



Institute for the
Development of Education



The impact of COVID-19 on higher education: a review of emerging evidence

NESET Analytical Report (Farnell, S.Matijević, S.Schmidt, 2021)

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1.

**Immediate impact (now)
of COVID-19**

on the social dimension of higher education



Immediate impact of COVID-19 on the social dimension

- **At-risk students will be disproportionately affected.**
- **COVID-19 crisis is exacerbating pre-existing education disparities**, rather than causing those disparities.
 - Now at-risk students **face a range of additional challenges** in accessing higher education, participating fully in their study programs and successfully completing their studies.

(NESET Analytical Report, Farnell et al., 2021)



State of play: US-based survey on students (May-July 2020), Chirikov et al., 2020)

- **35 % of undergraduate** and **32 % of graduate students** screened positive for **major depressive disorder**
- **40 % of all students** screened positive for generalised **anxiety disorder**
- Groups more likely to be affected by depression were **low-income** and **working-class students, LGBT students** and students who are **caregivers to children or other adults**



State of play: Arizona State University – survey on students (Aucejo et al., 2020)

Lower-income students, racial minorities and first-generation students experienced larger negative impacts on the academic outcomes compared to their peers:

- While 13 % of all surveyed students planned to delay their graduation due to the COVID-19 pandemic, **lower-income students were 55 % more likely to delay graduation** than their more affluent classmates
- **Non-white students** were **70 % more likely** to report **changing their study course** compared to their white peers
- **First-generation students** were **50 % more likely to delay their graduation** than students with higher educated parents



University responses: University of Strasbourg

- Identified 160 students whose **lack of materials** (computer, internet connection) jeopardised their ability to continue their studies remotely as well as pass their exams.
- The university and its foundation consequently **set up an Emergency Fund** for these students and raised €61,000
 - helped to **distribute more than 100 computers** to students in need
 - it is currently trying to find a solution for the students who do not have an internet connection.



University responses: KU Leuven

- **Online sessions on mental well-being**, on themes such as worrying, addiction, the body (sleep, breathing, moving and listening), supporting each other, stress and self-care.
- Psychologists of the Student Health Centre, together with KU Leuven's main student organisations (LOKO and STURA), provide an **online resilience training for students**.
- Accessible and anonymous **online chat organised three times a week** by KU Leuven student support staff.



2.

Short-term impact
(next academic year)
of COVID-19

on the social dimension of higher education

State of play: UK - survey by the Sutton Trust (Montacute and Holt-White, 2020)

1. Reduced equal access to higher education

University **applicants from working-class backgrounds** were:

- **twice as likely** to have insufficient access to the internet, devices for learning or a suitable place to study, compared to those from middle class homes.
- more likely to be **worried about the negative impact** of the COVID-19 pandemic in terms of **getting into their university of choice (51 %)** compared to middle class applicants (43 %).
- **more likely to have changed their mind about attending university** than more advantaged applicants.

State of play: UK - survey by Wonkhe, 2020

2. Increased chances of drop-out of at-risk students

- Significant proportion of students are **considering dropping out (12.6 %)**, rising to around one in five among disabled students and students from state schools.
- Over half of the survey sample reported feeling lonely on a daily or weekly basis. The **risk of dropping out was much higher for students who had lower levels of satisfaction** with their student experience: compared to the average of 12.6 % of students considering dropping out, the rate was 31.5 % for students who felt lonely and isolated.



3.

Medium-term impact

(up to 2025)

of COVID-19

on the social dimension of higher education



Medium term impact on the social dimension (up to 2025)

Pandemic will have **negative impact on equity and social inclusion in pre-tertiary education >>>** creating a knock-on effect of:

- a) **reducing equal access** to higher education
 - b) Increasing **risk of dropping-out**
 - c) **lowering the level of participation** of at-risk students in higher education in the upcoming years.
- Long-term **‘scarring’ effects** for young people under the age of 25 – the ‘COVID generation’ – resulting in an **unprecedented decline in social mobility** due to rising economic and educational inequalities.



Medium term impact on the social dimension (up to 2025)

Additional research and analysis will be needed to better understand the future impact of COVID-19 on the social dimension of higher education, particularly **through collecting, monitoring and analysing trends** related to:

- **enrolment** in higher education
- the **transition time** between leaving the regular school system and entry into higher education
- how higher education is entered: alternative **access routes** vs standard access route
- **drop-out, duration of studies, and completion** in higher education
- demand for **various modes of study**: part-time studies and short-term programmes vs full-time study.



Medium term impact on the social dimension (up to 2025)

- Despite the negative impact of COVID-19 pandemic on higher education, it is also important to consider **what opportunities the crisis provides** to place the **social dimension as a top priority** in the post-COVID-19 recovery in higher education.
 - Provides an opportunity **to place the inclusion** of underrepresented, vulnerable and disadvantage groups **as a top priority** in the efforts to address the disruption caused by COVID-19



4.

Conclusion

- Each **public authority and higher education institution** must **adopt context-specific interventions** to address the challenges for social dimension caused by the COVID-19 pandemic
 - since their challenges and needs differ depending on the context in which they operate



Thank you for your attention!

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