

# THE LONGER WE LIVE WITH COVID-19

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By [johnyarham](#)

The longer that we live with Covid-19, the more that its disproportionate impact on different groups of people becomes apparent. Around a month ago, at the Education Leaders' Advisory Group meeting, convened by the [Careers & Enterprise Company](#), I was struck by the raw emotion of a group of headteachers, deeply concerned at the prospects of their most disadvantaged students. They spoke about the impact of those young people through higher risk of contracting Covid, their digital disadvantage, mental health and future prospects. It was a hard listen, but one that strengthened my resolve to mitigate such an impact.

## **Youth Unemployment**

The impact of recessions on youth unemployment is clear. Not only does the initial impact hit harder – as we are currently seeing – but this is sustained longer. After the 2008/9 economic crash, it took over five years before youth unemployment levels started to meaningfully decline. The nature of the pandemic may differ from the cause of other recessions, but we know already that some of the jobs that provide useful points of entry for young people into the labour market may never return as the acceleration of structural economic change takes place.

## **Mental Health**

The link between the prospects of young people and their mental health is very easy to understand. We all like to have a goal, a purpose, some sense of direction. If the opportunities to establish purpose this are seriously questioned, the sense of wellbeing will undoubtedly be affected. I vividly remember my first experience of this, twenty-five years ago, after graduating. I was ill-prepared for work, having no clear sense of direction but with a misguided belief that because I had been successful through an academic route, I would also be successful in finding a job. However, we were still in the midst of a recession and two hundred or so unsuccessful job applications later, I decided to take work in a factory as it was my only chance of some income. From there, I slowly established a sense of purpose and direction, eased by an improving economy and helpful advice from people that I trusted. The reason why I entered (and continue in) the careers advice profession with such a passion, is to counter the propagation of the views that led to my own situation – a blinkered belief that progression through academic studies without any due reference to the wider needs and changes in the economy would be enough. I strongly believe that young people need exposure to employers, to personal guidance, an understanding of the economy and to understand the different routes that they can follow.

## **Future Prospects**

Nowadays, I am concerned by the prospects for my own children; currently in secondary school; and those of the young people that the organisation that I lead, The Careers & Enterprise Company, seeks to serve. We must create opportunities for them to create a sense of direction and gain the skills that they will need to thrive in the new economy. This will affect different groups in different ways and requires us to

take both a macro- approach that addresses some of the structural issues facing all, as well as the provision of more personalised support to recognise the needs of individuals. On the latter, we know that there are a wide spectrum of needs and on [International Men's Day](#), it's worth reflecting that these differing needs can reflect gender as well as many other important dimensions.

In the last year, suicide rates in the UK have tragically increased to the highest levels since 2000, with males accounting for three-quarters of all of these. There will be a huge range of highly personal reasons for these tragedies, but such an awful statistic reminds us that young males need support to navigate their challenges. Creating a sense of direction, that enables a greater take up of technical and vocational options, is one of those steps and is one that I am personally committed to delivering on. By continuing to focus on and improve such provision, we will not only support young males but all young people to provide them with a sense of genuine hope and excitement about the paths that they can create for themselves.

John Yarham

Interim Chief Executive

**[The Careers & Enterprise Company](#)**