

Survey Insights

COVID-19

Survey Results

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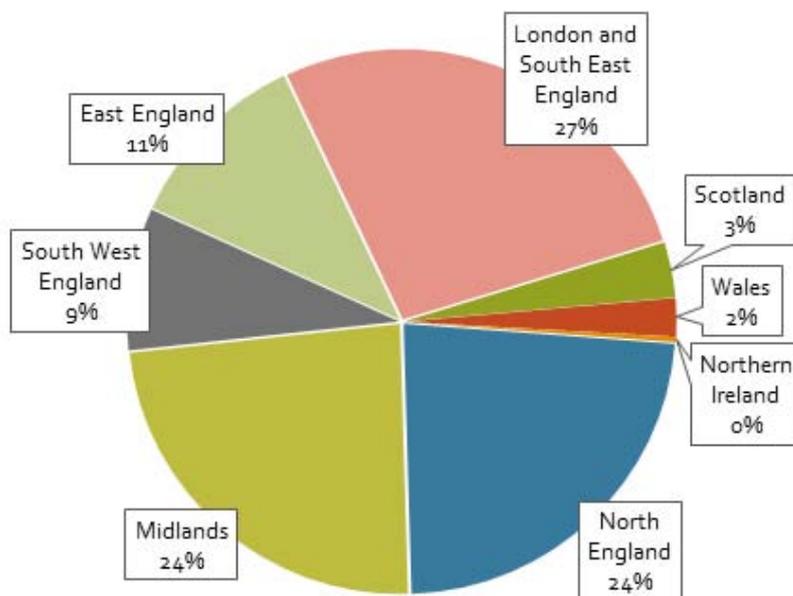
COVID-19 has impacted every aspect of our lives. Twelve months ago, no-one could have foreseen a situation where schools and businesses were unilaterally shut down, almost overnight. As ever, Voice members across the UK have risen to the challenge and have continued to meet the needs of learners, both in school and at home wherever possible.

It has been a particularly worrying time for those employed in private settings, unsure as to whether there would be any money to pay them, and this continues to be a concern for Voice as settings re-open. We are aware of a significant number of private nurseries and some independent schools that are struggling financially and may yet have to close their doors for good.

We surveyed our members and others in the education workforce across the UK to find out a little more of what happening across the country and in the different sectors.

We received a notable number of responses from the different countries of the UK, including three from Northern Ireland, 22 from Wales and 32 from our members in Scotland.

We asked a range of questions about the impact COVID-19 had on their workplace, job and the things asked of them. We also asked how ready they thought their workplace was for partial and full reopening.



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We were pleased to receive 964 full responses to our questioning, which has given us vital intelligence that we have used to inform our contributions when speaking with Government on our members' behalf.

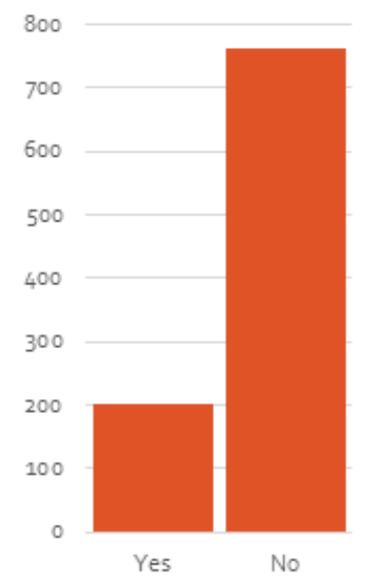
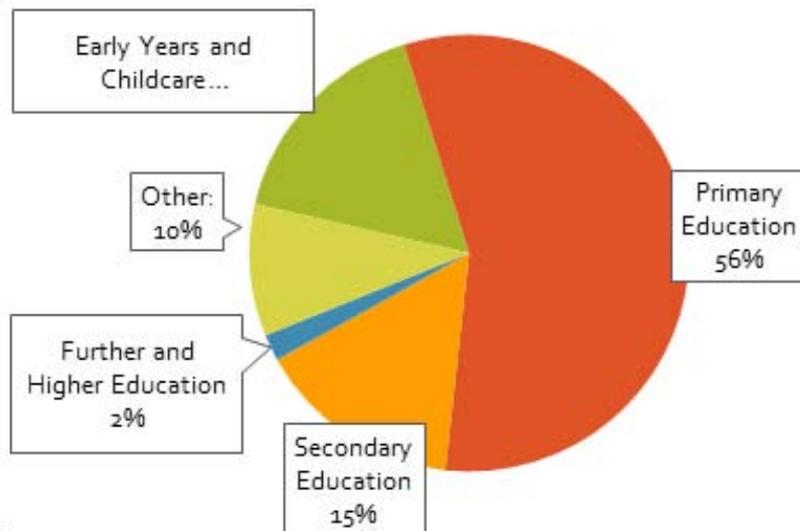
The largest number of responses – just under 550 respondents – were those working in primary education. A further 146 respondents work in secondary education and 160 in early years and childcare roles.

6% of respondents worked in independent schools and 2% in FE colleges.

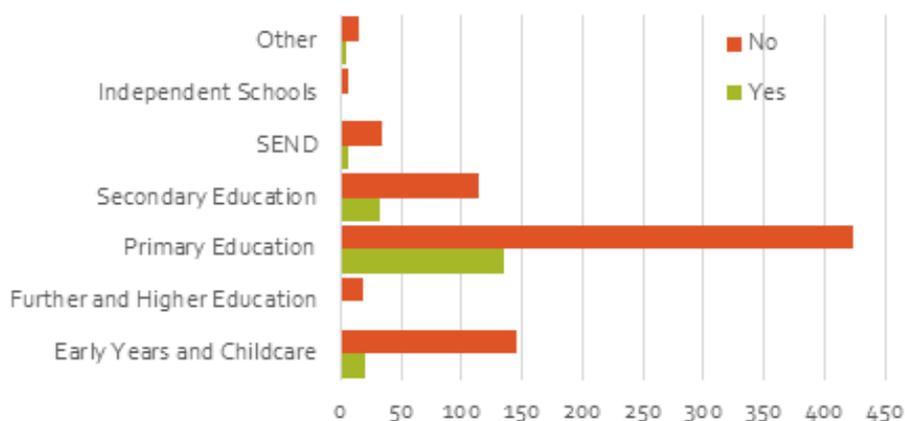
In addition, we specifically surveyed our early years members, the results of which are published separately.

We asked whether or not it would be safe for schools in England to open to a wider number of pupils from 1 June as the Government had proposed. Unsurprisingly, almost 80% of respondents felt it would not be feasible or that their setting would not be ready to reopen due to the lack of time between the announcement on 10 May and 1 June 2020.

What sector do you work in?



And this opinion was consistent across all the sectors of the workforce, not only in those working in maintained schools and academies but also in independent schools and the early years.



Although the above chart shows a very clear opinion, respondents felt that it might not be quite so black and white. Voice has been of the same opinion, advising members from the start that working together with their employer was key to ensuring the workplace was safe, and that engagement in the risk assessment process to identify and mitigate against risks was the only way to ensure safety.

Respondents commented that

Too much negative media coverage, is creating fear and anxiety about the reopening of schools.

The school will be able to take in the three year groups as planned, numbers greater than 15 can be moved to empty classrooms and taught by teachers from unused year groups. The problem arises when the rest of the school join us as we have only one spare classroom and a library area we can utilise to house extra groups.

15 is too large for our class sizes – 10 would be more feasible. Denmark and Germany are housing smaller groups with rooms that on average have a greater floorspace.

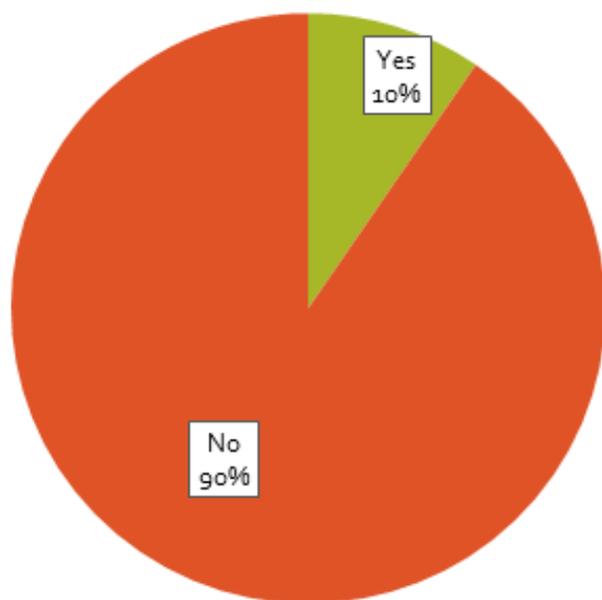
There were also concerns about staffing

All staff would have to be in work to cover children as we are a small school and don't have very many staff. If one or two had to isolate...

Staff may have to bring their own children in with them if their children are of ages that are not returning to school. Some I know rely on nans and grandads to help out but not sure this would be safe for many grandparents.

[We will need] extra cleaners (or we'll be teaching & cleaning) extra lunch staff. Cleaning products (already bought some) anti bac gels & soaps by the bucket load. Tissues. Safe toys?? More classroom space.

Did the Government prioritise the correct year groups for re-opening?



When asked if they thought the Government had selected the most appropriate year groups and why, there was a similarly clear response, which was much more nuanced in the commentary.

Pupils are losing out on their social developing skills as well as their education. The risk of transmission from them is minimal so the sooner they are back in the better, allowing their parents to return to work.

The long-term impact of lockdown will cripple the economy, let's not worsen this by delaying the return of students.

I am somewhere in the middle because the lower year groups are the ones who are missing out on a lot of their education and missing out on key learning goals, however, I feel year groups such as year 5 is a key group and should be one of the first ones going back due to SATs next year.

In terms of Y6, I think they would have been better off going straight to their secondary schools to support their transition, and primaries to have had Y5 back.

Those in secondary schools and academies commented:

I doubt any reception child is worried about the school work they are missing out on... Surely those teenagers in year 10 and 12, who have exams next year, are more worried and have to lose out on more not being in school. Some things you cannot do at home and some may not have parents who are able to support them with this level or the subject understanding.

Absolute priority to get years 10 and 12 in – we are doing massive damage to these years through the lockdown - you only get one chance at education and it is being severely damaged – we will regret this in years to come when we see the effect of this on this generation.

Many had real concerns about the safety aspect of children returning, especially young children in nurseries and reception classes.

There's not enough scientific data to show it is safe for us working in education to go back to work or to receive more children. 2, 3 and 4 year olds are unable to be socially distanced ... then it's the contact with parents and carers. How can you safely hand over children staggered whilst supervising other children?

Social distancing at these ages will be impossible to enforce. In my early years setting we work in one large room, 13 adults, 36 child places and about 60 children attend various sessions. Children have access to all toys and are allowed free play. Cleaning is going to be a huge issue.

I think separating classes in a school setting and having isolated bubbles will be more detrimental to children's wellbeing if they are told they can go to school but not see or interact with their normal teacher or best friends.

Guaranteeing social distancing is impossible with SEN children ... and actually emotionally damaging. Quality EYFS education will be impossible to deliver under the circumstances set out in the government guidance.

Some respondents suggested ways that schools and settings could reopen safely.

Not all year groups at once. Smaller class sizes than 15 - should be calculated by the square footage of the classroom, to ensure safe distances.

Smaller class sizes. PPE for staff and regular testing. Same staff work with the same children in the same class. Regular hand washing for children and staff. Own equipment. Small groups for lunchtimes and breaktimes. Extra cleaning of the school. Even carpets and soft furniture being removed. Carpets replaced with laminate flooring.

And whilst some of the comments may prove to be prohibitively costly, we do know that the government guidance was encouraging the continued use of small groups, social distancing and the removal of hard to clean surfaces and soft furnishings.

91.1% of respondents did not feel that their settings would be able to welcome back all pupils for a month before the end of the academic year. Largely this is because government guidelines on maximum pupil numbers have prevented this. Voice has been supportive of schools that have looked at returning additional year groups to the school and have encouraged members to engage in the risk

assessment process to ensure that this is attempted safely. But across the UK, very few schools have been able to open more widely due to a lack of space.

Since the survey concluded, government plans for September reopening have been published, and and Voice will be surveying our members regarding this very soon.

As with all things COVID, we are encouraging our members to engage with the processes that will ensure you are safe. And if you don't feel safe, then please get in touch.

Join Voice

If you have friends or colleagues who are not currently represented, why not suggest they give Voice a try. Call our team on **01332 372 337** or visit our website at www.voicetheunion.org.uk/join to find out more.