

Senedd Cymru  
Y Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg

Ymchwiliad i effaith argyfwng Covid-19 ar  
blant a phobl ifanc yng Nghymru

COV 79

Ymateb gan:  
Cymdeithas Seicolegol Prydain

Welsh Parliament  
Children, Young People and Education  
Committee

Inquiry into the impact of the Covid-19 outbreak  
on children and young people in Wales

COV 79

Response from: British Psychological Society

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### **Scrutiny of Covid-19 and its impact on children and young people (including students in further and higher education)**

The British Psychological Society, incorporated by Royal Charter, is the learned and professional body for psychologists in the United Kingdom. We are a registered charity with a total membership of just over 60,000.

Under its Royal Charter, the objective of the British Psychological Society is "to promote the advancement and diffusion of the knowledge of psychology pure and applied and especially to promote the efficiency and usefulness of members by setting up a high standard of professional education and knowledge". We are committed to providing and disseminating evidence-based expertise and advice, engaging with policy and decision makers, and promoting the highest standards in learning and teaching, professional practice and research.

The British Psychological Society is an examining body granting certificates and diplomas in specialist areas of professional applied psychology.

#### **Publication and Queries**

We are content for our response, as well as our name and address, to be made public. We are also content for the Committee to contact us in the future in relation to this inquiry.

Please direct all queries to:-

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#### **About this Response**

**The response was led on behalf of the Society by Elin Llyr and Harry Thompson (Deryn Public Affairs Agency) with contributions from Dr Elizabeth Gregory CPsychol, Division of Clinical Psychology and Chair of Early Help and Enhanced Support (Together 4 Children and Young People Programme)**

**British Psychological Society response to the Children, Young People and Education Committee**

**Scrutiny of Covid-19 and its impact on children and young people (including students in further and higher education)**

The Committee is keen to consider the impact of Covid-19, and measures adopted to manage the pandemic, on the following areas, and any other areas within our remit you wish to draw to our attention —

- The physical and mental health of children and young people.
- Vulnerable and disadvantaged children (including pupils with special educational needs and disabilities, children in need, looked after children and children eligible for free school meals).
- Children’s services, including social care and safeguarding.
- Early childhood education and care, including impact on the childcare market and childhood development.
- Statutory school education, including arrangements for remote learning, continuity of learning, the impact on educational outcomes and the implementation of the critical workers policy.
- Exams and qualifications (including vocational qualifications).
- Higher and further education, including the financial sustainability of the sector, the effect of changes to courses, student accommodation and other student services, and the impact of this on students’ legal rights.
- Student financial support including the impact on students who have lost their part-time employment.
- Youth work.
- Support available for the workforce, including (but not limited to) health, social care, education, children’s services, and youth workers.
- Parents and carers.
- Children’s rights.

**Comments:**

**Overview**

The British Psychological Society believes that the outbreak of Covid-19 will have a significant impact on our children and young people, and we must recognise that the implications for children, families, and their communities, particularly those experiencing deprivation, will be seen for years to come. The crisis is affecting many young people in ways that will risk long-term consequences for their mental health.

Many others – including those who have experienced bereavement, abuse or domestic violence – are also likely to require additional support. The fear of becoming ill or seeing a loved one become ill, the loss of routines, the difficulties of social connection, the impact of loneliness, the disruption to education and the challenges of living in difficult or dangerous situations are creating additional

pressure for young people across the country. Young people who belong to groups that are already marginalised or disadvantaged may be particularly at risk.

### **Education**

The Society welcomes the Welsh Government's announcement on the 18<sup>th</sup> May of additional funding to support children under 11 years old, focusing upon their mental and emotional wellbeing. Additionally, the extra support for the mental health and well-being of the school workforce is also most welcome.

The Society advocates whole school approaches to address mental health and emotional wellbeing. We have issued guidance for [children, parents, carers and the wider public](#) on steps to protect their psychological wellbeing during and after the coronavirus outbreak.

School staff will have a crucial role to play to ensure that the physical, cognitive and emotional needs of children are appropriately supported. Schools will need to create a learning environment that helps the whole school community understand the many factors affecting their future mental health and wellbeing.

- **We recommend that the Welsh Government prioritises children's social, emotional and psychological wellbeing when schools in Wales do reopen.**
- **We call on the Welsh Government to deliver a wellbeing support package for schools, enabling them to prioritise wellbeing now and over the next academic year, and providing guidance and resources on how to manage transitions when it is safe for students to return to school.**
- **We call for a comprehensive plan to attend to children's mental health needs, including the needs of under-fives.**

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### **E-Learning**

The Society believes that the need for an overarching approach to help support those most in need has never been starker – especially for those children and young people living in poverty. Although many schools are providing online learning, there will be many children without access to laptops and key resources such as internet connections – and this could lead to stigma and discrimination. The Society welcomes Welsh Government's recently launched "Stay Safe. Stay Learning" programme that aims to ensure that no child or family is left behind in this crisis.

- **As part of the Child Poverty Strategy, we call on the Welsh Government to ensure that it does everything in its power to make resources available to help those children and families most in need through – in particular through these difficult times.**

### **Wellbeing**

The Society notes that Covid-19 is making many children feel unsafe and unsettled, and we believe that it's vital to talk openly to children about what is happening. The Society has published [advice](#) for health professionals, educational professionals, parents and early year's providers on talking to children about illness in light of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic.

Many children and young people will be facing a major disruption in their routine, education and social lives – and will need support and encouragement more than ever. The Society believes that interruptions to children and young people's basic needs will have a big impact on their emotions and behaviour. Older children are likely to be more concerned with social, moral and emotional aspects of

the pandemic – which could lead to more distress and sadness than in younger children. The Society has published [guidance](#) for parents to help them navigate the emotional effects of the pandemic.

The Society notes that some families will be finding life easier under lockdown. For some children and young people, the lockdown has removed the large areas of difficulties – particularly for those who struggle in a school environment due to bullying or other challenges.

- **We call on the Welsh Government to take this opportunity to re-think ways of learning following this pandemic as part of its implementation of the new curriculum in schools across Wales.**

### **Online Therapy**

As a result of the current pandemic, there has been a significant increase in the use of video platforms for clinical work, particularly with young people. For many clinicians, this is a new way of working and although it's a positive development, there are practical considerations, especially when communicating with children and young people affected by trauma or abuse. The Society has published a [resource paper](#) outlining considerations for psychologists working with children and young people using online video platforms.

### **Child Psychology Referrals**

It is important to note that there has also been a reduction in child psychology referral rates due to the pandemic, as many of the usual referral routes and services have stopped. There is a struggle to reach those children and young people in need, and psychologists are having to think and work more creatively to make sure those children are not left behind.

While mental health professionals deserve enormous credit for responding to the challenges the pandemic brings, many children and young people who were receiving some form of mental health treatment before the crisis are now receiving reduced support or no support at all. Other young people who would not previously have met the threshold for mental health support are likely to require it. Without preventative action, their needs are likely to escalate.

With the restrictions on access to schools, universities and primary care, there is often uncertainty or reticence about how and when to access mental health support. In many cases, young people have also lost the coping mechanisms that could help them to manage their mental health. When it is safe for restrictions to change, there needs to be a clear plan about how to grow and develop services, how to enable social re-integration and how to support groups who are disproportionately affected by the crisis.

- **We call on the Welsh Government to launch a national campaign to reach children and young people, and their families across Wales, to promote positive approaches for maintaining mental wellbeing, working alongside the voluntary sector to do so.**

### **Post-Covid Recovery Plan**

We recognise the scale of the challenge that we're all facing, but by taking bold action now, we can reduce the impact of the pandemic and give hope to thousands of children and young people across the country.

- **We would urge the Welsh Government to consider our role in how psychological evidence and expertise will be a vital part of Wales' post-covid recovery plan.**
- **We call for a strategy for young people's mental health, taking a 'young people's wellbeing in all policies' approach to future policy-making and addressing inequalities that can contribute towards worse mental health.**

*End.*