and initial work all being conducted online.

Towards the extreme, young analysts from Goldman Sachs reported that they were working 95-hour weeks, had little sleep and received brusque treatment by senior bankers. On average, they put their job satisfaction at two out of 10. One even wrote that the experience was worse than foster care.[184] While the banking industry acknowledged that these were quite normal experiences for young staff, historically being in the office together helped to take the sting out of this stressful situation. With face-to-face contact, young workers could build up a team spirit, and go to the pub together for a drink.

The isolating experience of many younger new joiners highlights how home working robs even office work of its social collaborative character. Young recruits need to be able act as sponges, absorbing the ways of working from more experienced colleagues.

Already some organisations are learning that something important is being lost from not having face-to-face inductions with their new joiners, and are experimenting with alternatives. The consultancy PwC, that normally recruits hundreds of graduates and school leavers each year, has designed a virtual space for new joiners to help bridge the gap between physical and virtual workplace. With the same objective, IBM has created Facebook groups and formalised a 10-day induction process to 'imbue the culture and spirit of collaboration, teamwork and self-reliance' and help new starters feel more secure.[185] While it is positive that employers are making an effort, these attempts remain prescriptive and formal. It is unlikely they can fully substitute for new joiners being able to spontaneously create their own social networks from direct physical contact.

HOME SURVEILLANCE

Another concerning trend amplified by working from home during lockdown is the extension of employee surveillance. One YouGov survey found 12 per cent of firms were already monitoring their staff working remotely, while eight per cent had plans to implement monitoring, and another six per cent were considering it.[186]

Silkie Carlo, director of the anti-surveillance group Big Brother Watch, describes this lockdown trend as the natural progression of existing surveillance in the workplace: 'Now that is morphing into home surveillance it takes on a new shape and is more worrying, because some employers aren't realising that yes, some employees are working from home, but the home still remains a private space.'[187]

COLLABORATIVE CULTURE

The Covid restrictions will be lifted at some point, but it is likely the current debate about office-versus-home working will continue. So far it seems probable that a hybrid form of working will be adopted by many organisations. People will have the choice, or in some cases be expected, to work from home for at least part of the week. However, office space will remain in some form for workers to attend as acknowledgement spreads that direct social engagement is necessary for effective working.

Physical collaborative working activities are valuable for helping create a corporate culture, for potentially enabling creativity, serendipity and productive working practices. They can also help offset the dehumanising features of work. With the world of work unlikely to return as it was pre-Covid, it is important we guard against the persistence of the downsides of lockdown working ∎

Hospitality

THE NIGHT BEFORE BORIS Johnson announced to Britain that we would be entering a 'lockdown', I was having dinner in Stoke Newington, London, with a friend that had launched one of the most successful venues in Ibiza many years ago. We were reminiscing on how venues are capable of transforming areas and regions. As with Ibiza, so with Shoreditch, Birmingham's Digbeth, Bristol's Montpelier, Manchester's Northern Quarter and all of Brighton. The restaurant was empty except for us and the proprietor was telling us how nervous he was about what was going to happen.

He was right to be worried. The response of the government to the threat of Covid 19 has been erratic, confusing, contradictory, confounding and enormously damaging.

It should be noted that all was not well even in the run-up to the pandemic. Licensed premises in Britain are subject to some of the most stringent conditions and rules. Yet UK operators are some of the best in the world with a remarkably buoyant and dynamic sector that is part of British 'soft power', as Joseph Nye would put it. These firms and premises account for collectively over £130 billion of revenues[188] and 3.2million employees, which is 10 per cent of the workforce[189] and five per cent of national GDP.[190]

STATE OF UNCERTAINTY

One of the biggest problems with the Covid response has been the continued uncertainty. Businesses rely on being able to plan, organise, promote and execute. There is a cycle to all areas of hospitality. Supply chains, managing and maintaining staff, scheduling events and – for those in the nightclub, music venue and festival arenas – very long timelines for booking of talent and promotion. It became clear from very early on that nightclubs and festivals were simply not going to be allowed to open. Being so concerned with the safety of clientele as operators are, there was acknowledgement that to deal with the pandemic initially, stringent measures would be needed. Many in hospitality sprang into voluntary action with zeal, even providing free meals for those that needed it.[191]

It was never clear, however, why some activities were permitted during the lockdown and not others. Many, like Harvey Goldsmith and Alex Proud, pleaded with government to allow their expertise to be utilised, having experience in setting up mini city-like areas for festivals; their logistical insights could have been

ALAN D MILLER
CO-FOUNDER, OPEN FOR ALL

Alan Miller started his career staging international events in the music business. He is the co-founder of London's Old Truman Brewery cultural business centre, which helped regenerate Shoreditch, and was CEO of The Vibe Bar for 20 years. He is also a film and TV producer/director.

Alan sat on The Arts Council's UK London Arts Board and ran the New York Salon, a forum for inter-disciplinary, open debate with speakers from around the world.

As a founder and first chairman of the Night Time Industries Association, Alan represented cultural interests across Britain as well as around the globe.

Alan co-founded Recovery, bringing together hospitality and arts groups along with teachers, scientists, doctors, parents and citizens to launch the collective call for a calm, reasonable and balanced response to the pandemic.

Alan is writing in a personal capacity.

Follow Alan on Twitter: @alanvibe

transformative. The offers were not taken up. Instead government decided to take advice from 'experts' that did not understand this sector at all. Goldsmith, the creator of Live Aid, said that it was clarity, more than subsidies, that was desperately needed.[192]

REFUSAL TO ENGAGE

The Night Time Industries Association (NTIA) and all the other hospitality associations campaigned for several months to engage with the government. Why were landlords of properties being allowed to continue demanding rent and accumulating arrears while businesses were shut and forced to take loans from banks to keep going? The government did indeed suspend landlords' ability to evict tenants during the last 12 months, incrementally – with enormous strain and stress on all operators. However, the pandemic response led to a *net* decline of 5,975 sites in 2020[193] (five per cent of the total), which represents the actual closure of 9,930 sites along with 4,000 opening for the first time. Those opening faced dire circumstances.

Many applauded Rishi Sunak's unprecedented furlough scheme, along with the reduction in VAT and business loans. Furlough has been a double-edged sword, however, as one operator told me in Newham during last summer's Eat Out to Help Out (EOHO) scheme: 'I can't get many of my young staff to come in because they're on furlough and say they don't feel safe being here', despite the risk of Covid to young people being minimal. Government loans have enabled some businesses to continue, but many big names have gone under with thousands of redundancies, all of which has a multiplier effect on families and areas.[194] Many businesses went through CVAs (company voluntary agreements), which meant creditors lost money, with payment of the remainder to be paid over several years.[195]

BLAMING HOSPITALITY

Was lockdown necessary? The first lockdown was perhaps understandable, given the levels of uncertainty about the virus and how it would behave, although there is much debate as to that. Lockdown is an entirely novel mechanism never used before, and some commentators have questioned its efficacy when weighing up *all the risks and all of the costs*. This debate continues in comparisons of areas that have stayed relatively open with those that locked down: Sweden with Britain, Florida with California.

But the rationale for subsequent closures seemed far less clear. EOHO provided an enormous boost and restaurants and pubs played their part by investing enormous amounts in social distancing, additional safety measures and table service, all with the arbitrary 'rule of six'. The result was a tiny transmission rate from hospitality, yet some tried to blame EOHO for spiking positive cases. As Greg Fell, director of Public Health Sheffield, made clear, the risk was minimal from hospitality.[196] There were far higher risks at hospitals and care homes. Meanwhile, nightclubs and festivals have been closed for a year.

One must also account for the experience of so many independents in Britain and the stress of being continually in the dark. While so much of the public has been disciplined, resilient and stoic, there has been an unpleasant trend to blame people – joggers in parks, drinkers outside bars or people having picnics – for being 'irresponsible'. The combined toll of vague timelines, dates, strategy, insights and opening, along with erratic open-close rulings, tiers, rules rushed through without consultation and consideration of impacts for businesses has been enormous. Perhaps nowhere is this more true than with the idea of having 'Covid passports' or 'certificates' as a means to allow access to premises.[197]

> **" The risk from pubs and restaurants was minimal compared to hospitals and care homes**

NIGHTCLUBS AND FESTIVALS

The businesses most severely impacted in the ecosystem of night-and-day operations have been nightclubs and festivals. They have been closed for a year, with many attempts to demonstrate how venues could be opened effectively last summer,[198] prior to the enormously successful and impressive vaccination roll-out. So, it has been somewhat ironic to hear Michael Gove talk about nightclubs so much recently. As noted above, nightclubs and later-night bars have been subjected to enormous restrictions historically in Britain.[199]

Venues have faced measures like Public Protection Orders and have been described one-sidedly as being 'hotspots' of 'anti-social behaviour', rather than the places where we might find the new Stormzy, be inspired by the creations of London Fashion Week or provided with such wonders as Ian Schraeger Hotels.

This is regrettable, considering Prime Minister Boris Johnson's team when at London's Mayoral Office was fully briefed – and encouraging – about the enormous value and benefits that nightclubs bring to

cities and regions, leading directly to the appointment of a Night Time Commission and 'Czar' under the current mayoralty.[200] This has been replicated now in Manchester and Bristol, with other cities planning such measures. Nightclub operators are some of our most capable entrepreneurs. Their businesses stage the best of British and international talent, and offer an academy for the next generation, with exceptional technical and operational staff. Many young people work in the night-time and hospitality industries to subsidise their studies and lives. It is impossible to imagine the transformation of Hackney, Peckham, Brighton, Leeds, Glasgow or Nottingham without nightclubs. They bring new trade into areas and they help increase much-needed revenue. Changing perceptions of an area also leads to the creation of new housing projects and brings other businesses into these areas. As Sara Tate, MD of advertising agency Mother, said at an NTIA event in 2016: 'We came to Shoreditch because of the nightlife.'

> " Venues are described as 'hotspots' of 'anti-social behaviour', rather than places where we might find the new Stormzy

SOCIAL COMMUNITY

One positive outcome of lockdown, it could be argued, is that absence makes the heart grow fonder: many now realise how important pubs, clubs and venues are to our everyday lives and indeed to the British way of life. The Romans brought the original *tabernae* to these shores and, over the two thousand years since, our public houses, inns and gastro bars have been both the envy of the world and places to meet, debate, fall in (and out) of love and be part of a social community. The Enlightenment would not have been possible without the Salons, at coffee houses and pubs. If this last year has shown us anything, it is how important these cultural hubs, these destination experiences are – for tourism, for local business and revenue, for jobs and for community.

Coming on top of long-term trends, such as the loss of so many pubs each year,[201] the response to Covid has left all hospitality on tenterhooks. The love so many have for them, however, is keenly felt.

Sacha Lord, night-time adviser for Greater Manchester, has asked the government repeatedly why it is that 'non-essential retail' was allowed to open on 12 April, yet hospitality was told to wait another five weeks. The lack of a clear evidence-based response has led him and Hugh Osmond to take the government to the High Court.[202]

Freelancers in particular have been terribly impacted. Not fitting into many of the original criteria for claiming either loans or any supplements, some five million of them have suffered immensely. Excluded UK has chronicled this diligently.[203]

ONGOING RESTRICTIONS

Having lobbied government consistently to listen, staging protests such as #WeMakeEvents,[204] and creating groups such as One Industry One Voice[205] many working in festivals and events are despairing. Harvey Goldsmith has announced that because of the risk of not knowing what the government will do next and not having adequate insurance provision, he will not be staging any festivals this summer. While Melvin Benn of Festival Republic has announced he is confident that Reading and Leeds Festivals will go ahead,[206] many are far less so.

That said, a demonstration of how much demand there is can be seen by the fact that many of the smaller independent festivals sold out within an hour or two of announcing this year. A major concern, however, is that many local councils, who have the authority over licensing in their jurisdiction along with the police, can impose an array of restrictive measures. We Are The Fair CEO Nick Morgan, one of the protagonists featured in *The Political Economy of Informal Events,* has talked extensively about these issues locally and the impact on trying to stage an event.[207]

This is particularly of concern with regard to so-called 'Covid passports'. Trials have been set for a number of events. We have just seen Cinemas UK announce that they will not be asking to see any health documents from their clientele. Similarly, Hot Tub Comedy Club in Liverpool, which was a part of the government trial, has stepped away, citing the fact that it was not made aware it would mean Covid certificate checks. The British Retail Consortium has now come out against this, too. As Peter Marks, CEO of REKON UK, a 44-venue chain, told me: 'I was bombarded by furious customers telling me they won't be coming to any of my clubs if we have Covid passport checks.' Many others in the sector have been vocally challenging this – and as Silkie Carlo at Big Brother Watch asks, where does this all stop?[208]

While many in local authorities now understand the value of clubs, bars, events and hospitality generally, thanks to persistent campaigning in recent years,[209] some of the prevailing influencing factors that have shaped the past decade and a half have impacted the

outlook of many. There has been a low tolerance for any kind of risk. Some argue that risk assessments and health-and-safety concerns slow business down significantly without making it safer.[210] [211] There has been an impulse that 'when in doubt, regulate' rather than innovate or create ambitious infrastructure.[212] This has led to a perfect storm in terms of the impacts on business.

REOPENING BRITAIN

How do we recover from all this? We need a robust approach that allows the dynamic and creative industries to flourish. The government must stop contradicting itself, be very clear and honest. That means if it really is 'data not dates', then act like it. There have numerous U-turns on policy and government's inability to listen to Britain's *fourth largest sector* has resulted in immense loss. However, the tenacity, confidence, optimism and energy of our operator teams provide an army of possibility. They need to be allowed to open up fully. To be encouraged and not to be further undermined. We can come back from this – we can be the world leader in cultural entertainment and hospitality – but only if we allow our phenomenal practitioners to *do their work unfettered.* We must not allow accrued rent arrears to be imposed entirely on tenants.[213]

I have not listed a series of 'take away' points here. But overriding is this: Britain has legally allowable 24-hour licensing as part of the UK Licensing Act. Local authorities have never generally permitted much of that – and often actively prevented it. Reopening should be accompanied by 24-hour hubs – areas where clusters of nightclubs bars and venues can operate, can acquire cheap freeholds and very long-term leases, and attract young people to live, work and play there. They should also allow more places to open late, past the standard-issue 2AM. This way we can ensure a world-class offering.

Visit Britain often provides examples of our sector to attract global tourists[214] and we know from Vegas to Nashville, Ibiza to Austin, Amsterdam and Barcelona, that hospitality makes cities and regions more desirable all round. It's time to allow this to happen now ∎

Cancer

KAROL SIKORA
PROFESSOR OF CANCER MEDICINE

Professor Karol Sikora is chief medical officer of Rutherford Health. He was the founder of Cancer Partners UK, which has created UK's largest independent UK cancer network with private equity. He was professor and chairman of the Department of Cancer Medicine at Imperial College School of Medicine and is still honorary consultant oncologist at Hammersmith Hospital, London. He was seconded to be director of the WHO Cancer Programme in 2000.

He was the founding dean and now professor of medicine at Britain's first independent medical school at the University of Buckingham and a fellow of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge. He has published over 300 papers and written or edited 20 books including *Treatment of Cancer* – the standard British postgraduate textbook, now in its seventh edition in over 30 years. His book, *The Street-Wise Patient's Guide to Surviving Cancer* was published recently.

A year ago, he joined Twitter and now has over 300,000 followers. During the Covid crisis he has been dubbed the Positive Professor.

Follow Karol on Twitter: @ProfKarolSikora

THE FACTS ARE CLEAR. EVERY day, winter and summer, a thousand people in Britain will be told they have cancer for the first time. That's 30,000 a month; 360,000 a year.[215] But at the time of the peak incidence of Covid, this dropped precipitously. Where did the missing patients go? How many are there? We know they exist, and their diagnosis was significantly delayed. Many will die consequently because of the delay. The excess deaths can only be counted accurately in at least one year's time. Estimates vary from 30,000 to 60,000 lives lost.[216]

Every policy has direct and indirect effects of intended and unintended consequences. Policies that require people to stay at home to reduce the morbidity and mortality from Covid will have effects way beyond the virus. They will adversely affect mental health and economic prospects for many. They will also affect people's willingness and ability to access health and social services. This is likely to result in increases in morbidity and mortality from otherwise curable diseases, such as cancer, acute myocardial infarction (heart attacks) and stroke.

Despite the important impacts, most of the scientific evidence used to guide Covid policy in the UK has focused entirely on epidemiological models of the effects of Covid alone, and most notably the model formulated by Imperial College London. This was widely taken to be pivotal in the decision to go into lockdown. More recent models, such as the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) model immediately preceding the decision to go into a second national lockdown, do go beyond

direct Covid mortality to consider the excess deaths from non-Covid causes in a scenario without extra measures. But these models still do not compare the morbidity and mortality that would result from other policy options. Cancer patients have been greatly disadvantaged by these policies.

HOW CANCER PRESENTS

Cancer presents in a myriad of ways depending usually on the site of the primary tumour. Every part of the body can be affected, manifesting in a wide range of symptoms as diverse as headache, cough, chest pain, weight loss, abdominal discomfort, orifical bleeding and tiredness. Most patients with these symptoms do not have cancer – but it's a massive sorting out exercise for the GP and hospital services.

The UK has been behind mainland Europe in cancer survival as long as this comparison has been available.[217] It's now clear that this is due to diagnostic delays. From 2000, patients with symptoms and signs likely to be due to cancer were triaged into a pathway whereby they were guaranteed to be seen by a relevant hospital consultant within two weeks. This did increase the speed of access to secondary care for some, but only 26 per cent of cancer patients came through this pathway.[218] The majority remained in the traditional slow path, waiting months to see a consultant and then a further wait for key investigations such as CT scans, ultrasound, X-rays and endoscopy. Such delays did not happen in Europe where nearly all patients are fully investigated within two weeks. So, when Covid hit the UK, this under-capacity had a profound effect on increasing delays in diagnosis.

> **We urgently need to restore cancer services to pre-pandemic levels**

TREATMENT DELAYS

The root causes of delay in cancer diagnosis and treatment due to Covid are fourfold:

- Patient delay in seeking help from GP or other health providers.
- Curtailment of primary care services making access difficult.
- Breakdown of hospital diagnostic pathways for cancer.
- Delays in starting the first cancer treatment – usually surgery.

At different phases of the pandemic, different factors assumed greater importance. Patient delay – essentially the bottling up of symptoms – were prominent at times of greatest lockdown. Fear was used deliberately by our government to enhance the *stay home – protect the NHS – save lives* message. Patients simply suppressed the progressive symptoms of early cancer.

There were clear difficulties in accessing primary care services. Even before Covid, GP appointments took some time to get and were essentially rationed. Patients with symptoms were used to waiting a month or more to see their GP and would often use other providers such as urgent care centres in hospitals or NHS 111. The lack of capacity within the system meant that once Covid caused additional workload, GP services in many areas simply crumbled.

The third point of delay was in the access to hospital diagnostic services. These are investigations that have to be performed within the hospital often as an outpatient procedure. The most common cancer related diagnostics include X-rays, CT scans, MR scans, ultrasound images, endoscopy and image guided biopsies. Ultimately the diagnosis of cancer requires a piece of tissue for histological examination making a biopsy or the excision of primary tumour mandatory.

The fourth cause of delay was access to operating theatres and anaesthetics at a time when even urgent surgery was suspended due to lack of staff. Surgery is the normal first line treatment for a wide range of solid tumours. For a few patients, alternative strategies were used at the height of the pandemic, but delays for most were inevitable as cancer surgery is nearly always an aerosol-generating procedure.

These delays inevitably caused upward stage migration in many patients, so reducing overall five-year survival significantly in many patients. As an example, a Stage 1 breast cancer patient has a 98 per cent chance of cure whereas a Stage 3 patient has only 25 per cent.[219]

Similar prognostic figures apply to most solid tumours of which the four most common are breast, lung, prostate and colon. The timing of this upstaging is very variable and depends on both tumour and host factors. Delays in the diagnosis and treatment

of cancer is the commonest cause for litigation. It is accepted that where there is breach of duty, a delay of six months or more is adequate proof of causation in claims for compensation.

The upstaging means that primary cancers usually confined to single organs are more likely to spread to lymph nodes and other structures. Effective treatment will therefore need complex surgery and require more medical intervention – chemotherapy, immunotherapy and radiotherapy to achieve optimal outcome.

As infection and mortality rates start to decline for a second time, the NHS has entered its third phase response to Covid-19. Continued vigilance is required to mitigate the risk of a further outbreak. Recently announced cancer metrics still demonstrated a significant reduction in the number of consultant referrals, and the number of new patients taking up radiotherapy and systemic anti-cancer therapies is still below normal. We urgently need to restore cancer services to pre-pandemic levels, to minimise the potential harm caused by the current disruption to services. Additional capacity is also needed to handle the backlog of patients.

CONTINUING ISSUES

Referrals
Even now, patients are still choosing not to present at their GPs due to a fear of exposure to infection. This will result in a delay of patients entering the system for diagnosis. They need to be assured that their concerns about symptoms should be acted upon and will be managed in a safe environment.

Diagnosis
The availability of, and attendance at, screening programmes has significantly slowed down. This will result in early indications of cancer being missed and the start of treatment delayed.

Surgery
Most urgent cancer surgery has continued, albeit at reduced levels.[220] The NHS cancer hubs are providing Covid free hubs to increase the throughput of patients, but there is already a backlog to address. It is inevitable that within the five million people currently on an NHS waiting list, there will be patients with so far undiagnosed cancer.

Treatment
Some cancer treatments have continued throughout. However, as some patients were at greater risk of Covid than starting treatment, and the patients not yet referred or diagnosed, there is a significant backlog to address and a surge in demand is anticipated for later this year.

Post-treatment services
Some patients will require on-going support, and the NHS is already anticipating additional pressure on primary and community care following discharge from treatment.

Workforce
The NHS workforce has been depleted during the pandemic through staff being ill or self-isolating with symptomatic family members. This is likely to continue and directly affect the NHS's ability to recover levels of service. The NHS recognises that staff are exhausted and stressed, which may also impact the pace of service recovery.

Independent sector (IS)
Just as the IS was an integral part of the bed-capacity requirements for phase 1 of the pandemic, it has a critical role to play in the restoration of cancer services. Rutherford Health's analysis of this capacity and its availability to the NHS is as follows:

1. Surgery and diagnostics
The 19 currently operational cancer hubs partially involve private-sector hospitals for surgery and diagnostic biopsies. Most of this phase of activity was transferred back to Covid Free Zones (CFZs) within NHS hospitals by October 2020.

2. Conventional radiotherapy
There are 26 private linear accelerators (LINACs) currently staffed and operational. These are in addition to NHS LINACs used part time for private patients. The capacity of each LINAC is 1,200 patients a year. The private sector therefore has the potential capacity to treat 31,200 new radiotherapy patients annually.

3. Precision radiotherapy

Radiotherapy can be used as an alternative to surgery in certain circumstances. Lung, pancreatic and prostate cancer are obvious targets for this substitution. Three precision techniques are available in the independent sector:

(i) Stereotactic ablative radiotherapy (SABR)

Low fraction number, high-dose precision treatments are regularly used for lung and other cancers. Increasing their availability by harnessing the IS will dramatically enhance overall capacity. The majority of modern LINACs can easily be adapted for SABR once the appropriate software is loaded. Local collaboration to create SABR outposts of NHS centres can be developed within days.

(ii) MR LINACs

There are now four active MR LINACs in the UK – 2 NHS and 2 IS. This precise form of image-guided
radiotherapy could be used for selected patients with Stage I and II localised cancers.

(iii) Proton beam therapy (PBT)

There are now four active PBT centres – The Christie, Manchester (NHS) and the Rutherford Centres in Newport South Wales, Reading and Northumbria. Three more are scheduled to come on stream shortly – UCLH, London (NHS); Liverpool (Rutherford) and Harley St, London (Advanced Oncotherapy). Where appropriate, the existing NHS Standard Operating Procedure for handling referrals could be amended to include the IS Centres to improve access to this service. The Rutherford Cancer Centres currently have capacity for up to 750 new patients per year.

THE COVID TRADEOFF

Comparing the various outcomes of different policy options requires a common metric. Over the past few decades, there has been considerable debate about whether mortality risks should be valued according to the number of life-years saved rather than the total number of lives. An important goal of policy is to generate as much benefit as possible for as long as possible, and so a life-years approach seems preferable in this regard, since lives are never saved but merely prolonged. Considering life-years rather than lives is more commonplace in the appraisal of healthcare intervention, where the UK has been at the forefront of the adoption of quality-adjusted life-years (QALYs). QALYs seek to combine the value of changes in quality of life and length of life into a single number, where one year of life in full health is equivalent to one QALY.

The debate around how to measure benefits, and especially lives versus life-years, is crucial in the case of Covid as mortality risks are highly correlated with age and underlying health issues, and hence strongly negatively associated with remaining life-years. According to the ONS, the average life expectancy of deaths associated with Covid (unadjusted for the effect of underlying conditions) was estimated to be 10.5.[221] Some have suggested that adjusting the years of life lost (YLL) from Covid for the number and type of long-term conditions typical of Covid deaths only results in a decrease in YLL of around 10 per cent.[222]
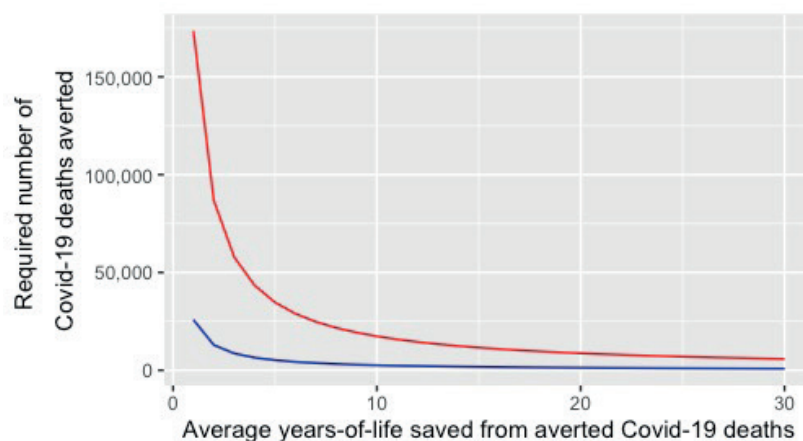
Figure 1: Required number of Covid deaths prevented (as a function of average Covid life-years saved) for total Covid life-years saved to equal total life-years lost from excess cancer deaths. Blue line: three-month delay in cancer diagnosis. Red line: six-month delay in cancer diagnosis. Average years-of-life saved from averted Covid deaths could be over 30; x-axis cut for readability.

In contrast, excess non-Covid deaths from treatable illnesses, such as cancer, will result in a much higher average number of years-of-life lost. A six-month delay in patient presentation and diagnosis for cancer has been estimated to lead to 9,280 lives and 173,540 life-years lost, implying an average life expectancy of around 19 years.[223]

Despite the relevance of age and years of life lost, most Covid discussions have focused on lives rather than life-years. A study by the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) did find that the QALY losses from lockdown exceeded the QALY losses from direct Covid-19, but this study did not gain nearly as much traction as others taking a lives-saved approach.

LIFE-YEARS LOST

Estimates from Cancer Research UK showed that around three million people missed their cancer diagnostics during the UK lockdown.[224] A recent systemic review and meta-analysis showed that as little as a four-week delay was associated with an increased mortality for seven cancer types. It therefore becomes important to consider the life-years saved from the Covid deaths prevented by the UK lockdown to the life-years lost from excess cancer deaths. Note that cancer deaths represent only one, albeit important, indirect effect of lockdown measures.

For example, in the case of a six-month delay in cancer diagnoses, if the average life-years saved from averted Covid deaths is four, more than 43,385 Covid deaths need to have been prevented for the UK lockdown to be the correct policy choice in terms of a maximisation of life-years saved.

THE RIPPLE EFFECT

A comparison between the life-years saved from the Covid deaths prevented during the UK lockdown and the life-years that will be lost in the near future from excess cancer deaths due to lockdown indicates that preventing Covid deaths through lockdowns might result in more life-years being lost than saved. For example, if the average life-years saved from prevented Covid deaths is eight and lockdown produced six months of cancer delays, anything less than around 22,000 Covid deaths prevented would mean more life-years lost to cancer than saved from Covid.

Of course, many epidemiological models have put forward very high Covid death estimates from no-lockdown scenarios that would cause the Covid life-years saved to far exceed the life-years lost to cancer. For example, Imperial College estimated that a no-lockdown scenario would lead to 500,000 Covid deaths, which would require more than 210,000 cancer deaths for cancer deaths to be prioritized in a life-years approach (if the average life-years saved from prevented Covid deaths is eight).[225]

However, the credibility of these high Covid death projections has been questioned. Furthermore, cancer deaths represent only one, albeit important, indirect effect of lockdown measures. Policies to deal with Covid affect mortality risks from many other conditions, such as stroke and myocardial infarction; it is possible that preventing Covid deaths through lockdowns might result in more life-years being lost than saved. We need to capture all the ripple effects of any policy and not just the initial splash when the pebble of intervention hits the water ∎

Dentistry

LOCKDOWN HAS HAD A significant effect on dentistry, not just for patients, but also on dentists and their staff.

Dentistry is devolved to the four nations of the UK, so the systems are different in each country. England and Wales use a system based on 'units of dental activity' (UDAs). Each course of treatment falls into one of three bands. The patient charges and payment to the dentist are in accordance with each band. Scotland and Northern Ireland use a system based on approximately 400 different items of service, so each treatment, such as a filling or extraction, attracts a specific patient charge and payment to the dentist.

**HENRIK OVERGAARD-NIELSON
NHS DENTIST**

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Henrik was also the chairman of the Federation of London Local Dental Committees for 10 years, a statutory body representing the majority of NHS dentists working in London. Henrik sat on the National Steering Committee at the Department of Health for many years.

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This essay will focus on England as this is the largest system, but specific differences within the devolved nations will be highlighted.

Most dental practices operate a mixed model in which they are partly NHS and partly private. It is effectively impossible to run an exclusively NHS practice, as popular treatments such as tooth whitening, cosmetic treatments and implants are not available on the NHS. Practices differ in how much private work they perform as part of their total, ranging from fully private with no NHS contract to 90 per cent NHS and 10 per cent private.

LOCKDOWN BEGINS

On 25 March 2020, all dental practices were told to close their doors and not treat any patients face to face.[226] Patients who needed to see a dentist face-to-face should be referred to an Urgent Dental Centre (UDC). These were going to be set up around the country.

Problems arose in most areas as UDCs were not set up, or if they were, they did not have sufficient personal protective equipment (PPE) like gowns and masks.[227] In fact, four weeks after practices closed down, there were still a third of UDCs not operating and over half reported shortages of PPE that affected the operational status of their practice. The result of this was that because dentists were only allowed to advise and prescribe antibiotics and painkillers if needed, patients that required urgent clinical procedures were left in limbo.

This became a source of considerable distress for dental practices as their patients would call repeatedly,

often in great pain, and there was no route for the staff to relieve the suffering of their patients. It caused resentment and frustration for all concerned.

Practices were allowed to reopen on 8 June 2020 as part of the dental transition to recovery.[228] Initially this was to handle emergencies only, but with a plan to move gradually towards seeing non-urgent cases as well.

Dental practices have stayed open since then, seeing patients both for urgent and non-urgent treatments. However, severe problems for both patients and dental practices remain.

FALLOW TIME

When a high-speed drill is used in a dental surgery, aerosols are produced and, as these aerosols might be contaminated with saliva from the patient's mouth, there is an increased risk of infection for anybody in the room. As these droplets stay in the air for an extended period of time it means that a surgery will have to be left 'fallow'. Nobody is allowed in the room for a period after the procedure. For most surgeries without a window it means that the room has to be left empty for up to 30 minutes after the treatment.[229] (Initially after reopening, the fallow period was 60 minutes.)

The consequence is that the planning of appointments and staffing has become much more difficult and that clinical time and therefore overall capacity of the practice has reduced significantly. From personal experience in our NHS practice, we have had to stop taking on new patients for the first time in over 20 years.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

NHS practices have been paid their full contract value, minus an abatement of up to 16.75 per cent, for the whole period, including when practices were closed. Dentists and staff were asked to volunteer to help in other areas of the NHS, like hospitals or Test and Trace, and many did so.

Practices who were providing mainly NHS treatment to their patients were largely able to manage their finances. However, there were serious financial consequences for fully private practices and mixed practices with a large private element, most notably from 25 March to 8 June, when they had to close their doors entirely.

Approximately three-quarters of dentists were unable to receive any support from the government.[230] This compares to industries like hairdressing, which received support from the government, both to individuals and through the business rates holiday.[231]

TARGETS

In England, NHS practices were expected to complete 100 per cent of their pre-Covid UDA target every year, but this was not applied for the two and a half months where practices were closed. After 8 June, a target of minimum 20 per cent of UDA target was applied, the reduction being due to the increased time it took to see and treat patients and the reduced number of patients visiting the dentist for regular check-ups.

After 1 January 2021, the target was raised to a minimum 45 per cent of UDA target and from 1 April 2021 the target was raised again to a minimum 60 per cent of UDA target. If practices fail to reach these targets, they will have to pay back part of their contract value, which could force them out of business.

The problem with this system is that practices vary hugely in how easy it is for them to reach these targets under the Covid regime. Many practices are converted residential buildings and have little natural ventilation. Very few practices have spare surgeries to cope with fallow time. Clearly, a purpose-built surgery with numerous dental chairs has a considerable advantage.

It also does not allow for the reality that many patients are choosing to postpone their normal dental visits until the risk of infection is abated. Sadly, many practices are likely to face large clawbacks of money at the end of the year through no fault of their own.

> ## ❝ Many patients are postponing normal dental visits until the risk of infection is reduced

To be fair to NHS England, their determination to apply targets has occurred due to a small number of dentists gaming the system, meaning that these few dentists have refused patients NHS treatment and asked patients to pay privately instead, rather than exceed their minimum targets. Management and punishment of these unrepresentative members of my profession would be a preferable solution to the sweeping one imposed on the whole profession.

This combined with a huge reduction in capacity in all practices has meant that seven out of 10 patients have major problems finding access to dental care. [232] These targets apply to England; in the other nations, there are no, or much lower targets for dentists to achieve.[233]

MENTAL HEALTH

Dentistry is well known to be a very stressful profession but during the period that all practices were closed, it was found that dentists were less stressed than before the pandemic. The study suggests that this is due to less fear of litigation and complaints, more time to spend with family and a general feeling of being off the 'treadmill'.[234]

The data shows that practice owners were the most stressed, presumably due to worries about the financial viability of their business. Even though we have no data from after practices reopened, I would anticipate that after targets were reintroduced and then increased, and the threat of clawback of money for NHS work became more likely, then stress levels in the profession would probably be increased to more than pre-pandemic levels.

POSITIVE EFFECTS

The fact that NHS practitioners and their staff have been able to see fewer patients due to lower targets and the need for fallow time between patients has meant that the working day has become less stressful.

Dentistry has also become more visible in the public eye, media interest has gone up and the need for a new NHS dental contract has moved up the agenda for both politicians and civil servants.

NEGATIVE EFFECTS

Since March 2020, there has been a substantial reduction in recall appointments for patients, which means that severe conditions like mouth cancer will have gone undiagnosed or will be diagnosed later.[235]

Practices have suffered financially due to a non-existent or reduced income from private treatments. I have friends who were forced to sell their practice at a considerably reduced price, due to limited financial

support and an absence of clear communication from government. They retired earlier than they would otherwise have done, and anecdotally this has happened all over the country.

Communication from NHS England and the Department of Health and Social Care has often been late, lacking or incorrect. When practices reopened in June 2020, the information to patients indicated that the service was back to normal, which frustrated patients as this was far from the truth. Additionally, in

" Severe conditions like mouth cancer will have gone undiagnosed

March this year, practices were given only three days' notice before their targets for the year were changed by NHS England. Practices around the country had to change their working patterns, staff contracts and plans for the year ahead within three days. And any failure in these areas would fall squarely at the feet of the practice owners and their professional staff.

During the time practices were closed, Local Dental Committees (LDCs) assisted the NHS by organising dentists, in rented vans, to collect PPE from practices which had no need of it during the closure. LDCs then redistributed the PPE to where it was needed, such as prisons and pharmacies. When practices reopened and needed supplies of PPE again, this was not forthcoming. This left many practices feeling abandoned by the NHS.

THE FUTURE

Unless requirements for fallow time and PPE are abandoned, the future dental service will be

considerably more expensive, and this will apply to both NHS and private treatments. If dentists are only able to achieve targets of two thirds (66 per cent) of previous output, then one additional dentist will be needed to help cover the work of every two dentists, meaning the whole service will be 50 per cent more expensive, a cost that will fall partly on the government and partly on patients due to NHS patient charges and private treatment fees.

The tradition of seeing patients every 15 minutes on the NHS has been under pressure for a while, especially from younger practitioners who prefer less stress and a different work/life balance. The slower pace due to fallow time will probably have encouraged this desire for change. Anecdotally, we hear that older practitioners are considering retiring earlier than planned due to the increased PPE and restrictions on their working methods.

This will all mean that many more dentists will be needed to meet demand in the near future. Since it takes at least six years to train a dentist, it is probable that we will have a severe shortage of practitioners in the near future.

We have also seen a general disillusionment with the NHS amongst dentists. Anecdotally this has become more prevalent during lockdown, which would mean that in a time of workforce shortage, the NHS dental service will come under even more pressure.

What is needed for the NHS is a completely new dental contract. This is accepted by all the stakeholders: civil servants, politicians and dentists. In fact, a new contract has been piloted for over 10 years, but so far the political will has not been there to change it.

There are now signs that the political will might be there,[236] but for us to get an NHS dental service fit for the twenty-first century takes political courage and funding. It is badly needed for both patients and the dental workforce and I hope that this might be the one positive aspect that comes out of this pandemic ∎

Social work

THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC has had a significant impact on social work and social care for service users, carers and professionals. Dealing with the dying, the bereaved and the severely ill is not uncommon within social care, but the pandemic not only increased this significantly, it affected many other aspects of social work and care provision, too. The nature of the disease necessitated swift and decisive action, but, with hindsight, it is clear that the political response to the containment of the coronavirus had many unintended consequences, some of which I highlight below.

CARE HOMES

The rush to free up hospital beds resulted in many older and vulnerable people being discharged to care homes without due consideration being given to their needs and of the risk of them transmitting coronavirus within the homes. Care homes had insufficient space to isolate people who had caught coronavirus and contain its spread. Local supplies of personal protective equipment (PPE) were low, or non-existent in some places in the early stage of the crisis, which left many care workers exposed to the virus.[237] The

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He has written several books concerned with the way wider social and political concerns are reflected within social policy in general and social work in particular, the latest of which, *Stigma, and Its Discontents*, is currently in press.

His work has also appeared in several academic journals and in the online political and current affairs journal *spiked*.

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emotional toll on staff in care homes, some of whom lost several residents to coronavirus in a matter of days, was immense.

During the first few weeks of the pandemic, people who use services and their carers reported feeling very isolated and frightened. The emotional impact of social isolation cannot be underestimated, with residents being denied visits from their friends and family. For many of these residents, their mental state would have made them incapable of understanding why their loved ones had stopped visiting.

SOCIAL WORKERS

One study found that just under 40 per cent of social workers said their ability to meet statutory responsibilities had been compromised, either because of rising demand for services or due to colleagues getting sick or having to self-isolate.[238] Workers also reported heightened anxiety levels due to the fear of contracting coronavirus, an understandable fear in the circumstances, but not one conducive to doing a full and proper assessment of need and/or risk.

The closure of many formal and informal services – such as schools, youth and community groups and other recreational activities – raises the fear that children who may be suffering are being missed. Such organisations are often those where the early signs of maltreatment, neglect or need are first noticed and then referred to social services.

ONLINE ENGAGEMENT

The increase in remote and online working has also undermined good practice. The quality of assessments has suffered as has the ability of social workers to build good working relationships with adults, children and families.

The difficulties of working from home are not exclusive to social work, but given the sensitive issues that are often discussed, a shared home/office environment is not ideal. As one social worker commented: 'My ability to switch off has significantly decreased. Sat inside

the house I share with my family, I am discussing severe sexual abuse, assault and injury that feels like a violation into my family life.'[239]

" Trying to assess someone's mental capacity over video call seemed very impersonal

The move to online assessments in many cases led to important decisions being made in relation to people's lives without social workers even meeting them. As one social worker put it, 'trying to assess someone's mental capacity over video call (sometimes with freezing picture and poor sound quality) seemed impossible and very impersonal'. It was 'social work without the social'.[240]

RIGHTS AND LIBERTIES

The withdrawal of face-to-face visits and monitoring by care and support services often led to inappropriate requests for Mental Health Act (MHA) assessments being made. The withdrawal of services coupled with the threat of compulsory detention in hospital could only have had a detrimental effect on the mental state on those subject to them.

The use of digital technology to undertake MHA assessments by video or telephone, perhaps understandable given the current challenges of conducting face-to-face assessments, raised some powerful legal and ethical issues. Given you are considering taking away someone's liberty, is it ethically correct or even possible to do a proper assessment over the phone? Some Approved Mental Health Professionals (AMHPs) reported only using video interviews in relation to community treatment orders (CTOs), where the patient is already detained in hospital, rather than in relation to admission to hospital.[241]

NHS England had issued guidance that during the pandemic video assessments were permitted. However, the High Court ruled that the guidance was wrong, noting that the MHA makes it a legal requirement that doctors and AMHPs must 'personally examine' a patient before recommending detention.[242]

INCREASED DEMAND

A Kings Fund report found that Covid created extra types of demand for local authorities. Some of this demand related to breakdowns of other services, for example, people whose personal assistants were unable to work. In addition, workload increased significantly as hospitals urgently discharged patients, whilst there was an increase in demand due to people who would ordinarily have gone into hospital being unable to and who therefore required increased community support. This at a time when sickness absence had tripled to eight per cent.[243]

LASTING IMPACT

The coronavirus pandemic necessitated urgent action to prevent the spread of the disease and minimise its impact. However, governmental action has been criticised and the inadequacies of current social care provision cruelly exposed.

The impact within the field of social work and social care ranges from the tragedy of preventable deaths, the impact of social isolation, increased anxiety and the reduction and/or withdrawal of services that placed an increased burden on unpaid carers, family and friends.

The social work role was also adversely affected. Online assessments not only have the potential to infringe on legal protections, they also limit the quality of assessment, the outcome of which can have an enormous impact on the health, safety and liberty of those who are being assessed ■

Mental health

AN EVIL, ALL-POWERFUL God intent on maximising human distress would create a world characterised by loneliness, fear and uncertainty. A toxic mix of these three experiences provides a perfect milieu in which emotional pain and suffering can thrive. The government's responses to the Covid-19 pandemic – in particular, the lockdowns, social distancing and mask mandates – have generated this potent combination of feelings among many of its citizens and, as a result, have delivered a punishing assault on the mental health of the nation.

Although some anxiety about catching a nasty virus is understandable, particularly for the more vulnerable elderly and those with existing health problems, the draconian coronavirus restrictions per se are largely responsible for creating unprecedented levels of alarm, isolation and insecurity about the future among the population as a whole. Consequently, the mental wellbeing of everyone has been threatened, many have succumbed to mental health problems for the first time, while those already struggling with particular psychiatric difficulties have endured extraordinary challenges. While few can claim to be unaffected by the recurrent lockdowns and other restrictions, young people and the elderly appear to have suffered the most.

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Gary opted for early retirement in 2013 and currently is a freelance writer and trainer with an interest in promoting alternatives to bio-medical psychiatry as ways of responding to human suffering.

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YOUNG PEOPLE

Despite children and young people being at vanishingly small risk of harm from the SARS-CoV-2 virus, the evidence strongly indicates that this section of our community has suffered considerably as a consequence of the restrictions. Unsurprisingly, prolonged school closures and separation from peers have taken an emotional toll. A survey in July 2020 found that 1-in-6 children were exhibiting significant mental health problems.[244] A YouGov investigation for The Prince's Trust calculated that, by winter 2020, one in four young people (aged 16 to 25) felt 'unable to cope with life', with over half the respondents reporting high levels of anxiety.[245] The chief executive of the Prince's Trust attributed these concerning findings to 'a disrupted education, a shrinking jobs market and isolation from their friends and loved ones'.

Ofsted (the schools inspectorate in England) identified further specific signs of distress in young people. A report, based on school visits made in autumn 2020, highlighted a worrying increase in the incidence of self-harm and eating disorders.[246] Also, senior paediatric doctors noticed an 'explosion' of children with disabling tic disorders and Tourette's syndrome during lockdown.[247]

" Doctors noticed an 'explosion' of children with disabling tic disorders

More rigorous scientific investigation has confirmed the likely detrimental impact of Covid restrictions on the mental health of children and adolescents. A systematic review of over 80 research studies concluded that social isolation and loneliness significantly increase depression and anxiety among this vulnerable group.[248] Furthermore, they found that the longer the loneliness persisted, the more intense the symptoms – an ominous discovery in light of the recurrent and ongoing lockdowns. Other psychological experts have also highlighted the enduring negative effects of social isolation and loss of structured occupation on the mental health of our young people.[249]

OLDER PEOPLE

While it is widely recognised that older people, particularly those residing in care homes, have died from Covid in numbers much greater than the rest of the population, their disproportionately high emotional distress evoked by the restrictions is seldom acknowledged.

As the minutes[250] of the meeting of the SPI-B (a subgroup of Sage) on 22 March 2020 clearly show, it was a strategic decision to inflate fear levels as a means of increasing compliance with Covid restrictions.[251] Evidence suggests that many older adults suffered mental anguish as a direct result of this scare campaign. An Age UK report in summer 2020 stated that 'a substantial group of elderly people… have been left frightened, depressed and very much alone'.[252] A similar observation was made by the Alzheimer's Society, which found that 46 per cent of elderly people with dementia reported that lockdown had a negative impact on their mental health.[253] The testimony of relatives in the Age UK report support these claims, feedback from loved ones suggesting a rapid deterioration in mood, sleep, memory and behaviour during the lockdowns.

The negative consequences of the Covid restrictions on older adults may have stretched beyond the infliction of emotional distress: lockdown loneliness could have been directly responsible for the demise of many elderly people. In the period from January to July 2020, the largest increase in excess non-Covid deaths (over 5,000) occurred in patients with dementia.[254] It is plausible that the social isolation suffered by this vulnerable group, as a result of either the restrictions or the heightened fear deployed to achieve compliance, will have evoked mental defeat and an intensity of loneliness sufficient to cause premature death.[255]

EXISTING PROBLEMS

Although the first lockdown witnessed population-wide increases in suicidal thoughts,[256] symptoms of anxiety and depression[257] and alcohol intake[258], many people suffering pre-pandemic mental-health problems will have faced additional challenges. The general rise in suicidal thoughts during the lockdown was greater for those already experiencing psychological problems.[259]

The official number of completed suicides in 2020 is not yet known; the usual lengthy delays between death and coroner's inquest having been further extended by the pandemic disruption.[260] However, given the toxic mix of fear, isolation and uncertainty generated by the restrictions, together with the recorded increase in prevalence of anxiety, low mood, suicidal thoughts and alcohol intake, a significant rise in the number of people taking their own lives seems highly likely. Furthermore, the medium- to long-term outlook appears ominous when one considers the feelings of hopelessness generated by business failures,[261] job losses, and career-stymying educational ruptures. Evidence from other countries lends support to this bleak expectation. For example, the USA recorded a 13 per cent rise in drug-overdose deaths in the first three months of 2020.[262]

The mask mandates and strategic fear inflation will have inflicted additional suffering for people already struggling with particular mental-health problems. The unrelenting emphasis on potential contamination concerns – starkly illustrated by the 'act like you've got the virus' mantra – will have ramped up the anxiety levels of many of those already suffering severe obsessive-compulsive problems. Similarly, those enduring generalised anxiety, characterised by excessive worrying about the future, will often have been activated by the government's communication strategy involving slogans such as, 'Coronavirus: anyone can get it; Anyone can spread it' – accompanied by menacing images of emergency personnel wearing medical masks and visors for extra effect.

The somatic sensations from wearing a face covering will be triggering for many victims of historical trauma, evoking distressing 'flashbacks' of assault or smothering. Many people already tormented by recurrent panic attacks, involving catastrophic thoughts of imminent death and feelings of breathlessness, will find masks very difficult to tolerate. Regrettably, exercising their legal right to go out without a face covering can attract harassment and victimisation.

SERVICE PROVISION

While the pandemic and associated restrictions may have spawned creative ways of remotely delivering some talking therapies – for example, cognitive

behaviour therapy for psychosis[263] – they have, overall, had two deleterious effects on mental-health service provision. First, there has been a marked reduction in the volume of face-to-face support offered to people with emotional difficulties. Services for children and adolescents, in limited supply prior to the coronavirus crisis, have contracted further and, across all age ranges, in-vivo therapy has been restricted to only those most at risk. Given that many questions remain about the value of online psychological interventions, this decrease in human-to-human service delivery is of major concern.[264]

> ❝ Lockdown loneliness may have directly led to the demise of many older people

Second, insistence that clinical staff and patients wear personal protective equipment will, potentially, reduce the helpfulness of the services offered. Although the impact of Covid-safe environments on the effectiveness of professional help for people with mental health problems is unknown, masks might be especially problematic.[265] Facial expressions and other forms of non-verbal communication are vital for the development of a therapeutic relationship, one based on trust, empathy and compassion; in the absence of such a relationship, psychological therapy is rendered ineffective.

Masks will also impede verbal communication, with the hard of hearing – who largely depend on lip reading – being effectively excluded from the conversation. Traumatic personal stories are often told in whispers, so a therapist may sometimes struggle to hear the words of a masked patient. Add the fact that many people who seek psychological therapy may harbour high levels of suspiciousness, and it is clear that face coverings in a therapy room can be hugely problematic.

STEPS TO RECOVERY

There will be some people among the general population whose mental wellbeing has not been detrimentally impacted by the coronavirus restrictions, who may even have drawn psychological strength from the sense of belonging that can derive from a group of people collectively fighting an external threat.[266] In contrast, as shown in the above analysis, a substantial proportion of the general population will have endured an increase in emotional distress, with the young, old and those with existing mental health problems bearing the brunt. While a future expansion of psychological support to these groups will be required to alleviate the emotional damage already inflicted, as of now the most effective way to aid recovery would be to stem the main sources of this widespread distress by lifting the coronavirus restrictions and changing the narrative surrounding them.

Specifically, the nation's mental health would best be served by the following actions:

1. *The immediate lifting of all remaining aspects of lockdown and an explicit government commitment to never lock down the nation again.* There is a growing body of evidence that lockdowns (an unprecedented and untested approach to the management of a respiratory virus) do not reduce rates of Covid mortality,[267] yet cause widespread 'collateral' damage to, not only people's mental health, but also to our physical and economic health. Enduring opportunities to return to leisure, sport and outdoor activities would ease the current social isolation and uncertainty. The pandemic planning policies in place in 2019 – which explicitly recommended against quarantining the healthy – should be reinstated as the framework for dealing with any further novel viruses.[268]

2. *The immediate lifting of the mask mandate.* There is no compelling real-world evidence that the masking of healthy people in the community reduces viral transmission.[269] But masks do perpetuate the current inflated fear levels, stymie emotional expression,

heighten distress for many people with histories of trauma and impede effective communication in therapy settings.

3. *The development and delivery of a Covid communication strategy based on calm presentation of relevant facts.* The messaging throughout the pandemic has strategically deployed covert psychological 'nudges'[270] – often relying on fear, shaming and scapegoating – to promote compliance with the coronavirus restrictions. The deleterious impact of this approach on people's emotional wellbeing has been considerable. From this point onwards, risk information should be disseminated in an open and factual way, allowing each of us to make our own informed decisions.

In conclusion, the central factors responsible for the pervasive increase in emotional distress of the British people throughout the pandemic have been the unprecedented restrictions imposed on our basic rights, in tandem with the inflated fear levels to encourage compliance. Mental-health specialists from all professions have, with few exceptions, failed to openly consider these connections. This lack of overt response has been disappointing, but perhaps understandable given the personal attacks and expressions of outrage often targeted at professionals who speak out against the mainstream coronavirus narrative. Personally, I have had several NHS clinical psychologists contact me privately to let me know that they agree with me but have felt too scared to say so publicly. My observations in the mental health sphere tally with the pervasive censorship I have witnessed (in the media and the scientific community) of any expert who questions whether repeated lockdowns and associated fear inflation have been the most helpful way to respond to the challenges presented by a novel respiratory virus.

Albeit belatedly, I hope that the People's Lockdown Inquiry, and my small contribution to it, will help to encourage a much more open debate ▪

The Care System

A FILMED SUBMISSION

Ella Whelan talked with members of Rights for Residents, a campaign to end inhumane restrictions on visiting loved ones in care homes. Watch the interview at peopleslockdowninquiry.co.uk
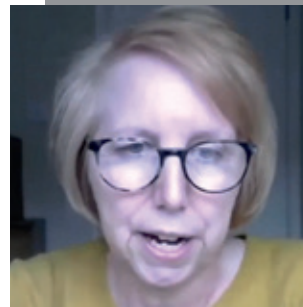
JENNY MORRISON

CO-FOUNDER, RIGHTS FOR RESIDENTS

“ Our loved ones have deteriorated in all sorts of ways as a result of the loneliness and isolation

KATE MEACOCK

SOCIAL MEDIA MANAGER, RIGHTS FOR RESIDENTS

“ You feel like you're grieving for someone who's still alive

Sociability

THE COSTS OF LOCKDOWN are always pre-emptively acknowledged in debates about coronavirus. No day goes by without a news segment noting how we, as 'social creatures', suffer from the measures imposed, or how friends and families have been 'painfully' separated, how 'difficult' it has all been, and how this national effort comes with such a great 'cost'. Conversation in many circles seems to turn in an almost competitive fashion around counting the cost: one person hasn't seen a friend for several months, another has cancelled a wedding, yet the trump card is played by whoever announces that they haven't even left the house for a period of time. However, it is as if acknowledging the costs of lockdown has become a way of ignoring them.

This essay is an attempt to not ignore, indeed to illuminate, one cost in particular. In a sea of hard-to-quantify effects, perhaps it is hardest to get a clear sense of the cost of lockdown to sociability. In the first place, it is hard enough to understand of what sociability *is*. It seems to encompass everything from a pint with friends in a local pub through to bumping into a neighbour in the supermarket, a chance encounter with an old friend on the bus through to a coffee with fellow parents after dropping the kids off at nursery. While the effects of lockdowns on work, education, sport or family life have seen some comment, none of these come close to defining the whole realm of sociability. Though difficult to quantify, the loss of sociability is no less keenly felt.

Given this is all so general, let us briefly try and get a measure of the situation. Take pubs as the most obvious manifestation of British sociability. There are about 47,000 pubs in the UK,[271] and in 2016 the average Brit spent about £350 a year in one.[272] 2020 saw a reduction of about 54 per cent in on-premises beer sales,[273] which could be about 4.3 billion undrunk pints in pubs.[274] Assuming one pint is an hour's socialising, that's over 180 million days' worth of socialising lost.[275] What's more, the chief exec of the British Beer and Pubs Association estimates about five per cent of pubs closed their doors permanently in 2020 and 72 per cent of those left fear closing permanently,[276] suggesting a legacy of reduced opportunity for socialising for years to come.

Now, these kinds of figures are necessarily highly imprecise and wildly detached from the actual experience of sociability (more on this below). They don't even begin to account for community organisations of all kinds (trades' clubs, social clubs, ethnic or national organisations, hobby and interest groups, etc), or the socialising that goes on in religious settings, at sports clubs, golf courses, tennis courts and fitness centres, in cafés, at workplaces, or even on the street and in shops. Even if we could get that information, we'd have no way of deciding how to count or measure those hours spent, or how to place a value on them. In other words, artificial exercises such as the one above suggest that, while sociologists or economists will in years to come try and quantify the sociability we have foregone during lockdowns, it is a loss that *in principle is impossible to quantify*.

DISTANCE BETWEEN US

Perhaps, then, we can be more precise by being more general. We can estimate the cumulative effect of lockdown on social life by the phrase which has come to dominate our lives: *social distancing*. Social life has been distanced from us, we have been distanced from our friends and social groups, and a distance, both physical and emotional, has opened up between us. If on public transport we may briefly appreciate this new-found space between people, there remains something eery about the consciousness of social space that has emerged. The way that everyone gives each other such a wide berth – on the street, in the supermarket, in parks and more – is only the most obvious expression of this new social distance.

Into this new social distance, this void of sociability, have emerged the various virtual spaces which are posed first as a substitute for and then an alternative to real being-with-others. In this sense, the lockdowns accelerated a trend for what Sherry Turkle called being 'alone together': the tendency for online spaces to be less a new medium for connecting socially with others

> " Lockdown is hostile to the spontaneity that is essential to sociability

and more a veneer of contact that, in the last analysis, makes one more alone than ever.[277] It is as if sharing a photo of your carefully prepared dinner sates *just enough* of your desire for social contact that you no longer miss the fact you have no one to share it with.

LIFELINES FOR MILLIONS

In case this seems too pessimistic, we should note that the proliferation of online groups of all kinds have genuinely functioned, as we often hear, as a 'lifeline' to millions around the country. A catalogue of such groups is way outside the scope of this contribution. Perhaps foremost in the public mind have been the quizzes, fitness classes and virtual pubs. Jay's Virtual Pub Quiz has regular audiences of around half a million people[278] and Jay himself has been thanked by Boris Johnson,[279] landed a spot on national radio, received an MBE,[280] and released a book.[281]

Another such initiative is the 'Virtual Tavern' – a wide-ranging online community which began as a

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pub quiz – which has likewise received accolades including a segment on ITV's primetime show *Ant and Dec's Saturday Night Takeaway*.[282] The Tavern perhaps is more emblematic of the broader sweep of online groups and social events, given its focus on mental health and loneliness over and above entertainment. Indeed, its Twitter bio puts these issues front and centre. In addition to such groups, almost everyone now has a familiarity with Zoom evenings with friends, Facetime choruses of 'happy birthday', and the like.

But the existence of these groups should not blind us to what they were set up to provide but a reflection of: social contact. In the same way as food parcels help alleviate the effects of famine, a weekly Zoom call staves off the sense of total isolation. But no one would pretend that occasional food parcels are a viable alternative to a real supply of food. I think one decisive fact about these technological replacements is suggested by the subtitle to Turkle's book: 'Why we expect more from technology and less from each other'. Technology is a response to not being able to expect what we need to get from each other.

Turkle's subtitle is perhaps an allusion to Christopher Lasch's *Culture of Narcissism* where he famously laments how 'we demand too much of life, too little of ourselves'[283] (the subtitle of the book is again important, referencing as it does 'diminished expectations'). He goes on to paint a picture of a society beset by a profound spiritual malaise, where the inability to form meaningful social relationships and the reliance on technologies that are but a substitute for social life 'gives rise to feelings of powerlessness and victimisation'. His description could be a portrait of life in lockdown, and is worth repeating in full:

> 'We find it more and more difficult to achieve a sense of continuity, permanence, or connection with the world around us. Relationships with others are notably fragile; goods are made to be used up and discarded [like masks! – JR]; reality is experienced as an unstable environment of flickering images. Everything conspires to encourage escapist solutions to the psychological problems of dependence, separation, and individ-

uation, and to discourage the moral realism that makes it possible for human beings to come to terms with existential constraints on their power and freedom.'

Again, without diminishing the degree to which technology has provided a measure of sociability under lockdown,[284] it is 'escapist' to presume it is the same as *real* sociability.

WHAT IS SOCIABILITY?

But – and to me this is the central question – what is it that is 'not the same' about the improvised responses to lockdown? What does real sociability consist in? This question is essential to pose because it is the only sure way to understand what precisely is lost in or threatened by lockdowns. We are at a real disadvantage here, because, as is often the case, the things we have most everyday understanding of are those which are hardest to put our finger on. There is no great philosophical or literary tradition which articulates the meaning of sociability,[285] perhaps because it has never been necessary to do so; you don't know what you've got till it's gone. Undoubtedly, recent events will prompt some attempt to understand what we mean by this term 'sociability'. Until such a full accounting can be given, I propose that the central things we should focus on are the twin features of spontaneity and unpredictability.

Sociability is essentially spontaneous in that it resists attempts to prescribe how things will play out, and for this reason also sociability means a large degree of unpredictability. Contrivances and games mark children's parties off from adult parties precisely because being forced to have fun is a contradiction in terms for adults. Chance encounters feature so strongly in our intuitive sense of what sociability consists in for this reason. It is also why, at least in the Western tradition, alcohol also features so strongly in sociability because of how it breaks down artifice and prompts the unexpected. Sociability has, for this precise reason, been seen as suspect by authoritarian or totalitarian regimes.[286]

In this sense, another major trend accelerated by the pandemic has been the tendency towards a

fully administered life.[287] Administration is deeply suspicious of spontaneity precisely because of its tendency to be unpredictable. An unpredictable world cannot be known and managed in advance, and so steps must be taken to make it more predictable, more amenable to technological and bureaucratic control. Nobody wants to live in a world where it is completely impossible to plan one's life, and so some amount of administration is not just necessary but desirable.

But it is hard to resist the conclusion that the logic of lockdown – the reliance on models, data, rules, restrictions and guidance – is not just about introducing a reasonable level of administration in the face of danger, but is, at heart, hostile to spontaneity. The reversal of a presumption of freedom to socialise into the need for a *licence* to socialise – an expression of a long-running trend of officialdom claiming the power to regulate and license what was previously a presumed freedom[288] – may be one of the most enduring legacies of the pandemic.

PANDEMIC SOCIABILITY

That said, we must note that, especially in the first lockdowns, there was a positive, social quality to many efforts to reduce social contact, support those isolating, and otherwise grease the wheels of society under lockdown. Something of an alternate, 'pandemic sociability' emerged in the many spontaneous acts of checking in on neighbours, local support groups, donations, volunteering, and even in the over-exaggerated crossings of pavements to avoid one another while out 'exercising'. Perhaps it would not be a complete contradiction in terms to note that good sociability sometimes requires one to reduce social contact.

Nonetheless, such early, spontaneous attempts at defining a 'pandemic sociability' seemed to come to very little in the end. Perhaps the only enduring example was the 'Clap for Carers', and even then, the spontaneous social quality of doorstep congrega-

> **"** Online spaces provide a veneer of contact that makes one more alone than ever

tions was soon eclipsed by the increasingly formulaic, contrived form of a half-hearted clap before retreating inside.[289] Indeed, the whole tenor of the official response to the pandemic stacked the cards against anything spontaneous. How likely was something more substantial – a genuine citizen's effort – when everything has to be risk-assessed, DBS-checked, properly masked, and approved by the local council? Who was likely to take a step out with their neighbours when for months that very neighbour was defined as the source of contagion, danger and even 'cancelled'?[290] How can we even face the resumption of sociability when the pub has to be booked weeks in advance,[291] everyone checked in with the right app on the right kind of phone,[292] regulars banned from their usual spot propping up the bar?

RETURN TO NORMAL

What, then, should we take, for the future? Some hope is given by the fact that the full legacy of lockdown on sociability is still to be defined. The effects on the hospitality industry will leave a scar; a year of missed conversations, hugs, and glances will have knocked our social confidence; the newfound hesitancy around other people will linger on; the suspicion of spontaneity will to some degree be entrenched in regulations and licences.

However, a boisterous 'return to normal' – full pubs, street parties, conversations among strangers, spontaneous hugging, more travel, reunion and romance – could well signal a determination to never let the costs of lockdown be imposed again. More than that, perhaps in the coming months and years, armed with a knowledge of what we lost, we find ourselves determined to push back against the very trends that allowed this to happen in the first place ∎

Sport

Alastair Donald chaired a filmed discussion with sports fans Donald Clark, Geoff Kidder, Rob Lyons, Declan Rooney and Christine Thompson.
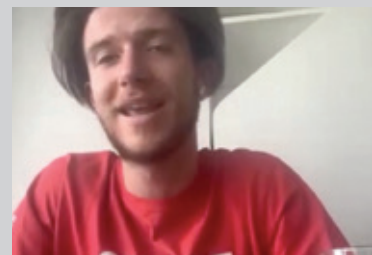
Visit peopleslockdowninquiry.co.uk to watch our roundtable conversation about the impact of lockdown on watching and taking part in sport ■

ALASTAIR DONALD

CHRISTINE THOMPSON

DECLAN ROONEY

DONALD CLARK

GEOFF KIDDER

ROB LYONS

" To many people sport matters. I don't think it's a frivolous discussion, it's very relevant to what's gone on over the past year

Cultural Sector

MANICK GOVINDA - ARTS CONSULTANT WRITER AND ARTISTS' MENTOR

Manick Govinda is a freelance arts consultant, and was formerly programme director at SPACE. He is an associate consultant for Counterculture LLP and has worked closely with a range of artists for many years as a producer, advisor, mentor, curator, strategist and fundraiser.

He is also a freelance writer and campaigner on free expression and on arts and freedom of movement issues. He has written for *spiked*, Index on Censorship and All In Britain. He runs arts campaigns for the Manifesto Club, where he led the campaign against the UK government's visa restrictions on non-EU artists and academics. He also helped co-found Artists for Brexit and the Brexit Creatives.

Follow Manick on Twitter at @manick62 and Authory (authory.com/ManickGovinda)

I T HAS BEEN over a year since UK theatres and performing arts venues more or less closed their doors to the public due to the Covid pandemic. Art galleries and museums had a moment of re-opening to the public when restrictions eased up over summer 2020, with the proviso that face-coverings were worn. Visitors had to book in advance online, leading to much reduced numbers. Major museums such as Tate, the British Museum, the National Gallery and the Victoria & Albert Museum had a massive 78 per cent drop in attendance in 2020 compared with 2019.[293]

Since mid-March 2020 to the present day, I can count on one hand the number of cultural events I have attended, all of them exhibitions during that small window of partial freedom between July and October 2020. No live music, theatre or cinema. As someone who has fairly recently gone freelance as an arts professional, without the safety net of furlough, I've been forced to rely on self-employment grants and universal credit. As a result, I've had to cut my cloth and it was with great regret that I was forced to cancel my Odeon Cinema, Art Fund and Tate memberships. I am not alone in having to review my cultural outgoings. The Royal Academy reported a loss of 18,000 Friends since lockdown, a loyal fanbase that would normally automatically renew their annual membership.[294]

The financial losses for the cultural sector are enormous, as they are for vast swathes of the UK's economy. Pleading that shopping is far more dangerous than attending an exhibition will not hold favour with the general public as they review their personal expenditure weighed against loss of earnings. Did we all instead satisfy our appetite for culture through streaming TV? In April 2020, Netflix reported a surge in new subscribers announcing that it had 15.77million new paid viewers across the world.[295] But by October 2020 it added fewer new subscribers in the third quarter of 2020 than at any other point in the past four years.[296]

Clearly, the excessive restrictions and continuous tiered lockdowns enforced by the UK government is taking its toll on the British public, the leisure/ hospitality industries and on cultural institutions, both public and private. The battering we have received by government-imposed social distancing measures, face masks, and the erosion and over-policing of social and public life have worn us down. The novelty of online

performances and exhibitions has quickly worn off and have exacerbated isolation.

The result is a psychic withdrawal. We are tired of the endless passive staring at the two-dimensional surface of the digital realm, the atomised imprisonment within our homes. This is not the 'new normal' we want, especially as vaccines are successfully being rolled out in the UK. But the year-long, fear-inducing tactics by the state have indeed made us feel a sense of unease and trepidation as we begin to step back out into the real world.

PASSPORTS FOR CULTURE

A YouGov poll revealed that 55 per cent of people think that vaccine passports should be required when we are allowed back into cinemas.[297] Theatres are desperate to re-open and therefore may submit to the possible imposition of requiring punters to show Covid Status Vaccination Certificates as a means to relax social-distancing measures and instil public confidence to start booking tickets for shows.[298] As one major theatre producer puts it, despite highlighting the logistical chaos that implementing a vaccine certificate would entail, 'in the haste to get our lives and industry back, a vaccine passport programme for live entertainment must be delivered from the outset with the upmost care and clarity'.

Thankfully, not everyone in the culture sector wishes to embrace a possible 'Covid passport' scheme. The National Museum Directors' Council's response to the government consultation made a principled point that 'using a Covid-status certification scheme as a basis for access sits at odds with the public mission and values of museums'.[299] The industry body for cinemas, the UK Cinema Association put out a statement that it 'does not believe that it is appropriate to ask someone to prove they have undertaken a medical procedure or to undergo a medical test to access what is supposed to be a place of entertainment and enjoyment'.[300]

STIFLED BY SAFETY

Governments across the world and health officials have created levels of paranoia that I have not seen in my lifetime. Often on my social media feeds, I read of people feeling anxious about life getting back to normal; they fear the crowds, noise and bustle. It seems like we have pulled the shutters down on public life itself. It was right to exercise some degree of precaution and

prevention during the height of the Covid pandemic before the vaccine rollout, but now we have a cause to embrace a re-awakening, a regenerated verve and spring joy knowing that a third wave of Covid cases is looking highly unlikely.

However, there is another greater concern. Great art thrives on taking risks, pushing against the boundaries of social norms and imaginary borders. While institutions should welcome the Government's £1.57 billion Cultural Recovery Fund that has helped 2,700 cultural and heritage organisations that are being offered nearly £400 million in grants and loans,[301] they should not lose sight that the arts are also a site for danger, unease and uncomfortable experiences and thought. Press release after press release from cultural organisations now talk in a therapeutic language about 'care'. For example, Liverpool Libraries' new scheme to tackle loneliness and improve mental health through *virtual* meet ups, where you will 'not be expected to read anything, if [you] don't want to, [you] can just join the session and chat to someone new and have a laugh'.[302] This ethics of care in the arts in order to create a 'Covid-secure' environment should not be the primary focus for arts institutions nor artists.

> " Great art thrives on taking risks, pushing against the boundaries of social norms and imaginary borders

Even in the territory of radical live and performance art, producers and curators are adopting a precautionary principal at a time when it seems highly unnecessary now that the UK Covid rates are the lowest in Europe. From enforcing the wearing of masks, temperature checking audiences, imposing physical distance and the authoritarian threat of vaccine certificates, it's time the venues and arts curators/producers stuck two fingers up to these impositions by the state.

A LUST FOR ART

Glimmers of hope exists, echoes of the speakeasies of Prohibition America, where performance companies are creating a new underground scene of illicit events. Last summer, I had the privilege of experiencing HUNCH-theatre's adaptation of Mikhail Lermontov's *A Hero of Our Time* at a disused health centre (a rather apt site considering our wellbeing obsessed culture) in north London. Strictly invitation only, about 30 spectators threw caution to the wind, shaking hands, kissing, hugging, drinking, no masks or social distancing. It is these acts of defiance and rebellion from which we must take inspiration and embrace our lust for life and art ∎

Visual Arts

FEW WOULD DENY THAT THE effect of lockdown on the arts has been severe. But lockdown measures have not treated all the arts equally. Some of the arts have boomed during lockdown; stuck indoors, many of us have turned to streaming services, for TV, film and music. Reading has grown, and print books, even while bookshops have been shut, have boomed.

But the arts that have suffered during lockdown are those which depend on physical space and an audience free to decide where it goes and how it spends its free time. Visual art – found in every kind of building from Tate Modern and swanky London commercial galleries to the smallest artist-run storefront pop-ups and art college galleries, and the scores of mid-sized regional art centres and galleries – has, for the best part of a year, been put into cold-storage. For all the talk of 'recovery', the government's response has been at best unimaginative and reactive, at worst ignorant of the complex and often precarious economy on which much of the visual arts – and many visual artists – rely. While the sector tentatively begins to reopen, it will be unlikely to return to 'business as usual' and the result is likely to be a battered, cash-strapped and pared down visual-art culture.

EMERGENCY FUNDING

The government's response – propelled by the widespread alarm of many in the arts and cultural sector as the first lockdown pushed into June – was in the first instance to throw money at keeping arts organisations from going bust. Alongside this, more limited funding has been made available by the arts councils for direct grants to artists. Cutting across these sector-specific schemes, the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (the 'furlough scheme') and the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme, have sustained both employees and freelancers across the subsidised and commercial arts sector.

While this emergency funding was widely welcomed, it has also revealed the longstanding structural vulnerability of many publicly funded visual-art institutions to the loss of commercial income, as well as the interdependencies between commercial, public and

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WRITER AND ART CRITIC

JJ Charlesworth studied art at Goldsmiths College in London in the mid-1990s, before turning to writing criticism. His reviews, articles and commentaries have appeared in publications including *Art Monthly*, *Modern Painters*, *Time Out* and the *Spectator*. Since 2006, he has worked on the editorial staff of the London-based international art magazine *ArtReview*, where he is one of the editors. His doctoral thesis, completed in 2016 at the Royal College of Art, is a study of art criticism in Britain during the 1970s.

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non-commercial economies in the visual arts and the wide arts and culture sector. Many state-subsidised arts organisations, especially in London, now generate a significant share (sometimes the majority) of their income from sources other than their DCMS or Arts Council funding. For example, the Tate Gallery group's income in 2019/20 was £130.7million, of which only £36.7million was government grant-in-aid.[303] This shift towards self-generated income is a direct result of government funding cuts in the wake of the financial crash, and a policy push since then to encourage arts organisations to find more of their own funding. In

the visual-arts sector, survey data of the income of Arts Council England's (ACE's) National Portfolio Organisations (those receiving regular core funding) shows that in the three years to 2019/20, the share of earned income in visual arts organisations grew by 15 per cent (ticket sales, café and shop revenue, etc) and contributed income (donations etc) rose by over 18 per cent. Meanwhile ACE grant income, as a share of total income of organisations, fell by 12 per cent.[304]

" Many artists have fallen between the stools of government and arts council support schemes

For as long as galleries and arts organisations could function normally, the shift from public to private income could be welcomed by those in government keen to reduce the 'dependency' of the arts on the state. But because of this increased dependency on earned income, arts organisations have been badly exposed to the effects of the lockdowns. At the same time, the commercial forms of the arts have been similarly hit; normally solvent businesses in the arts and entertainment sector have had to go begging to the Cultural Recovery Fund to stay afloat.

ART ON HOLD

The closure, reopening and closure of galleries, art spaces and venues has meant that art programmes have been put on hold. But this means that exhibitions have been put off or cancelled, and artists not commissioned or paid for new works. As is typical of the wider arts and entertainment sector, many working in the visual arts are not permanently employed by organisations but are self-employed. However, few artists earn their income exclusively from the proceeds of their freelance work as artists, with the result that many artists have fallen between the stools of government and ACE support schemes. ACME, a long-established visual-arts studio provision charity, outlined in its submission to parliament's DCMS committee inquiry on the 'Impact on Covid-19 on DCMS Sectors' that artists habitually draw their income from various sources, shared across sales, teaching, other cultural freelance work and non-art related activities.[305] As arts researcher Susan Jones has pointed out, 'the criterion to show at least 50 per cent of income from self-employment made three-quarters of visual artists

ineligible for the government's Self-Employment Income Support Scheme (SEISS) and Arts Council's Emergency fund for individuals'.[306]

The lockdowns have disrupted business-as-normal for arts organisations, while largely abandoning artists to fend for themselves, as both the exhibition economy and the informal gig economy on which many practitioners also rely has been put into induced coma by the lockdowns. Equally disruptive has been the effect of Covid restrictions, during the brief window of reopening during the summer of 2020. Widely reported, the Association of Leading Visitor Attractions' (ALVA) figures for 2020 show a collapse in visitor numbers for galleries of upwards of 70 per cent. Notably, outdoor venues, which had been able to reopen earlier and with fewer restrictions during the summer months (these mostly not galleries and museums), fared somewhat better, demonstrating the stark impact not only of total closure but of the effects of 'Covid secure' regulations on indoor public culture.[307]

LOCKDOWN RULES

During the few months of 'Covid-secure' reopening, commercial and independent galleries struggled valiantly to accommodate the new rules: online booking systems with timed appointment slots were hurriedly implemented, to book visits for exhibitions that one would have previously casually dropped in to. Public galleries and museums fared worse: saddled with more complex public-liability duties and much more dependent on the free flow of visitors (and ticket income), they became victim to the government's risk-averse caution over any space where too many people might gather. The prospect of a timed 15-minute entry window for a visit to Tate Modern, for example, would have been a deterrent to all but the most committed visitors. It is not just closure which had mauled the visual art sector, but the Covid-secure restrictions which have caused chaos for indoor venues. Empty galleries may have been one of the luxuries for the committed few, but the disappearance of visitors means that for many venues which now increasingly rely on visitor spend as much as ticket sales, staying open without losing money has become a serious concern. So concerned is the sector that the National Association of Museum Directors, alarmed by the likely administrative burden, commercial impact and social consequences of proposed vaccine passports, has come out in opposition to these, arguing that 'museums are committed to engaging and involving the widest possible audiences, therefore measures that create additional inequalities of access, particularly

for audiences who may be already less engaged with culture cannot be supported'.[308]

WOKE ARTS

Lockdown has been calamitous for the visual arts and all the arts, whose meaning and value is located in the civic culture of public gathering and free movement. The complex system of interdependent public and private economies which sustains both institutions and artists has been badly disrupted, first by outright shuttering, then by attempts to reopen based solely on the mitigation of health risk. The government's response, via furlough scheme and via its Cultural Recovery Fund, has only really achieved the mothballing of organisations that would have otherwise gone bust. This is only putting off the day when we have to reopen the galleries, theatres and concert halls for good. But then what? The ongoing effects of restrictions on travel will have a dire impact on our larger, mostly London-based institutions. Already the Tate[309] and the Victoria & Albert Museum[310] have announced significant restructuring and redundancies in their permanent staff. Falling revenues cannot but have a significant impact on the quality of exhibitions, cultural expertise and scholarship.

The looming problem is that the funding crisis which the lockdowns have provoked will not magically disappear post-lockdown. Organisat-ions increasingly reliant on trading income, ticket sales, corporate sponsor-ship and philanthropic donations will face the reality of poorer visitors and fewer tourists on one hand, while corporate and private philanthropy will either withdraw or demand greater influence in the programmes of institutions. (Already big brands such as Chanel are bringing the 'woke corporate' agenda to bear, for example in their support of the National Portrait Gallery's curatorial project *Reframing Narratives: Women in Portraiture*.)[311]

The government's emergency response, channelled by the Arts Council, has been to shore up the base of client institutions it has cultivated over the past quarter of a century, underwriting buildings and staffing costs while largely ignoring the downstream consequenc-es on artists and other freelance practitioners. The Arts Council has recently published its latest 'delivery plan', in which it admits the failure of its reliance on a 'trickle down' model to support individual artists. And yet, while it makes vague noises of support for individual artists, the Council's delivery plan looks forward to what is in effect more straitened finances for organisations which will need to find 'more flexible business models', 'an increased focus on efficiency… including mergers, shared services, and new partner-ships with organisations and people inside and outside the cultural sector'.[312] Reading through the policy-speak, this is code for public funding that will make more demands on arts organisations – imposing its buzzword preoccupations 'inclusivity' and environ-mental responsibility – while supporting them less.

PUSHBACK

The visual arts need to reopen fully, without the trammels and constraints of 'Long Covid', audience restrictions of vaccine passports, social distancing and timed entrances. Only then will visual art stand a chance of reconnecting with its audience, while creating new places for artists and audiences to come together. Light touch, not over-regulation, will give artists the best chance to make things happen.

But at the same time, the government and its agencies must be made to take responsibility for the damage their lockdown policies have caused. This will mean a pushback against 'inevitable' funding cuts, but also against the continual creep of the top-down micromanagement culture of funding bodies like ACE, dictating how artistic activity is to be organised and what its purposes and goals should be. While the 'trickle down' model of funding has failed to support artists, the 'pour down' model of policy direction coming from ACE is alive and kicking. Unchecked, it will make the visual arts even more culturally subordinate and dependent on government policy ('arm's length' or not), being made responsible for the failings of a policy model which has sought to reduce funding while maintaining the funder's veto on the independence of artists' organisations.

If the government and its clients really wanted to support the arts, they should first commit to paying artists equitably when receiving public funds, and then back off – allowing the arts the room to create and develop the art, the cultural spaces, and the audiences, needed to restart life after Covid ∎

> **The funding crisis provoked by lockdowns will not magically disappear post-lockdown**
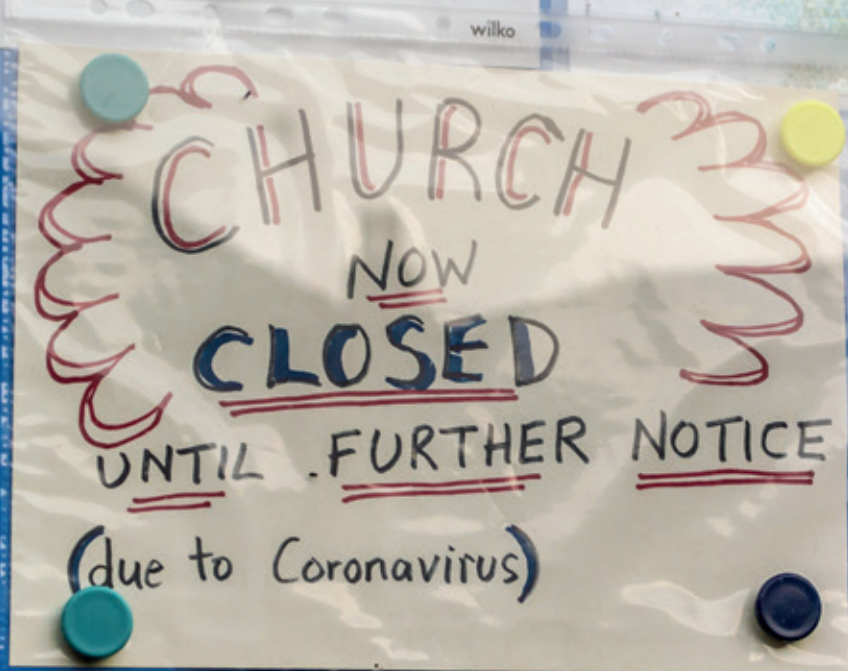
Religion

TRACY CHAPMAN WROTE:
I lose my head
From time to time
I make a fool of myself
In matters of the heart

In approaching this subject from the religious perspective, I have a sense of foreboding. Just as Robert F Kennedy opined that the main method we use for assessing the economy 'measures everything in short, except that which makes life worthwhile' so too the impact of the lockdowns on religion and the religious are tricky to gauge, and I tend to take the view that ideally the attempt shouldn't be made. If we ever return to something broadly resembling the old normal there will come a time when we will be able to make a very in-depth assessment of the long-term overall damage of suspending social contact in so many ways, and for so many people for so long. But in matters of the heart, in the end quantifying the damage, and yes the benefits, will be impossible.

RELIGION AND COMMUNITY

The key aspect of religion – and I speak primarily of my own Catholic belief, but I include all three Abrahamic faiths and the three main Indian religions, even Buddhism – is that it is all about both the relationship with the divine and a relationship with the community. Cutting off one from so much of the other, as both the 2020 lockdowns did, and for far longer in Scotland, will have been a cause of great suffering and loneliness for so many, because worship – the engagement with God – is above all a communal experience. Individual

prayer, meditation and contemplation is, of course, vital. One of the main upsides to the first lockdown in particular will have been an intensification of prayer life for so many, but it cannot in the end substitute for the need to relate to God as a human cooperative.

Most religions do emphasise the benefits of temporarily depriving oneself of good things, partly to strengthen oneself in resisting the temptation to satisfy or indulge the bad or the not so good. I know of at least one alcoholic who during the first lockdown had finally managed to quit alcohol, and have heard of more who felt driven to turn their lives around. Speaking for myself, the pain and anguish of not being able to attend to prayer in church has also been a spur to develop my domestic church. This has been a particular challenge as I currently live on my own, but the process of my home more closely resembling a place of worship and prayer has begun in earnest, and I am resolved to establish this as a permanent aspect, as and when all restrictions on churches are removed. Lockdown has deprived me of much of the energy I needed to get this done, but it has been a strong corrective on the need for it to happen.

When services had ceased, but the churches were still open for three days back in March last year, I had a sense of hope. Being able to enter your local place of worship and prayer, even if unaccompanied by others, is a great source of solace for so many, and not just the single. Those who in any way find relationships at home at all chaotic and traumatic can experience particular grace and comfort in spending time in a communal space specifically designed to support them

in seeking out such solace and relief. Depriving anyone of this for as long as we did will have done incalculable damage to the psychological and spiritual health of so many; there is little time and space to make room for God at home when you're a mother with an abusive husband. So, the November lockdown, when services were suspended but churches were kept open, was the better balance, and should have been kept in place for the first lockdown.

RECKLESS CAUTION

In religion, as with so many other matters, an overabundance of caution combined with an understandable desire to put everyone in something like the same boat, will I think prove to have been reckless in the face of many of the other dangers that humanity faces. Indeed, those who are highly vulnerable to death because of Covid, and those that live with them, have had little choice but to fully isolate (shield) for over a year regardless of the locking down of everyone else. This has meant that government and society as a whole did not focus in on the needs of those who probably had to cut themselves off from physical and social contact.

" Without authentic religion, society's answer to fear becomes 'security'

I am still amazed that it wasn't until 2021 that getting a Covid test and then going on to visit your grandparent in a care home on the same day was introduced.[313] Imagine for a moment that early on we shielded all those seriously vulnerable to dying from or with Covid, but made most of lockdown much less onerous on the economy and the rest of society. Inevitably, meeting the needs of those completely shut off from normal life would have become a top priority alongside the energy and dynamism that has led to our successful vaccination programme. No social or financial expense should have been spared on providing the much-needed social interaction for those of us who will remain effectively under what resembles house arrest until they, or indeed most of the country, has been fully vaccinated.

The leading of a godly life to the best of your abilities, which without divine assistance and a supportive community leads to abject failure, is all about living in hope. It is hope tempered by caution that is the antidote to fear, but without authentic religion, and the genuine practice of a virtuous life, society's answer to fear in the end becomes 'security'. The result is a doubling down where we never really return to those freedoms that are so vital to a vibrant developing society. Having utilised fear as a tool to aid government in its efforts to

control human behaviour, then as that fear subsides, the desire to control will be all the harder to shake off. Such a predicament would have been less binding had our disposition in this pandemic remained one anchored in openness alongside a practical awareness of the serious threats we faced.

That all places of worship have been able to remain open, at least in England, from the end of the first lockdown until the present day without any evidence of the need to close a single one is a testament to what could and should have been possible from Easter 2020 onwards. The authorities should have made a more considered effort to prioritise those measures that definitive evidence demonstrated were vital to combat this wretched disease without so endangering all our other vulnerabilities from cancer to psychological breakdown.

Fear in the sense of a humility in the face of genuine danger is healthy; fear as an ongoing or permanent temperament – or worse still implicitly animating it as some kind of virtue, especially when applied to only one potential cause of death – is deeply unhealthy. If those of us who are religious, and indeed our religious leaders, can learn one thing well from this past 12 months it is how to better communicate that our traditions underpin so much of what we hold dear, whether that be the relationships with our friends, family and loved ones or the philosophical principles that we seek to adhere to in our daily lives.

In the end it is love – not in the sense of the mushiness of emotional feelings, but of persistent serving of those we know and meet that – will be our redemption ∎

ED RENNIE - CATHOLIC POLITICAL WRITER, ANALYST AND STRATEGIST

Ed Rennie is leading advocate and strategist for Blue Labour within the labour movement. Ed has worked at Christians on the Left and for the Labour MPs Emily Thornberry and Jim Dobbin and was a Labour councillor for Perivale.

More recently, he led the virtue policy programme at the think tank ResPublica and worked for John Mills helping to found Labour Future and wrote for Labour Leave.

In a voluntary capacity he has been a support-line volunteer for the National Association for People Abused in Childhood (NAPAC), and is a founding member of Catholic Voices.

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Housing

THE GOVERNMENT-IMPOSED lock-down has had a ruinous effect on UK housing, but the transformation of the home under coronavirus-justified regulations and programmes will have a far worse impact in the future, fundamentally changing our status as citizens under UK law.

After the financial crisis of 2008, the UK government promoted the lie that 'we're all in this together' while imposing a fiscal policy of austerity that continues to impoverish the poorest members of our society. Twelve years later, the government has responded to the coronavirus epidemic with an unprecedented level of propaganda that characterises this crisis as a great leveller, which the British people are united in combatting.

The truth, however, is the exact opposite. While capital-ising on this crisis to outsource more functions of the UK state to its corporate partners, the government has taken this opportunity to vastly increase its own powers to monitor and control the lives of British people in perpetuity. As expected of a country in which the single largest fixed monthly expenditure for most households is on the costs of accommoda-tion, housing is at the heart of this transition to what is already the most authoritarian state in British history, the effects of which are widening the already-existing inequalities in UK society. Here we can only list some of the negative effects the lockdown has had on UK housing, while making some predictions about the future that awaits us.

CONFINED TO HOME

It's necessary to state what should be obvious: that the physical and mental health of those who live in overcrowded, noisy or badly-maintained accommodation, in which amenities are shared or missing, will suffer from residents being confined to their homes for months on end far more than those who live in spacious, quiet residences with access to private or communal gardens and amenities like gyms, play areas for children and separate rooms for work or study.

The result has been increased stress for working-class families already living under austerity. In June 2020, a mere three months into lockdown, there were 98,300 households, including 127,240 children, living in temporary accommodation in England, a rise of 14 per cent from June 2019.[314] Although the number of people living in B&Bs, hostels and private rented rooms has increased every year in the UK over the past decade, this sudden jump in numbers is a product of the breakdown in household relationships and loss of livelihoods caused by the lockdown, and is likely to continue at an exponential rate in 2021.

The worst consequences of the unequal conditions under which lockdown has been imposed has been the more than 50,000 excess deaths that occurred at home in England and Wales since lockdown was imposed, only 7,056 of which were attributed to Covid-19.[315] In addition, in 2020, there were over 26,000 excess deaths in care homes, for which there is strong evidence to suggest that elderly and vulnerable residents being isolated from each other, their carers and their families is responsible for thousands of deaths from dementia and other health conditions exacerbated by lockdown and erroneously attributed to Covid.[316]

RENTERS HIT HARDEST

8.4million households in England, 36 per cent of the population, rent from a private or social landlord, and the effects on them of lockdown are far worse compared with mortgagors and home owners.[317] Those who have lost their jobs because of the ongoing attempts to bankrupt small businesses by the corporate beneficiaries of lockdown are already living in housing precarity, and will face homelessness when an already inadequate furlough is withdrawn altogether. As of September 2020, eight per cent of private renters and

seven per cent of social renters had lost their jobs under lockdown, and nine per cent and 10 per cent, respectively, had been furloughed. In comparison, only three per cent of mortgagors had lost their jobs and six per cent were on furlough, while home owners have been unaffected.[318]

While workers have had their right to work, under Article 23.1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights,[319] suspended indefinitely by lockdown, the government hasn't seen fit to suspend the right of landlords to collect rent from those unemployed workers. As a result, in January 2021, over 750,000 families were behind with their housing payments, 300,000 of which contained dependent children.[320] This was twice the level of arrears before the first lockdown a year ago, the costs of which, once again, are unevenly borne, with nine per cent of all households in the social-rented sector, six per cent in the private-rented sector, and just two per cent of mortgagors in arrears.

In response, the government has only temporarily deferred the wave of evictions that will result from this unequal distribution of the economic costs of lockdown while refusing to address its long-term consequences.

SIMON ELMER - CO-FOUNDER, ARCHITECTS FOR SOCIAL HOUSING

Simon Elmer is a writer and researcher. In 2001, he received his PhD in the History and Theory of Art and Architecture from University College London. He has taught at the universities of London, Manchester and Reading, and for two years was a visiting professor at the University of Michigan. In 2015, he co-founded Architects for Social Housing (ASH), for which he is director of research.

Over the past year, he has published two collections of articles on the coronavirus crisis, *COVID-19: Implementing the UK Biosecurity State* and *Brave New World: Expanding the UK Biosecurity State through the Winter of 2020-2021*.

Previous publications on the UK housing crisis include, with ASH co-founder Geraldine Dening, *For a Socialist Architecture: Under Capitalism* (2019), *The Costs of Estate Regeneration* (2018), *Central Hill: A Case Study in Estate Regeneration* (2018) and *The Truth about Grenfell Tower* (2017).

The work of ASH can be accessed at: architectsforsocialhousing.co.uk.

Follow them on Twitter at: @9thfloor

With the moratorium on evictions[321] ending last September, and the requirement for landlords to give tenants in arrears a minimum six months' notice of repossession only extended until the end of May,[322] at the end of last year it was estimated that 445,000 renters in the private sector were facing eviction in 2021.[323] Since the first lockdown, an estimated 694,000 households in the private rental sector have received a Section 21 no-fault eviction notice.[324] This March, 27 per cent of private renters, 2.2 million people, said they feared becoming homeless.[325]

Local authorities have taken the opportunity granted by Section 78 of the Coronavirus Act 2020 to withdraw even the token consultations they were obliged to conduct prior to this crisis when making unilateral decisions about the homes of council housing residents.[326] This has resulted in less accountability and public scrutiny in, most notably, councils pushing through estate demolition schemes that will result in the loss of thousands of homes for social rent when they are most needed. The London mayor's recent decision to withdraw funding to replace council homes demolished by such schemes will ensure their

replacements are properties for market sale or shared ownership.[327] As if that weren't enough, the government's recent changes to the sale of council housing, the receipts from which councils will now be able to invest in subsidising home-purchase rather than building council housing, will only exacerbate the already disastrous effects of this scheme.[328]

FAILURE TO BUILD

Finally, because of financial uncertainty in the building industry, in the first three quarters of 2020, just under 96,000 new homes were built in England, less than a third of the government's stated target of 300,000 homes per year over this decade.[329] With the chancellor having made it clear in his 2021 Budget[330] that the enormous financial cost of lockdown, with debt set to peak at 97.1 per cent of GDP in 2023-24, will be paid in equally huge cuts to public spending, the reduction in the already inadequate investment for social housing will lead to a further exacerbation of the crisis of housing affordability in the UK.[331]

TRANSFORMING THE HOME

Beyond this exacerbation of housing inequality, however, there is the transformation of the home being affected by the coronavirus-justified regulations, programmes and technologies of the emerging UK biosecurity state; and it's in the expansion of this new and increasingly authoritarian form of government that the lockdown will have its greatest impact on housing.

Under the arbitrary dictates of the Joint Biosecurity Centre,[332] which sets the alert levels determining the degree of freedom under which the UK population lives, the home has already been transformed from one of the few remaining private spaces into the first line of state biosecurity. Government guidance to 'work from home', although lacking any legislative power, has been obediently embraced by the economic classes able to do so; and under the global banner of 'Building Back Better' numerous professions — architects, designers, lawyers and developers — have responded by designing coronavirus-justified regulations into the fabric of the built environment, thereby transforming temporary restrictions to our rights and freedoms into permanent systems of control it will be very difficult to build out.

Not the least decisive of these is the transformation of the home into a 'Covid-secure' office space in which the only interaction with the world outside is through a screen and the digital platforms of the immensely powerful tech companies promoting the fear on which lockdown has been obeyed. But under coronavirus-justified legislation, the home has also been transformed into a quarantine cell; those who venture outside risk being confined on the arbitrary results of a testing programme denounced by scientists across the globe as unfit for any purpose other than to justify lockdown.

CITIZENSHIP AND HOUSING

The global crisis of housing affordability, whose financial centre since 2008 has been London, has shown how contingent the rights of citizenship are upon access to housing. Under lockdown, our access to public life and citizenship is on the verge of being made contingent upon compliance with an experimental vaccine programme that will be monitored

by digital identity passports whose control over our lives in the future is without limit. US property technology companies were quick to use the threat of Covid to implement biometric access controls and facial recognition entry systems to screen tenants in buildings with restricted access.[333] It would be naive to think that our entry into and departure from what we formerly regarded as the private space of the home will not be similarly subject to the same systems of surveillance and control in the UK.

> ❝ The effects on renters are far worse compared with mortgagors and home owners

By the simple expedient of making digitally controlled access to a council or social housing estate, private apartment block or gated community contingent upon the requirement to provide our regularly updated biometric data, compliance with whatever biosecurity regulations are imposed in the future may replace our credit rating as the final arbiter of who has access to housing in the UK. Connect such access to a universal basic income on which the millions of UK citizens impoverished by lockdown will rely in place of the withdrawn furlough, and the system of social credit being implemented in China will be the likely next step in our descent into what we can call, without exaggeration, a totalitarian society in the making.

A SILVER LINING?

The only positive outcome from the ongoing lockdown that we can predict is that UK property, particularly in the inner cities, may become less attractive as an investment opportunity for global capital, a trend that pushed up prices and helped to create the UK housing crisis; and that housing policy will instead be made to provide homes in which UK citizens can afford to live. At present, however, the political will to do so is lacking in both government and parliament. Unfortunately, the same lack of will defines the private sector. As it has done throughout the housing crisis,

the architectural profession and other groups in the building industry have sought to capitalise on the coronavirus crisis, rather than challenging the justifications for normalising its effects on housing and the built environment.

RECLAIMING PRIVACY

Finally, with regard to the freedom to speak out about these concerns, for questioning the necessity and efficacy of the lockdown and its consequences for UK citizens, Architects for Social Housing is under investigation by both the Office of the Regulator of Community Interest Companies and the Architects Registration Board. This is consistent with the unprecedented levels of censorship we've seen normalised under lockdown.

The UK housing crisis showed that homelessness is not an unfortunate result of the failure of housing policy to house UK citizens, but rather the product of that policy's success in attracting global investment in UK land and property. It is our opinion that, far from being the regrettable consequence of the failure of coronavirus-justified programmes and regulations, the government's lockdown of the UK population is the product of their success in implementing our transition into the UK biosecurity state.

However, for as long as our access to public spaces and services is prohibited by lockdown restrictions, monitored by the tiered system of social control and enforced by the expanding powers of the police, the home will be the new meeting place for those who refuse to comply with the regulations and programmes of the UK biosecurity state. It is our hope that, from these covert meetings, resistance will find a place to form and organise away from the surveillance technology in whose intrusion into our private lives the UK led the world even before the more than 400 coronavirus-justified regulations made into law over the past year.[334] From that resistance, the people of the UK can start to claim back what they have so meekly allowed to be taken from them on the justification of this manufactured threat to public health – their rights and freedoms under British law. The home will be at the heart of this struggle ■

Neighbourhoods

A'NEW ERA FOR CYCLING and walking' was declared by the transport secretary, Grant Shapps, in May 2020 at a Covid press conference. The policy was backed by £2 billion of funding. Quite what this had to do with a pandemic is anyone's guess.[335]

Boris Johnson sold the government's new plan for cycling, published in July 2020, in poetic terms. In his foreword, he wrote: 'All of us, cyclists and non-cyclists alike, have suddenly found out what it is like to have streets where you can breathe clean air, hear the birds singing at noon, and walk or ride in safety. That is why… we aim to kick off the most radical change to our cities since the arrival of mass motoring.'[336]

Under this 'emergency procedure', local authorities have the power to introduce measures such as road closures, cycle lanes and Low Traffic Neighbourhoods (LTNs) without the need for public consultation or prior notification. This is exactly what councils up and down the country have been doing for the past few months.

THE IMPACT

The resultant road closures and LTNs across London have had a major impact – on the elderly, the disabled and their carers;[337] these changes have massively increased journey times, leaving people struggling to get to work or to hospital appointments. The sight of emergency vehicles trapped on gridlocked streets – deliberately created by council road-closures – is sadly an everyday occurrence in many London boroughs.

In October, heavily pregnant Sabrina DaSilva, 31, thought her waters had broken, and was instructed to go straight to hospital. The *Hackney Gazette* reported that her car 'got stuck in the same spot for 35 minutes' and so she had to abandon her car and 'walk the remaining 25-minute journey to hospital, despite being in pain'.[338]

Cafes, restaurants, delivery companies, funeral directors, dog walkers and many others say business has suffered greatly as a result of road closures imposed during lockdown. 'We will lose our small independent restaurants, bars, retailers and businesses – not in a matter of years, but in a matter of months', warned one business woman.[339]

A survey of more than 700 East London residents found that road closures and increased journey times were having a particularly high impact on working-class women. One respondent explained: 'I'm a single mum, self-employed as a cleaner and I have to drive to my clients, due to all the necessary equipment I use. Without a car I simply would not be able to

work.' There are many similar stories and testaments from women struggling now to balance responsibilities, including childcare, shopping, caring for elderly relatives and at the same time holding down a job.[340]

TECHNOCRATIC APPROACH

For local authorities like Hackney, the Covid crisis was an opportunity to impose road-closure programmes that had previously been consulted on and rejected by residents, some by as much as 75 per cent.[341] The government said it was looking for 'ready to go' proposals that could be quickly implemented, and Hackney had them in spades. It simply had to rebrand them to fit with Covid legislation.

These new powers have emboldened a technocratic approach by councils, that are mistrustful of the public. To justify LTNs, many councils claim there are too many 'unnecessary' car journeys and have taken it upon themselves to decide on our behalf what is and isn't a necessary journey.

> ❝ Lockdown LTNs are a practical experiment in behaviour modification

These road closures are also a practical experiment in behavioural modification, or 'nudging' as it's often called. Department for Transport guidance makes this explicit when it says that road closures and LTNs should 'help embed altered behaviours and demonstrate the positive effects of active travel'.[342] This is the reasoning behind the absence of prior consultation.

For the government, local authorities and lobby groups like London Living Streets, removing public choice and imposing schemes on 18-month 'trials' will force us to get used to road closures. 'Don't make it a yes or no vote', says Living Streets, hoping to avoid a 'perceived referendum'.

A COMMUNITY RESOURCE

For pro-LTN activists, cars are detrimental to community life. JH Crawford, author of *Carfree Cities*, claims 'the largest effect cars have on society is the tremendous damage they do to social spaces'.[343] However, the shutdown of many London streets is tearing into the fabric of many working-class and minority communities who depend on their cars. 'We underestimate the usefulness of our cars as a community resource', says Hackney resident and campaigner Ruth Parkinson. 'Many of our neighbourhoods are held together by informal networks of

helpers, carers, companions and shoppers. So often, the car is an essential part of that equation.'[344]

Residents groups say that frontline emergency workers have been instructed by their bosses to keep quiet about the effect road closures are having on their work. One or two have defied instructions and spoken publicly at demonstrations. *The Times* reported recently that delays to emergency call-outs have risen sharply where LTNs have been introduced, according to fire-service records, confirming what anti-LTN groups have been arguing for months.[345] And yet some emergency services bosses still claim all is fine.

One positive to come out of this is that councils have succeeded in uniting radicals, conservatives, Greens, Muslim, Jewish and other communities against road closures. Across the country, grassroots campaign groups have sprung up, for the purpose of fighting council road closures. Some London groups boast membership exceeding 7,000 residents and show signs of becoming a real political force, organising large-scale rallies and demonstrations, bringing legal cases against local authorities and some standing for office in local elections.

A focus on the state of our local democracy is long overdue. If residents are beginning to question how their towns and boroughs are run, and seeing the need to become more involved themselves, then this has to be a sign of hope. It would be easy to see the past year as being a story of a pacified and increasingly fearful public, but perhaps the fightback against road closures suggests the public are not so easily pacified ∎

NIALL CROWLEY - ORGANISER, HORRENDOUS HACKNEY ROAD CLOSURES

Niall is a designer and writer, who works in education. He is an organiser of Horrendous Hackney Road Closures, a grassroots anti-road closure campaign group. He has renovated and run pubs and restaurants in East London and in rural Staffordshire. He used to sing second tenor in the amateur chorus of Birmingham Opera Company. His other passions include Northern Soul and West Bromwich Albion. He recently stood for election to Hackney Council as an independent.
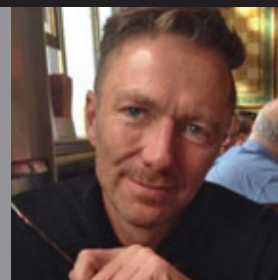
Follow Niall on Twitter: @elondems

Prisons

I WORK WITHIN THE PRISON service. Here, I want to reflect upon the implications and the ramifications of the lockdown throughout Her Majesty's prison estate.

Upon the announcement by the government in March 2020 that the UK would be going into a national lockdown, Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) acted immediately.

The services was concerned that Covid-19 would spread like wildfire throughout the prison estate and was worried that there would be a significant increase in the death of prisoners. It was with this in mind that in March 2020 all visits from family members and loved ones were cancelled,[346] all educational and rehabilitation courses were postponed, and all opportunities for prisoners to work during their sentence was stopped.[347] Essentially, prisons were locked down.

Many other activities, that were seemed to be normal day-to-day activities inside the prison were also stopped. There was a lack of access to dentists, medical appointments were being postponed and most healthcare clinics had been suspended.[348]

MICHAEL CAMPBELL
PRISONS ADVISER

Michael Campbell is an expert adviser to prisons and supports governors, officers and prisoners to implement change that strengthens safety for everyone in prison.

Michael served for three and a half years in prisons across the country and develops practical solutions grounded in his experience to tackle prisoners' anxiety, stress and frustration. From the first days spent behind bars to the days spent preparing for release, Michael's work helps prisoners to cope with an alien environment, in order to reduce the staggering toll of self-harm, suicide and violence inside. His approaches have been adopted by every organisation managing prisons in the UK in both public and private sectors.

Michael is also a guest lecturer at De Montfort University in Leicester, speaking on penology and delivering most of his lectures online.

Michael campaigns for a zero target for self-harm in prisons and argues for an approach to criminal justice based on evidence over ideology.

Michael blogs, tweets and podcasts as the @TheTartanCon.

LOCKED IN CELLS

Prisoners were locked in their cells for up to 23 hours a day. They were allowed out for one hour, which had to include 30 minutes of exercise in the fresh air, the ability to use a telephone and to have a shower.[349]

The United Nations defines solitary confinement as being held in a cell for 22 hours or more per day.[350] It states that prolonged solitary confinement is cruel, inhuman, or degrading. 'Prolonged' means anything over 15 days. Many prisoners in our country have now spent over one year in conditions that equate to solitary confinement.

There is a phrase often used in relation to prison: 'Prisoners are sent to prison as a punishment, not to be punished.' However, it must be said that locking an individual up for 23 hours a day in a cell just 10 feet by six feet with one other person is indeed a cruel and harsh punishment. The impact that this has on somebody's mental health cannot be underestimated.

EARLY RELEASE

The prison service response to Covid had three objectives:

1. preserve life;
2. maintain security stability and safety in the broader sense;
3. provide sufficient capacity.[351]

Indeed, in April 2020, the prison service quickly convened a taskforce to study the possibility of an early-release scheme for those prisoners who were at the end of the custodial part of their sentence.[352] A large media strategy was put in place to confirm that the Ministry of Justice was looking at releasing certain prisoners early. The result of this ill-fated and badly designed project was that only 316 prisoners were released early – less than 0.5 per cent of the prison population.

GREATEST RISKS

Was the prison service overreacting in its instigation of a complete suspension of all activities in prison and locking down their entire estate? Evidence suggests

that people who work in the justice sector (and in prisons) were very aware that the primary risk of transmission of Covid was from staff.[353] On settled wings, in particular, the chances of a prisoner becoming infected by any other route than contact with staff was minimal.

Remand prisons, that hold those sent by the court to await trial, have been most vulnerable to Covid cases, as those new arrivals were coming straight from the community. (Moreover, because cases are taking longer to be heard, more and more people have been held in these arduous conditions even though they haven't been convicted.)[354] As prisoners sometimes live two or three to a cell, it would have been impossible for them to abide by the government's new social distancing guidelines. The prison service inexplicably waited for several weeks before implementing a segregation policy for those coming into a prison and, indeed, it was woefully slow in testing those arriving into a prison for Covid. Shockingly, prisons only started testing staff on a regular basis at the tail end of last year, some eight months after the lockdown in prisons was announced.

EMPATHY AND TRUST

The negative effects of national lockdown have been sorely felt in prison, and not just for the reasons mentioned above, in particular that we are now locking our prisoners up for 23 hours a day and have been doing so for over a year. The lockdown measures have also thwarted the service's ability to aid the rehabilitation of prisoners. We must now ask why we are sending them to prison at all, if not for arbitrary punishment and retribution.

In the first few months of the pandemic, prisoners understood the reason why the prisons had taken the step to isolate them. It helped that prisoners could see on television what was happening outside in the community as a whole. Therefore, one could say that the prisoners empathised with the public (for possibly the first time ever). Perhaps, understandably so, that empathy has recently started to ebb as the country starts to ease its national restrictions; our prisons remain locked down.

However, it is not all doom and gloom within the prison estate. Some very innovative governors have used this enforced lockdown to make some positive changes. Children and families have been forced to suffer further separation from their loved ones. As such, video calls with families have been initiated over the past year. This has allowed some sort of family contact to continue (albeit limited). Happily, HMPPS and the prison estate have eventually realised that family ties are of the utmost importance in rehabilitating prisoners.[355] They have issued weekly free phone credit in order to maintain those family ties. Prison officers have had more time to engage with their wards over the past year and as such a bond of trust has been built between the prisoner and the staff member. It is a level of trust that was so sorely missing prior to Covid.

> " Many prisoners have spent over a year in conditions equivalent to solitary confinement

CHANCE TO LEARN

The prison service has now set up a process to ask itself fundamental questions about what it has learned from living with Covid, and how to build back better. It understands that achieving a healthy prison means a huge amount more than freedom from disease. It is hoped that the prison authorities will learn from their early mistakes in managing the pandemic and take forward the innovation that they have shown. To ruin the opportunity of learning and taking forward their experiences of this pandemic would be to the detriment of those remanded to their care and, for obvious reasons, the populace as a whole.

While many people will believe that the plight of prisoners is something best not talked about, I would urge them to understand that the vast majority of all of those in prison will be released at some point in their lifetime and could be their next-door neighbour. It is imperative that we treat all of our citizens with decency and humanity ∎

TOBY YOUNG
GENERAL SECRETARY,
FREE SPEECH UNION

Toby Young is the general secretary of the Free Speech Union and the editor of LockdownSceptics.org. He is the author of four books, the best known of which is *How to Lose Friends & Alienate People* (2001), and three plays, including *Who's The Daddy?*, which was named Best New Comedy at the 2006 Theatregoers' Choice Awards. His teaching experience includes working as a teaching fellow at Harvard and a teaching assistant at Cambridge. He was an energetic participant in the Vote Leave campaign and is an associate editor of the *Spectator*, where he has been a weekly columnist for 21 years, an associate editor of *Quillette* and an associate editor of *The Critic*.

Follow Toby on Twitter: @toadmeister

Free Speech

ON 3 APRIL 2020, I WROTE an article for the *Telegraph* about the tsunami of criticism I'd received after publishing a sceptical piece at the end of March about the UK government's lockdown strategy.[356]

That piece appeared in *The Critic*[357] and shortly after it was published I started trending on Twitter, with thousands of people denouncing me, often using intemperate language. In the *Telegraph* article, I expressed my disappointment about this reaction and said people shouldn't feel shy about criticising the lockdown even if those views put them at odds with the government and its medical advisers, as well as a majority of the electorate. Our leaders were making decisions every day that would affect all of our lives for years to come and it was right to scrutinise those decisions in the public square.

In the days that followed the *Telegraph* article, I was contacted by dozens of people, many of them doctors and scientists, who shared my reservations about the lockdown policy and were frustrated that it wasn't being properly challenged. Some had tried to get their views published in newspapers, either as letters or articles, but without success. That's when I decided to create a blog called *Lockdown Sceptics*. The idea was for it to serve as a hub for sceptical articles, academic

papers and interviews that had appeared elsewhere, as well as to provide an opportunity for experts and non-experts to air views that they couldn't get published anywhere else.

From the start, I also welcomed rebuttals of these views. The critical thing, I believed, was to have an informed public debate. Decisions of this importance, affecting the UK's entire population, shouldn't be 'left to the experts', as some people believed – and I was astonished by how many people condemned me and other sceptics on the grounds that we lacked the scientific expertise to evaluate the government's handling of the pandemic, or the advice it was receiving from the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (Sage).

To invoke David Hume's famous distinction, scientific knowledge can tell you what *is*; it cannot tell you what you *ought* to do.

ABUSING CRITICS

Most contributors to *Lockdown Sceptics* were small 'c' conservatives like me because we place a high value on those freedoms protected by English Common Law. We were horrified by the suspension of those liberties because we worry about the cost of wide-scale state interventions, as well as their unintended consequences, and… well, because scepticism is at the core of our political philosophy.

But I received plenty of emails from people with very different political values to mine, including some lifelong socialists. These emails usually began: 'I've never agreed with anything you've ever said before, but on this issue…' I loved getting those emails because it showed people were willing to set aside party political differences in order to have an informed debate about the lockdown policy. As Pericles, the prime minister's political lode star, said: 'Instead of looking on discussion as a stumbling-block in the way of action, we think it an indispensable preliminary to any wise action at all.'

But that democratic ideal was hard to hold onto as the debate over the lockdown policy became more polarised. When I came up with the phrase 'lockdown sceptics' to describe those who were critical of the lockdown policy, I didn't anticipate that it would enter the political lexicon or be used by many as a term of abuse.

The economist Sam Bowman, with whom I'd had a relatively civilised debate at the beginning of the crisis, went on to join forces with the Conservative MP Neil O'Brien and set up a website called Anti-Virus: The Covid-19 FAQ[358] devoted to attacking lockdown sceptics, including the medical scientists Sunetra Gupta, Karol Sikora and Carl Heneghan. He and others homed in on some of the inaccurate predictions made by sceptics – claiming Britain was approaching herd immunity in the summer of 2020, for instance – and cited those as proof that we were wrong about everything else.

But, of course, supporters of the lockdown policy have made just as many inaccurate predictions – the Warwick University modelling team predicted in May of last year[359] that daily Covid deaths would climb to above 4,000 a day in the summer of 2020 if we lifted controls too quickly – and it seems unfair for our opponents to hold us to a standard they don't hold themselves to. When you're debating how best to respond to something as fast-moving and unpredictable as SARS-CoV-2, with so many variables affecting the rise and fall of infections, it's inevitable that all sides are going to get some things wrong. I don't think the sceptics' track record was any worse than that of our opponents. In fact, I think it was a good deal better! (You can see a selection of research studies showing that lockdowns are largely ineffective on the American Institute for Economic Research's website,[360] although the best argument is that Sweden experienced a smaller increase in its overall mortality rate in 2020[361] than a majority of European countries, in spite of eschewing the lockdown policy.)

ABSENT OPPOSITION

It often felt to those on my side of the debate that we weren't competing on a level playing field. I don't just mean that the lockdown's defenders were less inhibited about launching *ad hominem* attacks, although that was certainly true. When Sunetra Gupta joined forces with Jay Bhattacharya and Martin Kulldorff to launch the Great Barrington Declaration[362] on 4 October 2020, proposing an alternative to the lockdown strategy, they were accused by three public health scientists in the *Guardian* of being under the influence of right-wing billionaires who were trying to give scientific legitimacy to a 'neoliberal' agenda.[363] Another tactic favoured by our opponents was to label us 'Covid sceptics' (see the Anti-Virus website mentioned above), although

I don't think any of the prominent lockdown sceptics have ever denied that Covid is a serious disease that poses a mortal danger to those in poor health.

Nor do I mean that the pro-lockdown side had the spending power of the British state at its disposal, although that was true, too. Normal rules about the amount of money the government is allowed to spend on promoting its point of view were suspended during the crisis because the pro-lockdown messaging was designed to secure compliance with its social distancing guidance, and that would supposedly 'save lives'. Had the government spent taxpayers' money on ads that made the case for its suppression strategy, rather than a less draconian approach, that might have been more controversial, particularly if the Labour Party had been in favour of the latter.

" Science can tell you what is. It cannot tell you what you ought to do

But the paid-for messaging took it for granted that the government had broadly adopted the right strategy – as did the leader of the opposition – and instead, focused on what people should do to help facilitate it. So, the Conservative Government was allowed to get away with spending hundreds of millions of pounds on an advertising campaign that, indirectly, affirmed the wisdom of Boris Johnson's approach. Incidentally, a good deal of this money was spent on full-page newspaper ads, giving the print media a much-needed financial boost when its other advertising revenue had declined and thereby creating a powerful incentive for editors to support the government. Little wonder that 13 months after the first lockdown was imposed, in spite of the huge collateral damage caused by the policy, the Conservatives were clocking up 14-point leads in the polls.[364]

Using the same rationale – the lockdown was essential to save lives – the government gave itself permission to use covert psychological strategies, with the help of its Behavioural Insights Team, to ratchet up fear of the virus among the British population.[365] That, too, was justified on the grounds that it would increase compliance with social-distancing measures but, like the advertising campaign, it had the indirect effect of convincing people that the lockdowns were necessary. After all, if the threat posed by Covid had been properly contextualised – compared to the threat posed by the other major causes of death, for instance – people might have been less willing to accept what Lord Sumption called the greatest interference in personal liberty in Britain's history. Again, not a squeak from Keir Starmer. A democratic government was allowed to get away with using sophisticated propaganda techniques to secure people's consent for the suspension of their rights, something that could never have happened in 'peacetime'.

MEDIA CONSENSUS

Just as sinister was the Government's enlistment of Ofcom, the state broadcasting regulator, to ensure any dissent from lockdown orthodoxy was kept to a minimum on the airwaves. On 23 March 2020, the same day the first lockdown was announced, Ofcom issued a 'Note to Broadcasters',[366] reminding them of the 'significant potential harm' that could be caused by dubious health claims about the virus or inaccurate or misleading programmes 'in relation to the virus or public policy regarding it'.

On 20 April, Ofcom followed up by reprimanding Eamonn Holmes,[367] a television presenter, for having said something that 'could have undermined people's trust in the views being expressed by the authorities on the Coronavirus and the advice of mainstream sources of public health information'. Holmes's sin, according to Ofcom, was to say on ITV's *This Morning* on 13 April that any theory running counter to the official Covid narrative – such as the one linking 5G masts and the symptoms of Covid – deserved to be discussed in the mainstream media, if only so it could be thoroughly debunked. This was in spite of him saying the 5G conspiracy theory was 'not true and incredibly stupid'. Ofcom said this view – the view that such theories deserved a public hearing, not that they were in any way plausible – was 'ill-judged and risked undermining viewers' trust in advice from public authorities and scientific evidence'.[368]

The Free Speech Union, of which I'm the CEO, applied to the High Court for permission to judicially review this guidance, but we were unsuccessful. Our argument was that by warning broadcasters not to air anything that could undermine people's trust in the advice being issued by the authorities about the virus, Ofcom was inhibiting them from giving a platform to people who were critical of the government's overall approach. After all, if you appear on television and say lockdown is causing more harm than good, that could have the effect of undermining people's confidence in the social-distancing advice being disseminated by the Department of Health.

The judge didn't accept this. Like most educated professionals, he didn't regard the lockdown as a politically contentious intervention, but, rather, an unavoidable policy dictated by 'the science' that any responsible govern-ment would implement, as nearly all Western governments did. For him, it went without saying that anyone challenging the authorities' social-distancing advice, including the insistence that you should not leave your home without a 'reasonable excuse', was potentially causing harm.

In fairness to the judge, he did invite us to produce evidence that broadcasters were actively suppressing criticism of the Government as a result of Ofcom's guidance and that proved hard to do. The evidence I came across wasn't the kind that would stack up in court.

For instance, on 14 October 2020, Sunetra Gupta appeared on BBC News to talk about the new control measures that had been introduced in the north of England and just before she went on air one of the producers told her not to mention the Great Barrington Declaration. Naturally, she ignored this instruction, but where did it come from?

Another example: at the end of September 2020, Professor Susan Michie, a member of Sage, took to Twitter to complain that she'd been invited on to the *Today* programme to discuss the lockdown on the understanding that the scientists who opposed it would be portrayed as beyond the pale, only for Professor Gupta to make a compelling, logical argument. 'I'd got prior agreement from R4 about the framing of the item', she wrote. 'I was assured that this would not be held as an even-handed debate.'[369] On whose authority had she been given that assurance? We couldn't prove it had been handed down from some high-up at the BBC who was worried about being censured by Ofcom. In truth, I doubt that Ofcom's coronavirus guidance was a major cause of the one-sidedness of the debate about lockdown on the airwaves. A consensus quickly developed among broadcast journalists, as well as broadsheet journalists, that the first lockdown was necessary – and they were broadly supportive of the second and third lockdowns, too. Insofar as they were critical of the government's handling of the crisis, it was generally for not locking

down sooner or more severely or for longer. There were exceptions – the *Mail* and the *Telegraph* were the most sceptical of the national newspapers, although not unequivocally so, and the occasional sceptical voice slipped past the BBC's bookers, notably Lord Sumption. But the only media platforms that took up a broadly sceptical position were those on the fringes of the mainstream media, such as talkRADIO, the *Critic* and the *Conservative Woman*. It was in this not-quite-respectable ecosystem that *Lockdown Sceptics* was located.

SOCIAL MEDIA

This consensus extended far beyond journalism and encompassed nearly all the elite professions across the developed world, including the managers of the big social media platforms who diligently censored anyone who dissented from the positions taken by the World Health Organisation (WHO) – including talkRADIO[370] – even though those positions sometimes shifted. When Dr David Nabarro, the WHO's special envoy on Covid, told Andrew Neil on *Spectator TV* on 9 October 2020 that 'we in the World Health Organization do not advocate lockdowns as the primary means of control of this virus',[371] I joked with other sceptics that YouTube would now have to review its content over the previous six months, restore all those videos it had taken down because they were critical of the lockdown policy and remove those that were in favour. But, of course, it didn't happen.

I had my own run-in with YouTube when it removed a clip I'd posted on my own channel for 'violating' its 'community standards'. This was a discussion in which I'd made the civil-rights argument against indiscriminately quarantining whole populations. The clip was restored when I pointed out that the other person in the discussion, nodding his head enthusiastically as I railed against the government, was Michael Levitt, joint winner of the 2014 Nobel Prize for Chemistry.

Levitt himself was later disinvited from a conference on computational biology and biodesign, even though those fields wouldn't exist without his work.[372]

MORAL RIGHTEOUSNESS

It was this consensus in favour of the lockdown policy, and the hostility of its adherents to anyone who dissented from it, that was the main reason it was so hard to have a proper public debate. One of the most striking characteristics of the policy's enthusiasts was their moral righteousness, which was why otherwise-liberal people were happy to embrace illiberal strategies, such as censorship and no-platforming, to promote their cause. Such *cancellation* strategies are commonplace at either end of the political divide – particularly on the woke left – but the unusual thing about the pandemic period was that they were used by people who define themselves as moderates and centrists.

> " Otherwise-liberal people embraced censorship and no-platforming to promote their cause

Was this because they were convinced that lockdowns saved lives and therefore anyone who criticised them posed a danger to public health? They often spoke as if they believed that, and a team of researchers published a paper[373] in the *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* in March 2021 showing that the efforts of governments and their scientific advisors to control the pandemic had become moralised, with anyone questioning those efforts being treated with the same moral disgust as someone who questioned sacred values. A good example of this was the journalist Dominic Lawson, who wrote an article in *The Sunday Times* accusing Sunetra Gupta and me of causing the deaths of people who'd caught Covid after we'd misled them about the seriousness of the UK's epidemic.[374]

Such puritanical zeal was rarely exhibited by the sceptics, which on the face of it is odd. After all, most of us are convinced that the lockdowns killed many more people than they saved and we could just as easily have accused our opponents of having blood on their hands. But we didn't – at least, most of us didn't.

On the contrary, we shied away from arousing people's moral indignation as a way of persuading them to embrace our cause, preferring to cite the empirical evidence. That may be one reason why we lost the argument: while we were pointing to the paucity of data about the positive impact of lockdowns on infections, hospitalisations and deaths, as well as the evidence that they were causing social and economic harm, our opponents were going puce with rage and screaming: 'Blood on their hands.'

STATUS SIGNALLING

So why did the educated bourgeoisie across the Western world become such fanatical lockdown adherents? No doubt social psychologists will be debating that puzzle for decades. My theory is it wasn't about virtue signalling so much as status signalling, although the two nearly always go together. The key thing is that at an early stage in the evolution of the pandemic a consensus emerged among public-health scientists that the best way to mitigate its impact was to quarantine everyone in their homes, the healthy as well as the sick. Why this happened is hard to say, given that the lockdown policy was historically unprecedented and, up until 2020, public-health authorities, including the WHO, had advised against quarantining in the event of another pandemic.[375]

I expect it had something to do with the apparent success of the lockdown in Wuhan, the television pictures from Bergamo on the nightly news in March 2020 and the WHO's recommendation that other countries should follow China's example if they wanted to avoid a similar catastrophe. And, let's face it, it doesn't take much to persuade liberal policy makers that the best solution to any crisis is a large-scale state intervention, something I wrote about in the *Critic*.[376]

But whatever the reason, once the view got abroad that 'the science' was four square behind the lockdown policy, the world's educated elites, including the international political class, fell into line. This wasn't because they trusted the judgment of public health panjandrums like Tedros Adhanom, Anthony Fauci and Bill Gates, although that played a part. It was more because disagreeing with them is a low status indicator.

In the eyes of the West's elites, those expressing scepticism about the wisdom of the lockdown policy were indistinguishable from anti-vaxxers and the people vandalising 5G masts. They were 'conspiracy theorists', which has become a synonym for uneducated, knuckle-dragging troglodytes – the kind of people who stormed the Capital building in January 2020 to 'stop the steal'. And it didn't help that those political leaders who rejected the pro-lockdown consensus – Donald Trump, Marine Le Pen, Jair Bolsonaro – were untouchables as far 'Davos Man' was concerned. For the global elite, and their bag carriers in the professions, supporting lockdown was just something that *everybody* did, like turning left on an aeroplane and spending Christmas in the Caribbean. It was a *no-brainer*.

That's my theory about why the world went to hell in a handcart in March 2020 – or, rather, a Mercedes-Maybach S 650 Pullman. It wasn't state censorship or Silicon Valley censorship or the resources devoted to promoting compliance with the lockdown policy by governments around the world, including psyops, that quietened dissenting voices during the crisis. Rather, it was self-censorship by the chattering classes prompted in the main by them not wanting to appear scientifically illiterate. The armies of commentators and behind-the-scenes influencers who would normally be picking quarrels with each other and scrutinising every detail of government policy became nodding dogs for a year.

The counter-narrative platform I created was more of a jalopy, but one into which thousands of sceptics crowded, like a group of students trying to secure a place in the *Guinness Book of Records* by squeezing into a Mini. At its peak, *Lockdown Sceptics* averaged 1.25 million page views a month – not bad for a website housed in my garden shed and held together with the digital equivalent of Sellotape and rubber bands. Our slogan was: 'Stay sceptical. Control the hysteria. Save lives.' But maybe it should have been: 'Proud to be a deplorable ■

Civil Liberties

THE GOVERNMENT RESPONSE to Covid-19 has been to introduce the most draconian curtailment of civil liberties since the Second World War. On 26 March 2020, the Coronavirus Act 2020[377] passed through Parliament in just four sitting days, and the Health Protection (Coronavirus Restrictions) (England) Regulations 2020/350[378] came into force under the Emergency Procedure of the Public Health Act (part 2A, section 45R)[379] without going through Parliament.

It is these Health Protection Regulations that introduced the powers restricting movement, work, business, worship and gatherings. In summary, they criminalise normal social behaviour and are in force through ministerial fiat. Devolved governments also meant that different emergency type laws applied to Scotland, Northern Ireland, Wales and England. I will focus upon England, but similar considerations apply to the other nations.

LAW AND GUIDANCE

The Health Protection Regulations have been relaxed, heightened, expanded and reduced; accompanied by overriding bafflement. A pattern developed. Each new set of amendments would be published the night before they came into force. On one occasion, there was only a 15-minute gap between publication and coming into force, difficult even for lawyers to properly understand.[380] Guidance and ministerial pronouncements in anticipation of the amended Regulations would be made the preceding week. However, the guidance usually was more restrictive than the law[381] and the ministerial pronouncements mixed up law and guidance. This has been consistently compounded by government conflation of both law and guidance into 'rules'.

While not quite in the league of Caligula who 'wrote his laws in a very small character, and hung them up upon high pillars, the more effectually to ensnare the people',[382] there has been absolute confusion by ministers, prime minister, police and members of the public as to the law in force.

At the time of writing, there have been 71 pieces of Covid related Regulations and 26 versions of Health Protection Regulations (England). Law must be accessible and clear to people otherwise the law itself is not lawful. Yet the coronavirus laws repeatedly lack legal certainty.

COMMUNAL WORSHIP

Further, there has been no or little parliamentary scrutiny of how the science informed the restrictions. For example, up until 4 July 2020 there was a ban on communal worship.[383] The effect of the Regulations up until that time was that it was lawful for a member of the public to visit garden centres, golf clubs or house-viewings in private homes, but not for a person to arrange for socially distanced communal prayers in a mosque (even with restricted numbers).

I represented Tabassum Hussain, the chair of the executive committee of the Jamiyat Tabligh-ul-Islam Mosque, in Bradford. He challenged the government ban, seeking to open restricted Friday Jummah prayers with limited numbers and social distancing and other public-health measures. Permission was granted for the case to be argued, but it bounced into the long grass as restrictions eased, enabling the government to respond that it was academic[384] – the fact that a ban had occurred at all was to be forgotten.

And yet the freedom to manifest a religion (Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights) is,

according to the judgment in one human rights case, one of the 'foundations of a "democratic society"… the pluralism indissociable from a democratic society, which has been dearly won over the centuries, depends on it'.[385] There was no science relied upon to blanket ban carefully curated communal worship. When the government's evidence came much later (in another case, concerning a different religion) it was in the form of a SAGE paper of 21 September 2020 and a SAGE summary paper of the same date. The evidence was anecdotal concerning an outbreak linked to a 'religious community' in South Korea and cases in churches in Singapore and Germany (although Germany already had held a ban on communal worship to be unconstitutional).[386] SAGE urged the government to undertake more detailed data collection on 'the effectiveness of intervention in different settings'. Data remains opaque. In some ways, this case is a point of reference as to whether subsequent greater understanding of Covid resulted in lighter treading over people's rights. It has not. In the same way that communal worship was criminalised at a legislative stroke,[387] so freedom to travel and a 'passport' to enter a pub are now in focus. Open scrutiny remains elusive.

LAST-MINUTE LAW

Another example of the tenuous justification of restrictions upon lives being founded in public health necessity was highlighted in September 2020 when children could not have a birthday party outdoors if there were more than six, but a large hunting party was specifically made lawful.[388]

> ❝ On one occasion, there was only a 15-minute gap between publication and coming into force

Each restriction upon civilians has been in last-minute legislating. People have been turned back and forth with a government grip firmly on the handbrake. Parliament hasn't even been along for the ride. For example, the third set of Public Health Regulations were debated when the fourth set were already in force and the fourth set were not debated at all. Indeed, Parliament has only actually voted twice on the Regulations, once before the move to a principle of 'three tiers'[389] and the second time before the November 2020 lockdown.[390] Prior to the last months of the year all Regulations

passed without parliamentary approval. There is no requirement to lay the law before Parliament before 21 days.[391] Even then, Parliament has no power to amend the Regulations.

It took rebellion from Conservative MPs and a scorching speech from the speaker, Lindsey Hoyle, MP for Chorley, on the 30 September 2020 for Parliament to start having any voice. Hoyle said 'the way the government has exercised its powers to make secondary legislation during this crisis has been totally unsatisfactory'. He called upon the government to stop treating Parliament with contempt.[392]

In fact, the government has settled into governing by decree. To date, the government has laid 424 coronavirus-related statutory instruments, using powers in 120 Acts of Parliament, five Orders and five EU Regulations before the UK Parliament. Since 6 March 2020, this means that this unscrutinised legislation has been coming at seven per week.[393]

It needs to be remembered that the emergency laws are for public health, not public order. They are for 'preventing, protecting against, controlling or providing a public health response to the incidence or spread of infection or contamination' (section 45C(1) of the 1984 Act). The police have other powers to manage public-order offences.

The Regulations have produced monster fixed penalty notices, testing the principle running through the Regulations that enforcement was to be a last resort

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and that a person might be diverted from the criminal-justice system by being given the option of a fixed penalty notice. That diversion is only effective if the amount of money demanded is affordable. However, the sanction for a first infringement of the Regulations increased from £60 (or £30 if within 14 days) to a 'super fine' of £10,000. There is no means testing and there remains no appeal system. Refusals to pay – or inability to pay – result in processing of those people through the magistrates' courts. While this calls into question the proportionality of interference with people's rights, practically, the underfunded criminal-justice system cannot cope with more growth to its pre-pandemic backlog of cases.

WHAT'S PERMITTED?

Laws themselves are not a solution. As has been shown, they can be part of the problem if they are not just, clear and accessible in substance and application.

A study (by Halliday, Meers and Tomlinson) found that whilst 99 per cent of the people surveyed claimed to know what activities were permitted under the law during the first phase of lockdown, 94 per cent of them erroneously thought that intentionally coming within two metres of someone outside the home was prohibited by law.[394] There has never been such a legally binding prohibition in England. Similarly, the restriction of exercise only once a day was never a legal restriction in England, though it was in Wales.[395]

When the government announced a relaxing of the Regulations on 10 May 2020, the prime minister announced that 'we want to encourage people to take more and even unlimited amounts of exercise', omitting to clarify that there was no legal prohibition in the first place.[396] He added that 'you can drive to other destinations' to take such exercise. There was no such legal prohibition in the first place.

People either were concerned not to do something unlawful or were unsure and so did not want to risk it. This overstating inevitably impacted upon the most vulnerable – those who would be stressed by a parking ticket. Criminal enforcement is a frightening concept. This mashing of government announcements, public-health guidance and law has led to unlawful enforcement. As well as distressing to individuals, it is destructive of the rule of law. People lose trust in the justice system; faith in the police vanishes.

The first publicised conviction under the coronavirus laws was in Newcastle. A woman was arrested at Newcastle railway station after a report of her 'loitering'.

She was standing on her own at the station. She was convicted on 30 March 2020.[397]

She had been wrongly prosecuted for 'failing to provide identity or reasons for travel to police and failing to comply with requirements under the Coronavirus Act' under Schedule 21 of the Coronavirus Act 2020. There is no such offence. She also was not considered 'potentially infectious'. In addition, she was falsely imprisoned and wrongfully convicted. The conviction was set aside. The deputy chief constable of British Transport Police, Adrian Hanstock, also said: 'It is highly unusual that a case can pass through a number of controls in the criminal justice process and fail in this way.'[398]

But similar cases followed. On 20 April, a young man in Oxford, walking to an address where his mother lived and back to another address was arrested and prosecuted – this time under the Welsh part of the Coronavirus Act. As well as utilising the wrong law, the wrong law applying to the wrong country was deployed.[399]

DUE PROCESS

A decade of cutting the courts to their knees means that fair trial process is bowed and justice often is not being done. The depletion of funding to the criminal-justice system has been exposed by the coronavirus. A recent report from the House of Lords Constitution Committee has found that the government has failed to protect the justice system.[400] Between 2010 and 2019, overall funding to courts has fallen by 21 per cent in real terms. Legal aid has been slashed by 37 per cent. Between 2010 and 2019 half of the magistrates' courts have been closed.

On 2 May 2020, the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) announced that it was reviewing all charges and prosecutions under the coronavirus laws. This was a positive move, recognising that the laws were being wrongly applied and seeking to remedy. The review found that 28 per cent of cases had been incorrectly charged.[401] The latest review by the CPS found that 359 of 1,252 charges last year under the Covid laws were later withdrawn or set aside in court.[402] Every charge under the Coronavirus Act 2020 was wrong, with invalid pleas or unlawful convictions. A further 127 wrongful charges were brought under the Regulations.[403]

The number of wrongful prosecutions evidences that there also is likely to be thousands of unlawfully issued fixed-penalty notices as there are no safeguards. These also should be reviewed.

The pandemic has intensified overreach by police in the use of their powers. This is driven by confusion by police as to what their powers actually are as well as macho signalling from their chiefs supporting the use of drones to observe walkers and threatening inspection of shopping to assess if it was 'bare essentials'.[404] There are well-publicised cases of two women walking in Derbyshire countryside being given fixed-penalty notices (later withdrawn)[405] and police doubling down against a vigil held on Clapham Common, London for the murdered Sarah Everard. At one stage, the Metropolitan Police seemed to be arguing that protests are unlawful. This was wrong.[406]

The effectiveness in preventing the spread of the virus in much of the enforcement that I have dealt with is likely to be minimal – in most cases potentially increasing risk by bringing small numbers into contact with more people through police interaction.[407]

" **People lose trust in the justice system. Faith in the police vanishes.**

We have also seen concerning enforcement against students by private security companies.[408] In November 2020, I was contacted by an 18-year-old student who was studying at Nottingham Trent University. She had been in another student's shared accommodation in the floor above her own shared accommodation, in the same block, but numbers had been over six – probably around 10. The police attended, adding to the numbers. The student explained that there was no prohibition on students all congregating in the same laundry room. She said that police had come into the flat and taken her photograph as she was not carrying ID. She said that she had not been asked to return to her flat. She would have done this. Instead, she was issued with a Nottinghamshire police letter indicating that she would be considered for a fixed-penalty notice or prosecution.

TAKING RESPONSIBILITY

Currently, government has announced a 'roadmap' out of lockdown.[409] However, there remain proposals which represent serious interferences with human rights, such as bans to travel outside the UK without reasonable excuse and the need to produce or share data in order to drink in a pub.

The government and police chiefs need to take responsibility for unlawful and inconsistent issuing of fixed-penalty notices[410] and review them, focusing upon whether they were correctly issued and, where there was evidence of a breach, whether issuing a penalty really was a last resort.

In other words, the discretion not to penalise people for a breach, particularly where there was a low risk of spreading coronavirus, should be applied.

There needs to be a return to policing by consent with enforcement deployed as a last resort. Legal aid cuts should be reversed to enable people to challenge laws which disproportionately interfere with their human rights and to be represented when at risk of criminal sanction.

A new Coronavirus Act II should replace the Coronavirus Act 2020 and the Health Protection Regulations. It should be considered by Parliament through a deliberative process including evidence taking by Parliamentary Committee.

The House of Lords warned in 2008 against 'fast track' legislation.[411] Indeed in 2004, the Civil Contingencies Act was passed to provide provision for emergency. At that time, Parliament then carefully considered the constitutional balance between Parliament and Executive in emergency. However, it was jettisoned when there actually was an emergency and the Covid laws were rushed into the space. A new Coronavirus Act would restore Parliament's spine as well as providing the necessary safeguards to protect the rights of civilians.

More generally, within and beyond government, it is important that there is due respect given to the importance of discussing and highlighting these issues. I have no difficulty in speaking out against the curtailment of civil liberties. But I find that there is increasing polarisation, a desire to place me in a specific group. At the same time, public messaging from the Home Office condemning human-rights lawyers is unhelpful, as well potentially dangerous for all lawyers working in human rights.[412] The government should allow light to shine upon the reasons for the ongoing curtailment of fundamental human rights. After all, the longer freedoms are lost, the deeper they sink and the harder they are to recover ∎

Stories on film

Lobster Films has produced filmed interviews with a variety of people talking about their personal experiences of lockdown. You can watch these films at peopleslockdowninquiry.co.uk

Beverly, 59
Bus driver
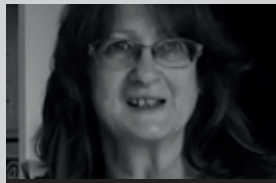
Carol, 61
Supermarket worker

Denis, 65
Builder

Faye, 32
Solicitor

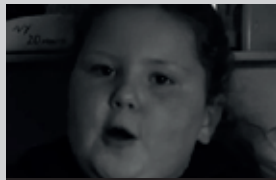George, 31
Film props manager

Graeme, 54
Health consultant

Hasmik, 55
Retail worker

Hunter, 5
Schoolchild

Ian, 61
Decorator

Ivy, 5
Schoolchild

Leigh,
Nurse (and Ivy's mum)

James, 60
Bus driver

Kieran, 32
Jeweller

Jackie, 53
Small business owner

Maeve, 26
Business analyst

Michael, 26
Surveyor

Naomi, 36
Journalist

Paisley, 7
Schoolchild

Rhylee, 12
Schoolchild

Rick, 41
Electrical contractor

Strahila, 31
Television producer

Susanna, 73
Nurse

Tom, 48
Psychotherapist

Will, 41
Music promoter

Andy, 56
Film editor
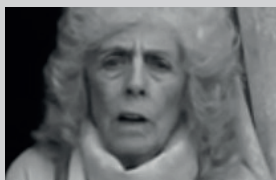
Ann, 80
Pensioner

Ashley, 36
Roofer

LOBSTER FILMS

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Fact checking the inquiry

Camilla graduated in International Studies with Journalism in 2019 and is currently undertaking a MA by research in Digital News and Media, while also working as a Studio Manager in the Journalism Department.

CAMILLA ZINGARI
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The Lockdown Inquiry gave me the chance to delve in great detail into some extremely interesting reports written by people who have experienced the profound repercussions of a year of economic and social restrictions. My job was to check that all the numbers, facts and data quoted in their essays were accurate and referenced, to ensure that the subjective claims in the report have been backed up by objective evidence.

In many cases the authors provided references to the academic papers, books and websites from which they derived the information, and these were usually straightforward to check. But where no references were provided for factual claims, even for ones that seemed to be common knowledge or uncontroversial, I tracked down the information myself to make sure it was indeed valid.

Wherever possible, I tried to find the original source of information. So, for example, where an author referenced a newspaper article, I would check the academic paper it quoted and, where this turned out to be a secondary source, the paper it quoted in turn. When authors rounded up or down certain figures for clarity, I checked the data to make sure the significance of the numbers had not been distorted. In a few cases, I found different information to that provided by the author and raised this with the editorial team to follow up.

Harley has worked in education publishing for over 20 years, for companies such as Espresso and Discovery Education. He organises public debates for the Academy of Ideas Education Forum and runs its monthly column in Teach Secondary magazine. He blogs about learning through the ages at historyofeducation.net.

HARLEY RICHARDSON
PROJECT COORDINATOR, ACADEMY OF IDEAS

As project coordinator for the Inquiry, I was responsible for reviewing and acting upon Camilla's comments on the essays as they came in. This might mean logging additional references or amending them when she found better ones. Where Camilla raised questions, or where neither of us could track down the source of a claim, I went back to the authors. Without exception they were generous with their time and very willing to both point me in the right direction for information and resolve points of confusion. It was only in a very few cases that we needed to amend the text of an essay, which is a testament to the knowledge of the authors and the seriousness with which they treated this exercise.

All the references were recorded as hyperlinks (for web) or text (for print), to allow the report's readers to check its claims for themselves. I also hope the references, as a complement to the essays, will be of enduring value to future researchers and historians hoping to understand this extraordinary moment in human history.

academy of ideas at THE UNIVERSITY OF BUCKINGHAM

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