

#VitalSignsMK

VITAL SIGNS

2021/22



• HEALTH AND WELLBEING



• POVERTY AND DISADVANTAGE



• WORK



• EDUCATION



**MKCommunity
Foundation**
Funding Fairness

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Vital Signs 2021

Vital Signs @ MK is an annual publication designed to summarise the current research on the communities of Milton Keynes and present it in an easy-to-read summary of a much longer report (available from our website mkcommunityfoundation.co.uk).

Vital Signs is an international initiative supported by many UK Community Foundations. It aims to identify significant research that reflect the vitality of Milton Keynes measuring several areas critical to the quality of life in the city.

In 2020, we reported specifically about the effect the COVID-19 pandemic had in relation four areas: Diversity; Health and Wellbeing; Poverty and Disadvantage; Crime and Safety. From the research carried out in 2020, the issues that emerged through various lockdowns were; extended furlough; closures in hospitality; retail and schools; continuing self-isolation and travel restrictions.

This year's focus is Health and Wellbeing; Poverty and Disadvantage; Work and Education. We have also looked at each area through the lens of Diversity and how different parts of our community are adversely affected to reflect the intersectionality of issues.

Who are MK Community Foundation?

Established in 1986, Milton Keynes Community Foundation is an independent charity working for and at the heart of Milton Keynes. It is our mission to connect people with resources, skills, and ideas to enrich lives and create positive growth for Milton Keynes and we achieve this with the help of our donors.

Our Value Statements

F-A-I-R

- **Fairness** We seek detailed understanding to make the right decisions
- **Assistance** We share our expertise and referrals for those who need advice
- **Inspiration** We communicate our unique proposition passionately and with hope
- **Reliability** We deliver what we say, when we say

Our Strategic Goal is to build a resilient, creative, inclusive and philanthropic community.

Over the last 35 years we have distributed over 15 million in grant funding and provided Voluntary, Community and Cultural Sector organisations with a further 18 million of rent subsidies. This includes over £1 million distributed last year through our Emergency Response Appeal. Grants started at as little as £100 to help brownies to move online up to £100,000 for the foodbank when it was providing approx. 2500 food parcels a month compared to nearly 1000 pre COVID-19.

With your help we are sending funding where it is needed most in Milton Keynes. By guiding businesses, philanthropists, community groups and charities to the right giving and grants, we're on a mission for a fairer community and our Vital Signs report helps us to prioritise that need.

United Nation Sustainable Development Goals

What are the Sustainable Development Goals?



[The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#), adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015, provides a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future. At its heart are the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which are an urgent call for action by all countries - developed and developing - in a global partnership. They recognize that ending poverty and other deprivations must go together with strategies that improve health and education, reduce inequality, and spur economic growth - all while tackling climate change and working to preserve our oceans and forests.

Within each goal there are several targets. Details can be found at <http://sdgs.un.org/goals>.

Here at MK Community Foundation, we felt a natural alignment with the SDGs through our Vital Signs reporting and particularly our Vital Thinking events. It was important that we also bring this focus to our funds, grant giving and internal activities as an organisation. We accepted that it was impractical to work on all 17 goals, so we have highlighted seven areas of focus and a particular target within these goals where taking local action can help to support global change.



SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Goal 1 - No Poverty

Target - 1.1. By 2030, reduce at least by half the proportion of men, women and children of all ages living in poverty in all its dimensions according to national definitions.

Goal 3 - Good Health & Wellbeing

Target - 3.4. By 2030, reduce by one third premature mortality from non-communicable diseases through prevention and treatment and promote mental health and well-being.

Goal 4 - Quality Education

Target 4.4. By 2030, substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship.

Goal 7 - Affordable & Clean Energy

Target 7.3. By 2030, double the global rate of improvement in energy efficiency.

Goal 10 - Reduced Inequalities

Target - 10.2. By 2030, empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status.

Goal 11 - Sustainable Cities and Communities

Target 11.3. By 2030, enhance inclusive and sustainable urbanization and capacity for participatory, integrated and sustainable human settlement planning and management in all countries.

Goal 12 - Responsible Consumption & Production

Target 12.6. Encourage companies, especially large and transnational companies, to adopt sustainable practices and to integrate sustainability information into their reporting cycle.





HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Theme Definition

Mental health has continued to be hugely impacted by the pandemic. Mind BLMK reported that last year there were over 2,559 instances of support requested in Milton Keynes. This includes face to face, video and telephone support. Mind BLMK's Crisis Café provide an alternative resource for those in urgent need. 55% would otherwise have accessed NHS services at a time when the NHS and emergency services were most under pressure (Mind BLMK, April 2020 – March 2021).

Overview

The past year has continued to shine a light on issues around loneliness and isolation. The Mental Health Foundation reported that in November 2020 of a sample of 4436 surveyed across the UK 25% of adults expressed feelings of loneliness within the previous two weeks. The measures to control coronavirus were having a significant impact on people's mental health, with the report data showing nearly half (45%) felt unable to cope with the uncertainty of the pandemic and a quarter (26%) were worried how they would cope with self-isolation.

In a guest blog for the Campaign to End Loneliness Professor Carolyn Chew-Graham, a GP and researcher in mental health of older people based at Keele University said: *"Enforced isolation, whether this is due to 'shielding' or 'self-isolation', causes disruption to daily routines, loss of social contact and loneliness which can lead to mental ill-health."*

As with last year's report we will continue to focus on older and younger people. We also wanted to highlight other marginalised sectors of our community whose mental health has been adversely affected by the pandemic, this includes the LGBTQ+ and Neurodivergent communities.

Findings

Young people

A study by the Mental Health Foundation found that loneliness is still an issue for the young people, with 48% of young people aged 18-24 being the highest demographic area representing feelings of loneliness <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/research-and-policies/wave-10-late-february-2021>

2020 data showed that Milton Keynes had a younger age profile than the remainder of England as a whole. Government statistics confirm that this has continued for the year of 2021 with Milton Keynes having 27.4% of the population as persons age 19 and under in contrast to the average of 23.7% in England. <https://www.milton-keynes.gov.uk/your-council-and-elections/statistics/population-statistics>

An Office of National statistics (ONS) survey investigating *Lockdown Loneliness* found that 38.6% (about 10.5 million people) said their well-being was affected by the pandemic due to loneliness. The initial report from 3rd April to 3rd May in 2020 identified that 5% of people 16

and over felt lonely *often* or *always*. A further breakdown of this identified that 7.1% of 16-24-year-olds felt lonely often or always. From October 2020 through to February 2021, the percentage has increased to 7.2%. Narrowing this down further, Milton Keynes identified 9.3% *often* or *always* felt lonely. The ONS also identified a trend of lower median age (the median age divides the population in two parts of equal size) locations generally having higher rates of loneliness during the pandemic. It was also identified that young and single people were mostly affected by *lockdown loneliness* with 16-25 years olds being five times more likely to experience it.

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/articles/mappinglonelinessduringthecoronaviruspandemic/2021-04-07>

Lockdown has had an impact on society and in particular loneliness. Focusing on the younger population, Young Minds identified statistics to support this in their 2021 survey. The survey ranged from 28th January to 12th February 2021 with 2438 young people who participated. They identified that 75% of young people felt the lockdown during January 2021 was harder than the previous whilst 14% felt it was easier and 11% felt there was no difference.

When it came to their general mental health, 67% of participants also felt the impact of the pandemic on their mental health will hold long term effects. Whilst 19% neither agreed nor disagreed with this statement and 14% who disagreed that there would be long lasting effects. They identified 79% who agreed that the state of their mental health would improve with lockdown lifting although some expressed concerns of lockdown ease being too quick and holding possible future implications. <https://youngminds.org.uk/about-us/reports/coronavirus-impact-on-young-people-with-mental-health-needs/>

Arthur Ellis Mental Health Support, a Milton Keynes based community mental health service for children, young people and adults has seen similar localised data.

In the year of 2020, prior to the pandemic, the main source of referrals was on a self-referral basis with individuals and parents reaching out to them via their website. The total amount of referrals from July 2019 to August 2020 was 159 self-referrals (over 13 months).

With the pandemic impacting on wellbeing, an increase in need was seen. A variety of organisations reached out to Arthur Ellis asking for support for their communities of young people.

Since the start of August 2020 through to 27th July 2021, there was an additional 149 referrals directly from GP practices across Milton Keynes, an additional 88 referrals from Colleges, 22 referrals from drugs and alcohol services and 29 referrals from bereavement services.

Comparing referrals from the first lockdown in 2020 to the end of 2021, Arthur Ellis saw a total of 210 referrals. From the beginning of 2021 through to 31st July, Arthur Ellis saw a total of 446 referrals showing an increase of people reaching out for support by 112.40% for 2021. YIS also report increases in referrals to their mainstream service of 21%.

https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1wC8LMe2QknwyMNsP5w2ehZoQaehQoJJJeGa5VG-vfqw/edit#slide=id.gd7ebcb8ad0_1_0

The age of children and young people is considered between 7 and 25 years old, out of the referrals, 27.15% are 17 years old. The needs vary depending on the client group, but generally, the primary presenting need is anxiety which accounts for 23% of the referral

reasons, second most prevalent need is 'difficulties in coping emotionally' at 17% of these referrals and thirdly, suicidal thinking at 16% of the cohort.

YiS (Young People's Mental Health) Milton Keynes conducted research into the effects of the pandemic on young people. In an impact report for COVID-19 starting in November 2020 where 25 young people were asked if COVID-19 has impacted their mental health, 60% of them answered Yes.

Whilst looking at the reasons, the report cited that social isolation, a loss of purpose, education and work were some of the primary concerns.

"Not being able to see my friends and everyday being the same has affected my mental state. It's been difficult not having things to look forward to"

Healthwatch Milton Keynes, YIS feedback forum.

https://www.healthwatchmiltonkeynes.co.uk/sites/healthwatchmiltonkeynes.co.uk/files/Healthwatch%20project%20word%20YiS%20survey%20report%20final.pdf?utm_source=Healthwatch+Milton+Keynes+Organisational+Stakeholders+from+May+2018&utm_campaign=934ab72072-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2018_03_09_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_9a366e968a-934ab72072-393377881

During the pandemic through the support of MK Community Foundation, YIS implemented a messaging service to help young people cope with the changes in their routine. Data shows that loneliness was the fourth highest reason for young people contacting the service.

https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1wC8LMe2QknwyMNsbP5w2ehZoQaehQoJJJeGa5VG-vfqw/edit#slide=id.gd2f55c453b_0_11

Referrals to YiS's therapeutic counselling service increased by 21% year on year, with the average needs of young people in Milton Keynes increasing by 10%, based on average CORE (Clinical Outcomes in Routine Evaluation) scores.

- Of the 436 young people seen, 13% were due to abuse, 10% directly to COVID-19 and/or the resulting lockdowns. 29% of YiS's counselling referrals came via CAMHS and 18% by MKC Children's Social Care.
- MK9, MK6, MK3 and MK16 were the postcodes with the highest number of referrals
- Ages 15-17 years old had the highest level of need.
- Key issues young people spoke about as causing their issues or exacerbating them over the 20/21 period included
 - the COVID-19 outbreak
 - the George Floyd murder
 - concerns about exams
 - going to university
 - the environment

Research from Young Carers MK has remained the same as the previous year, stating that the pandemic has increased their levels of isolation as the small amount of socialisation they were able to do was put to a halt. In May 2020 through to July 2020, young carers were supported by Arthur Ellis providing them group based mentoring sessions for groups of young people who were transitioning from the school year 6. This was introduced as the pandemic had put a stop to usual transitioning assistance.

An impact has also been seen for young people at school. A report from YoungMinds, commencing from 15th September to 30th September 2020, used a survey to identify the impact of mental health support and the pandemic of 2011 young people aged 11-18 years old who had a history of poor mental health. The survey identified that 58% of participants described their mental health as poor prior to returning to school, post returning to school this result had risen to 69%. 61% of the participant felt they had received a negative effect to their mental health from returning to school. Only 15% of participants felt there is enough mental health support in schools with 58% feeling there is not enough support. 23% felt there has been a reduction in the mental health support in schools compared to before the pandemic. 60% said that there was a school counsellor available to support students in their school.

Older people

In Milton Keynes, the share of the total population aged 65 and over is 14.4%, (39,017 people) which is an increase on 0.6%. This is based upon the latest ONS Mid Year population projections for 2021

Reference:

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/datasets/populationestimatesforukenglandandwalescotlandandnorthernireland>

Loneliness and social isolations were specific issues for older people before the pandemic, with research showing a link with premature deaths. These issues of loneliness have been exacerbated with the consequences of lockdowns and shielding.

<https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/coronavirus/divergence-mental-health-experiences-during-pandemic>.

When COVID-19 first reached Britain, reports noted that older people had a higher risk of mortality <https://bmcpublihealth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12889-020-09826-8>. Less attention has been paid to the damaging effect the virus has had on older people living through the pandemic. According to Age UK, more than 2 million people in England over the age of 75 live alone, and more than a million older people say they go for over a month without speaking to a friend, neighbour or family member. <https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/feelings-symptoms-behaviours/feelings-and-symptoms/loneliness-in-older-people/>

During the pandemic Age UK Milton Keynes set up a telephone befriending service to combat loneliness and isolation. With the ease in restrictions face to face befriending has now resumed alongside the telephone service. During March 2021 – June 2021 their service had 84 referrals of which by the end of the period 85% had converted to joining the service. For the same period in 2020 they had 41 referrals, showing an increase in demand of 104%.

"You don't realise how you have helped me. A voice at the end of the phone. Thank you so much"

Telephone Befriending client

Lockdown and the fear of catching the virus have further impacted on the health and wellbeing of our older population. Locally Age UK Milton Keynes report that they have seen their clients a reluctance to return to public spaces, including supermarkets, particularly following the first lockdown. Even when restrictions were eased between July – October, many clients chose to extend their shielding period as a precaution. (Age UK Milton Keynes) For many older people coping strategies for good mental health such as daily

routines, volunteering and opportunities to socialise were halted due to the pandemic.

https://www.ageuk.org.uk/globalassets/age-uk/documents/reports-and-publications/reports-and-briefings/loneliness/241120_tackling-loneliness-among-older-people-this-covid-winter.pdf

With that the pandemic has had an adverse impact on the mental health of older people. A study completed in August 2020 noted that one in five of them said that since the start of lockdown, they are finding it harder to remember things. This is exacerbated by long-term health conditions: 28% of people with a long-term health condition say they are finding it harder to remember things compared with 12% of those without. Rates of anxiety and depression are also rising: 34% of older people say their anxiety is worse or much worse than before the pandemic. The proportion of over 70s experiencing depression has doubled since the pandemic and 36% of the over-60s say they feel less motivated to do things they used to enjoy (https://www.ageuk.org.uk/globalassets/age-uk/documents/reports-and-publications/reports-and-briefings/health--wellbeing/the-impact-of-covid-19-on-older-people_age-uk.pdf).

Another adverse effect has been the ability to lead an independent life. 24% of people with a long-term health condition say they are now less independent, compared with 8% of those without a long-term health condition.

Some of this loss of independence has a physical cause:

- 43% of people with a long-term health condition are unable to walk as far as before, compared with 13% of those without.

Other causes are linked to a loss of confidence:

- 64% of older people are less confident about using public transport
- 47% of older people are less confident about going into hospital
- 43% of older people are less confident about going to the shops
- 40% of older people are less confident about going to their GPs surgery
- 33% of older people living with long-term health conditions report feeling less steady on their feet, compared to 8% of those without

The suspension of social activities during lockdown has left many older people feeling isolated and lonely. Although many in-person activities have been replaced by an online equivalent (such as Zoom meetings or video chats), four million people over the age of 65 have never used the Internet. https://www.ageuk.org.uk/globalassets/age-uk/documents/reports-and-publications/reports-and-briefings/health--wellbeing/the-impact-of-covid-19-on-older-people_age-uk.pdf.

Keeping connected via video call eased the loneliness for people, however some health conditions such as dementia made it harder for some to use technology efficiently <https://www.health.org.uk/sites/default/files/upload/publications/2021/HEAJ8932-COVID-Impact-210705.pdf>. For those who did have access to computer technology 28% said they felt unconfident using it, however over 51% admit to using it much more due to the pandemic. <https://www.elder.org/the-elder/survey-on-elderly-loneliness/>

The number of people caring for older people, disabled or those who are seriously ill doubled in January 2021 with carers reporting low levels of mental wellbeing due lack of support and respite.

Neurodivergent community

The covid pandemic has created change for many of us, but for the neurodivergent community changes in routines has created additional hurdles.

Neurodiversity refers to the different ways a person's brain processes information. It is an umbrella term used to describe alternative thinking styles such as Dyslexia, Dyspraxia, Dyscalculia, Autism and ADHD (<https://www.lexxic.com/what-is-neurodiversity>). It is estimated that around 1 in 7 people (more than 15% of people in the UK) (<https://www.ed.ac.uk/equality-diversity/disabled-staff-support/neurodiversity-support>).

A report by Health Assured evidence that those who are neurodivergent are more likely to have poor mental wellbeing. This could be due to lack of support or the stress of having to "mask" their differences. <https://www.healthassured.org/blog/neurodiversity/>

With the pandemic bringing about numerous lockdowns, many services were halted, or the level of support beneficiaries had relied on became sparse.

A report by Talkback found that feeling lonely made up for 67% of the report data. *The impact of COVID-19 on people in Milton Keynes with learning disabilities and/or autism and their carers report* (November 2020) One responder quoted "being alone was the hardest for me, to live alone under lockdown"

Anxiety and depression is common for the neurodivergent community and isolation due to social distancing has further impacted this for many. (<https://med.stanford.edu/psychiatry/about/covid19/neurodiverse.html>).

What would usually be a face-to-face appointment with a GP has now been replaced with a telephone or video call, therefore further limiting the social interaction people are having. Without considering IT capabilities - 27% of those surveyed by Talkback said that they found Zoom difficult to adapt to. *The impact of COVID-19 on people in Milton Keynes with learning disabilities and/or autism and their carers report, November 2020*. For many in the neurodiverse community they felt as though their preferred communication style was not asked and a one size fits all approach was taken (Talent Unlimited MK and AS Meet Up).

Talkback note that loss of social contact in particular not being able to see friends and relatives outside their household made coping with the changes due to Covid even harder. For many of those in supported living accommodation they were initially asked to stay in their rooms. (*The impact of COVID-19 on people in Milton Keynes with learning disabilities and/or autism and their carers report, November 2020*).

Accessing support services in a timely manner has been made worse by the pandemic with the National Autism Society (NAS) detailing that the impact on mental health and loneliness was felt more strongly by those with additional support needs. One parent noted within their report "Mental health services stopped seeing my children. My daughter was due to start specialist therapy which has been postponed." (Left Stranded NAS Report, 2020).

This type of delay has further adversely impacted people's mental health with support needs increasing.

It is still too early to see the full extent of the long-term impact the pandemic has had on the neurodivergent community, however early evidence is demonstrating a loss of independence. "They can no longer go on the bus by themselves" *The impact of COVID-19 on people in Milton Keynes with learning disabilities and/or autism and their carers report, November 2020*).

As the country returns to the new normal it is expected the impact of social isolation will have a long-term effect on the neurodivergent community. With both Talent Unlimited and AS meet up suggesting some of their beneficiaries have expressed to them that they feel that they may have lost interpersonal skills, social skills and lack confidence especially in 1:1 situations.

LGBTQ+ community

In 2020, Vital Signs reported that isolation due to the COVID-19 pandemic had a significant and detrimental impact on the LGBTQ+ community. Data from LGBTQ+ charities, including the LGBT Foundation, suggest that the negative effects of the pandemic continue to be profound and wide-ranging, significantly impacting mental health.

A report by LGBT Hero, published in May 2021, examined the impact of lockdown on the LGBTQ+ community one year on. Key findings included:

- One in three (35%) respondents stating they felt suicidal
- 6% saying they attempted suicide
- Trans and gender diverse people reporting they were three times as likely to attempt suicide (12%) than cisgender people (4%) (denoting or relating to a person whose sense of personal identity and gender corresponds their birth sex.)
- Nearly half (46%) of under 25s reporting feeling suicidal
- 14% of under 18s saying they attempted suicide, 53% of which were trans or gender diverse.

Despite this, there are small signs of improvement in other areas as rates of depression, anxiety and loneliness all showed marginal downward trends over the same time last year. <https://www.lgbthero.org.uk/lockdown-one-year-on>.

This report also stated that half (49%) of people found the winter lockdown harder than the first, versus 19% who found the first hardest.

These trends are being reflected in Milton Keynes, with youth workers from Q:Alliance reporting a drop in engagement with welfare calls during the winter lockdown. They also reported several interesting trends over the last 18 months which showed that:

- Self-harm and recreational drug use increased
- The amount of young people who are on anti-depressants has increased.
- More young people have realised they are living in hostile environments
- Many young people are now coming out as Trans, however trans are the least accepted within the home.

Feeling unsafe at home has been a huge issue for many from the LGBTQ+ community over the last year, particularly for young people. The Albert Kennedy Trust (who support LGBTQ+ young people aged 16-25 living in hostile environments) saw a 118% increase in the number of young people needing help during the first lockdown. They report that referrals continue to rise, and they expect numbers to keep rising. <https://www.akt.org.uk/News/unity>.

A report by the Albert Kennedy Trust published in 2021 (The LGBTQ+ Youth Homelessness Report) found that 92% of LGBTQ+ young people surveyed said that homelessness had a negative impact on their mental health. <https://www.akt.org.uk/report>

Overwhelmingly, charities and academics agree that there is a severe lack of data into the impact of the pandemic on the LGBTQ+ community. In order to examine the disproportionate effect of the pandemic on this community, social scientists at the University of Sussex and UCL have launched a new study to examine the scale of the impact. The first results are expected in September 2021. <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/broadcast/read/52043>.

Whilst waiting for these results, anecdotal evidence and research from both national and local charities is showing that isolation and the impact on mental health because of the pandemic, remains a significant issue for the LGBTQ+ community.

Just Like Us, a LGBTQ+ young people's charity, recently reported that LGBTQ+ young people are twice as likely to feel lonely and more than twice as likely to worry for their mental health on a daily basis during the pandemic than their non-LGBT+ peers.

Their research also found that **seven in ten (68%) LGBTQ+ young people also say their mental health has worsened** since the pandemic began, compared with half (49%) of non-LGBTQ+ young people. <https://www.justlikeus.org/single-post/lgbt-young-people-mental-health-coronavirus>

Finally, it is also important to note that isolation and loneliness do not only impact young people, but also particularly affects older members on the LGBTQ+ community. Research shows the older LGBTQ+ community are especially vulnerable to isolation as they are more likely to be single, live alone and have lower levels of contact with relatives. Opening Doors London, the UK's largest charity providing information and support to LGBTQ+ people over 50 in the UK, published a report into the impact of the pandemic on their beneficiaries. Key findings included:

- 37% felt more lonely than usual.
- 27% hardly ever or never had someone to talk to.

<https://www.openingdoorslondon.org.uk/news/connect-only>

As we transition out of lockdown restrictions, around half of surveyed adults (47%) and young people (52%) think their mental health will improve as restrictions ease. However, over half of adults and young people (55%) are worried about the transition to seeing and being near other people once restrictions ease. <https://www.mind.org.uk/media/8962/the-consequences-of-coronavirus-for-mental-health-final-report.pdf>

Vital thinking

- How do we build on the improved community cohesion seen through the pandemic to continue to support the most vulnerable in our community, including those with specific needs such as the neurodivergent?
- How can we increase awareness of mental health provision to audiences with cultural, financial, or additional physical needs?
- What support is needed for organisations and businesses to understand and support mental health in our community in the same way as physical illness?



Vital Action - Arthur Ellis

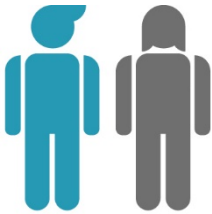
In April 2020 we provided a grant to Arthur Ellis, an organisation that provides mental health and emotional wellbeing of children, young people, and adults. The grant has enabled them to develop a bespoke referral management system for them to accept clients into their mental health service as quickly as possible. Previously, they were managing their referrals manually which took a lot of time. At the start of COVID-19, they began receiving as many referrals in one day as they would normally receive in a one month. This was prolonging the time it took to see people because of the administrative requirements.

This new system meant that no matter how many referrals they received, they can call beneficiaries within minutes and set up appointments with them within a week vs the typical mental health waiting lists where people can wait for months and even years before an appointment.

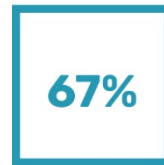
They were also able to automate most of the process, pulling information through from multiple systems and sources into one file. This helps them to improve the accuracy and security of their data input.



HEALTH AND WELLBEING

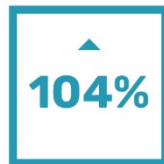


YiS (Young People's Mental Health) reported a **21% increase** in referrals from last year with 15-17 year olds having the highest level of need.



A Talkback report for MK Council found that **67%** of people with learning difficulties and/or autism reported being lonely as a result of lockdown.

Age UK Milton Keynes telephone befriending service saw a further rise in referrals from **58** reported in 2020 to **84** during the same period in 2021 a **rise of 104%**.

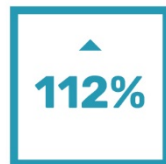


**To be clarified*



Trans and gender diverse people reporting they were three times as likely to attempt suicide (**12%**) than cisgender people*

* denoting or relating to a person whose sense of personal identity and gender corresponds with their birth sex



During the lockdown of 2021, Arthur Ellis saw a total of **446** referrals showing an increase in referrals of **112.40%** up to 31st July 2021 compared to **210** referrals in 2020 lockdown.



47% of people in the UK over the age of 65 have never used the Internet.



POVERTY AND DISADVANTAGE

Theme Definition

[Poverty can be defined in many ways](#). **The measure most used in the UK is relative poverty, which considers people living in poverty when they live in households with income below 60% of the median* of that year.** A key principle of the new measure is that poverty should be related to the extent to which people have the resources to engage adequately in a life regarded as the norm in society. Other definitions consider that income alone does not determine whether someone is in poverty or not. Material deprivation considers whether individuals have access to essential items and key services. Absolute poverty is when individuals are unable to meet their immediate needs. In other words, they are unable to obtain basic needs such as shelter, water, food and warmth.

Overview

Despite the COVID-19 pandemic and far-reaching restrictions on public life in 2020 and first half of 2021, Milton Keynes performed relatively well in terms of deprivation and poverty. Child poverty rates dropped slightly while employment rates increased. At the same time, Milton Keynes is a city of large disparities with child poverty rates almost three times higher in its most deprived areas compared to the most affluent parts of town. Wages have dropped at a much larger rate in Milton Keynes than in the rest of the nation, making it harder for working families to make ends meet. The number of people requiring support through Jobseekers' Allowance and Universal Credit remains high at more than twice the level compared to prior to the pandemic. The number of rough sleepers dropped significantly, although this is due to emergency measures put in place rather than reflective of reduced need. The number of people provided with emergency accommodation increased sharply in the last quarter of 2020 and into 2021.

Findings

Child Poverty

In 2020, 10,726 children aged 16 and under – or 17% – were living in relative poverty (i.e. in households with income below 60% of the median in that year). This represents a slight drop from 2019, although is still much higher than in previous years. There are also large differences between areas within Milton Keynes, with child poverty rates ranging between 8% and 31%. ([Children in Low Income Families - local area statistics, 2014-2020: DWP](#))

When looking at absolute poverty – measured as the percentage of children aged 16 and under living in households with an income below 60% of median income in 2010/11 – child poverty rates also declined slightly in 2020 compared to previous years – from 16.1% to 14.6% in Milton Keynes North and from 15.2% to 13.9% in Milton Keynes South. This is contrast to national rates, which have slightly increased from 2019 to 2020 ([Constituency data: Child poverty](#))

A report published by the Milton Keynes Child Poverty Commission in 2020 indicated that 7,000 children qualified for free school meals, and can be considered at risk of hunger. Government statistics show that the numbers and proportion of children in Milton Keynes eligible for free school meals increased steadily over time, with 8,977 eligible in 2020/21. This is almost double the number of 4,861 in 2015/16. While this represented 10.7% of all pupils in 2015/16, it accounts for 18.4% in 2020/21. This rate is higher compared to the South East as a whole (16%) ([Free school meals: Autumn term 2020, 2021; Department for Education](#)).

In terms of education, children in Milton Keynes – as across the country – were hit hard by the closure of schools following the Covid-19 pandemic. At the time of writing, data was not yet available to show the impact educational provision and performance for academic year 2020 to 2021. Data from 2019/20 indicates that average GCSE (Attainment 8) scores of pupils in Milton Keynes is slightly lower in Milton Keynes (47.1) compared to the whole of England (50.2). Overall, pupils eligible for free school meals had a lower score than those who were not eligible ([GCSE results 2019/2020, 2021; Department of Education](#)).

Relative Deprivation

Data for relative deprivation have not been updated since 2019, meaning that information on this metric is the same as in last year's Vital Signs report. The 2019 data showed that a number of areas in Milton Keynes rank among the most deprived in England: Out of a total of 132 so-called 'Lower Super Output Areas' in Milton Keynes, 18 areas of those were within the 20% most deprived areas, and 8 areas in the 10% most deprived areas. Two areas were within the 2% most deprived in England. These areas are where disadvantage is worst, but there will be others facing the challenges of poverty in other parts of Milton Keynes too ([English indices of deprivation 2019: Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government](#)).

Work and Income

Employment figures in Milton Keynes continue to be positive, despite the pandemic. Of the 170,800 residents aged 16–64 years old in 2020, 80.9% were employed. Somewhat surprisingly given the pandemic and its economic fallout, this is an increase from 78.3% in 2019. The city's unemployment rate (3.3%) is also lower than the average rate across England (4.8%), thereby reversing the pattern from 2019 when unemployment in Milton Keynes was higher compared to England overall ([Annual Population Survey: January 2020 to December 2020, 2021: NOMIS](#)).

This positive picture regarding the proportion of people in work is contrasted by data on pay. Between 2019 and 2020, median gross pay for a full-time worker in Milton Keynes dropped by 4.9% – or £29.70 – to £607.10 per week. Median hourly pay for full-time workers was £15.73. Wages in the whole of England have remained much more stable, only reducing by 0.4% in the previous year. Despite the large drop in pay since 2019, earnings in Milton Keynes do still compare favourably to that of the nation as a whole, with median gross weekly pay constituting £589.80 ([Annual survey of hours and earnings 2020, 2021: NOMIS](#)).

Between June 2020 and June 2021, the number of people in Milton Keynes claiming Jobseeker's Allowance or Universal Credit reduced slightly, from 9,560 to 9,310. These figures do mask a temporary peak in March and April, when the number of claimants rose to 10,105 and 10,290 respectively ([Claimant count by age and sex, June 2020– June 2021, 2021: NOMIS](#)). It should also be noted that the number of claimants is still well above pre-pandemic levels. As pointed out in last year's Vital Signs report, the number of people in Milton Keynes claiming support between March and May 2020 – at the start of the pandemic – rose by 134%

from 4,495 to 10,520. The Milton Keynes Child Poverty Commission notes in their 2020 report that the 5-week wait for Universal Credit undermines families' ability to cope, prevents them from recovering quickly when losing their jobs and causes undue anxiety among renters.

Many families in Milton Keynes struggle to establish a financial buffer. The 2020 report by the Milton Keynes Child Poverty Commission noted that 65% of families in the bottom income quintile either had no savings or their savings were below £1,500. This information predates the pandemic and with many families having faced (temporary) loss of income in the intervening period, levels of savings are likely to have decreased.

Low-income families, especially with children, are likely to experience further deterioration of their living standards from October 2021 when the £20 weekly top-up to Universal Credit and Working Tax Credit is scheduled to be cut. The Government increased benefits in March 2020 to protect families against the socioeconomic fallout of Covid-19. According to [calculations by Joseph Rowntree Foundation](#), 21% of all families in Milton Keynes (as in the rest of the UK) will be affected by these changes. Families with children are much harder hit, with 39% of families with children (or 6,830 families) in Milton Keynes North and 37% of families with children (or 7,220 families) in Milton Keynes South seeing their weekly income decrease substantially. These cuts are likely to increase child poverty and deprivation in the coming year.

Housing

Homelessness remains a major issue in Milton Keynes. Between January and March 2021, 466 households were threatened with homelessness, equating to 1.47 households for every 1000 households in Milton Keynes. This represents an increase in the absolute number of households compared to numbers reported in last year's Vital Signs report (which included data from October to December 2019) but marks a decline as a proportion of all households in the city. The number of households assessed as currently homeless was 308 between January and March 2021, which is a very slight decline compared to the last quarter of 2019. The proportions of households threatened with homelessness or currently homelessness in Milton Keynes were higher compared to those for England as a whole ([Number of households by initial assessment of homelessness circumstances and needs, January to March 2021, 2021: Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government](#)).

The annual count of rough sleepers marks a sharp decrease in the number of people that were recorded to sleep rough compared to previous years. One a single night between 1 October and 30 November 2020, 18 people were counted. This compares to 35 in 2019 and 41 in 2018. It should be noted that for most local authorities the collection of this snapshot data coincided with a national lockdown and many rough sleepers had been provided emergency accommodation through the 'Everyone In' scheme ([Annual rough sleeping snapshot in England 2020, 2021: Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government](#)). At the same time, however, Winter Night Shelter MK - who have been providing vital services to homeless people since 2010 and provided 81 people with accommodation during winter 2019-20 - were unable to run overnight accommodation in winter 2020-21 due to Covid-19 ([Winter Night Shelter MK 2021](#)).

Data about the provision of emergency accommodation between September 2020 and January 2021 shows that an increasing number of people were in need of support during the second and third lockdowns. The number people provided with emergency accommodation more than doubled, from 31 in September 2020 to 69 in January 2021 ([Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) emergency accommodation survey data: January 2021, 2021; Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government](#)).

Vital thinking

- With an estimated (10,726) or 17% of children living in relative poverty in 2020, some areas of Milton Keynes show child poverty rates as high as 31%. What can we do to reduce the rate of child poverty in the worst affected areas of Milton Keynes?
- The proportion of children eligible for free school meals increased from 15.0% to 18.4%. What more can we do support those who rely on school meals to get meals when these are not available?
- In October 2021, close to 23,000 families – among which 14,000 with children – in receipt of Universal Credit and Working Tax Credit will experience a substantial cut to their weekly benefits in October 2021. How will this impact child poverty and deprivation?



Vital Action - St Marks Meals

St Marks Meals provide meal boxes to schools so parents who are facing poverty can collect a box which contains enough ingredients to feed a family of four, these boxes also contain recipe cards. During the pandemic the charity saw the demand for meal boxes increase and as a result moved into larger premises with the help of a MK Food Support grant. Originally the project began tackling holiday hunger under the name 'Make Lunch', by providing hot meals at lunchtimes to families living in poverty. They realised the limited impact of such a programme when speaking to teachers and school staff and who recognised that it wasn't just holiday hunger that was a problem, but that children were going hungry on any night of the year. They are partnered with many schools now allowing them access to the most vulnerable families and resourcing trusted teachers to meet the need. They noticed a significant increase in demand during COVID-19 delivering over 600 boxes on request from their school's partners compared with only 108 for the same 6-week period pre COVID.



POVERTY AND DISADVANTAGE

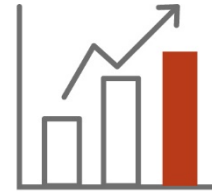
Statistics



18.4%

The proportion of children eligible for free school meals in MK increased from **15.0% to 18.4%**.

80.9%



Employment increased slightly to **80.9%** in 2020 compared to **78.3%** in 2019, although median gross pay for a full-time worker in Milton Keynes dropped by **4.9%**.



The number of claimants of Jobseekers' Allowance and Universal Credit remained reduced slightly in the last year, from **9,560 in June 2020 to 9,310 in June 2021**. This is still double the number of claimants compared to pre-pandemic levels.

9,310



18

The number of rough sleepers counted on a single night decreased from **35 in 2019 to 18 in 2020**. The number of people in emergency accommodation rose from **31 in September 2020 to 69 in January 2021**.



17%

An estimated (10,726) or **17%** of children were living in relative poverty in 2020, although some areas of Milton Keynes show child poverty rates as high as **31%**.



bottom
2%

The 2019 Index of Multiple Deprivation indicates that **18 of 132** local areas listed for Milton Keynes belong to the **20%** deprived areas in England. Of those, 2 areas belong to the **2%** most deprived in England.



WORK

Theme Definition

The coronavirus pandemic has had an enormous impact on businesses and employment, with temporary closures, a shift to online shopping and reduced travel and socialising. Resulting in a two-tier impact on business, some benefiting from lockdown while other unable to pivot their services.

Smaller companies are more likely than larger companies to operate in sectors that have been most affected by the pandemic shock, such as accommodation and food, arts and recreation, and construction.

Overview

Young people, aged between 16 and 24 have higher rates of unemployment, higher rates of unemployment benefit claims and 70% of employment losses were among the under 25s. The higher impact has been driven by the sectors young people predominantly work in, hospitality, retail, and leisure.

A higher percentage of older workers were furloughed and an analysis of ONS data finds that only around 35% of workers aged 50+ are reemployed after a redundancy in the UK in 2019, compared to an overall average of 49%.

Findings

The labour market

The recent publication by the ONS of labour market statistics for the three months of March to May 2021 show a continued recovery from the virtual shutdown of large swathes of the economy at the height of the pandemic.

Employment levels have been increasing and unemployment falling, but when the Coronavirus Job Retention scheme ends, increases in unemployment are highly likely. The ONS pay rolled employees survey showed that in February 2020 the fall for pay rolled employees under the age of 25 was 191,000, or 5%, meaning that almost 93% of the fall in this period for all pay rolled employees was for young people. The sectors with the largest falls in pay rolled employees were the Arts, entertainment and recreation sector, with an 14% fall, and the Accommodation and food service sector, with a 11% fall. Coronavirus: Impact on the labour market: <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-8898/>

Unemployment

The Unemployment Rate in Milton Keynes was 6.1% in May 2021, higher than the average in the South East of England at 4.9% and just slightly above the UK average of 6.0%.

Milton Keynes has a lower unemployment rate than Northampton, Bedford and Luton, but higher than Central Beds, North Northamptonshire and West Northamptonshire.

In May 2021, there were eight wards within Milton Keynes with unemployment rates above the borough average of 6.1%. Levels of unemployment were highest in the wards of Woughton and Fishermead (11.0%), Bletchley East (9.7%) and Central Milton Keynes (8.7%). People claiming unemployment benefits by constituency:

<https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-8748/>

In May 2021 in Milton Keynes 1,785 young people aged 18-24 years were unemployed a rate of 10.1% compared to the UK rate of 8.2%.

In Milton Keynes, accommodation & Food Services and Arts, entertainment & recreation saw the largest percentage of employments on furlough on 30th April 2021 at an average 28%. Wholesale & Retail and Accommodation & Food Services saw the largest number of employments made furlough, 3,020 on 30th April 2021.

Unemployment benefit claims

Unemployment can also be measured by the number of people claiming unemployment related benefits. In June 2021, within the Milton Keynes North and South constituencies, 9,660 people were claiming benefits, a significant monthly drop of -267%. But compared to March 2020, the number of claimants is 116% higher. This is also a third higher than the UK average of 83%.

The monthly figure for young people aged 16-24 claiming benefits was 1,754 a monthly drop of -42.5%. Again, looking back to March 2020, it is a 145% increase and much higher than the UK average increase of unemployment benefit claims of 80%.

Most affected workers

At the national level, analysis of unemployment data suggests that workers who are from an ethnic minority group, young and older workers, low paid workers, and disabled workers have been most negatively impacted economically by the coronavirus outbreak.

Payroll data shows that 70% of employee job losses between March 2020 and May 2021 were among under 25s. Young people who were in insecure work were most affected: 36% of 18-24 year olds on a zero-hours, agency or temporary contracts were no longer working in January 2021.

Unemployment rates for minority ethnic groups were higher than the average and white ethnic groups before the coronavirus pandemic. From January-March 2020 to January-March 2021, unemployment rates for Mixed/multiple ethnic groups nearly doubled from 5% to 11.3%. In comparison people from White ethnic groups increased by just over a half of a percent from 3.6% to 4.1%

The table shows the change in unemployment rates between January-March 2020 and the same period in 2021, by ethnic group.

Unemployment rates by ethnic group		
January-March 2020 and January-March 2021		
	Jan-Mar 2020	Jan-Mar 2021
Mixed/ multiple ethnic groups	5.0%	11.3%
Black/ African/ Caribbean/ Black British	9.0%	10.2%
Other ethnic group	5.8%	9.4%
Pakistani	6.1%	8.6%
Bangladeshi	9.5%	7.6%
Chinese	4.0%	6.9%
Indian	3.8%	6.5%
White	3.6%	4.1%
Total	3.9%	4.7%

Source: ONS, [Labour market status by ethnic group](#), 18 May 2021

Economy

Business recovery

Over 3,000 businesses in Milton Keynes found themselves in “significant” financial distress during the second quarter of 2021, according to insolvency research ‘Red Flag’ report.

However, after several steady quarterly increases, the city saw a 10% decrease in the number of struggling businesses between Q1 and Q2 2021 to 3,186, although this was significantly up – by 25% – on the same period in 2020.

Milton Keynes continues to work with local businesses within the framework of their Economic Recovery Plan and in July another £1.25m investment. The council that has so far supported over 400 businesses and 12,000 residents. Labour market insight June 2021: <https://www.milton-keynes.gov.uk/assets/attach/70842/Labour-Insight-Report-June-2021.pdf> <https://businessmk.co.uk/city-will-be-at-the-helm-of-uks-economic-recovery-says-powerhouse-report/>

The latest UK Powerhouse report prepared by Irwin Mitchell and the Centre for Economic and Business Research suggests that Milton Keynes will be one of the top three cities for economic growth by Q4 2021.

Only 36% of cities in the report are expected to increase employment levels in Q4 2021 and in line with the majority, job prospects in Milton Keynes are expected to decline following the end of the furlough scheme.

The findings support last year’s UK Powerhouse report, which predicted Milton Keynes would be one of the towns in the UK to emerge strongest in terms of economic output following the lifting of lockdown restrictions, while employment is expected to be slower to recover.

Following lockdown, the severe downturn Milton Keynes underwent, it is believed that it will provide more scope for a positive recovery. Much of the local economy is comprised of service industries, the report expects this sector to lead Milton Keynes out of Covid-19 restrictions into economic prosperity.

As retail sales return and online sales continue to grow, as a regional distribution and logistics hub for many businesses including Marks and Spencer, John Lewis and Amazon, Milton Keynes is expected to benefit as the economy recovers.

The initial £2.25 million economic recovery plan for Milton Keynes focuses on:

1. MK College

“By far the largest project, and highest single-investment scheme. A programme spanning 18 months and focused on individuals aged 16+ within in Milton Keynes needing skill enhancement for career planning and skill building with the aim of increasing employment opportunities.”

2. Works 4 Us

“The Works 4 Us programme is a 12-month course targeted at women aiming to get back into work. That includes training and personal development, interview preparation and practice, and overall career guidance. Additional aid includes digital equipment for members without computer/device access.”

3. WorkTree

“A local charity that specialises in providing career insights for secondary school children and employee interaction via online meetings. The scheme was formerly face to face, however, has needed to adapt to online sessions with for ‘Career Snapshots’ software that enables individuals with interesting careers a time to explain their industry pathways to Secondary and Primary School students”

4. Women Leaders

“The Council is working with Women Leaders UK on an 18-month mentoring and professional networking support scheme for women living in the Milton Keynes authority area who are out of work, and an Ally ship programme for senior leaders to be delivered to MK based businesses.”

5. Protospace

“A collaboration between Made in MK, MK Geek Night, and Pooleyville; Protospace was created to address the lack of a centralised hub, both physical and virtual, for tech entrepreneurs and creators based in Milton Keynes. A 12-month programme to deliver a series of events and workshops to provide an incubation space for innovation, learning, and business development.”

6. The Rebel business school (Completed)

“A national organisation with local projects for three two-week virtual pop-up business schools. During the 10-day course, the school works with participants to teach intermediate-level classes on starting, running and sustaining a business. Out of the 3 business schools Februarys 335 Attendees in Februarys Business School - the highest number of participants in a single event for the companies 10-year history.”

7. MK Artificial Intelligence (Completed)

“A tech focused community group that aims to make Artificial Intelligence accessible to the wider Milton Keynes Community, this involves hosting monthly [MKAI Expert Forum Meetups](#), interactive problem-solving discussions and sessions delivered by professionals. The organisation also works by connecting the community to academic institutions to create awareness of the opportunities for businesses from interns, research, advice and consulting. Milton Keynes has committed to funding the organisation for 6 months.”

8. Federation of small businesses (Completed)

“A national organisation has helped over 150 small to medium sized businesses find support, legal and HR advice, as well as local networking groups and business banking. This was another unique programme for the fund, as it involves a membership fee purchase, making the annual membership free for businesses who come under the Economic Recovery Plan.”

9. Indie Collective (Completed)

“The Indie Collective is a crowdfunded project that showcases independent product-selling businesses within Milton Keynes, the Recovery Plan match-funded an Intu store during the Autumn and Christmas Season of 2020.”

10. Love Local

"An independent City Centre MK shop showcasing small business within Milton Keynes with handmade and local products. Milton Keynes Council is funding a business support and mentoring scheme which aims to provide 50 MK based female founded start-ups with retail space, business reviews and web services training for 8 weeks per business. This scheme will start June 2021"

11. National Energy Foundation

"The National Energy Foundation (NEF) have 3 sections which the economic recovery plan is funding.1. To support at least 25 Milton Keynes businesses for green business growth (by gaining accreditation). 2. To train 10 people from Milton Keynes to become Retrofit Coordinators (RCs).3. To redevelop NEF's 'face to face' training materials on energy awareness in order to make them available online."

12. Bridgman and Bridgman

"Saxon Court Green Roof Project - This scheme is Green Roof installations and construction skills project aimed at young unemployed individuals from YMCA MK and Groundwork UK who will be trained on the installation and maintenance of green roofs within Saxon Court. The scheme will launch on the 6 June, World Green Roof Day

Vital thinking

- The development work around the Oxford to Cambridge Arc creates a wide variety of employment opportunities, how do we skill our workforce to take advantage the opportunities presented?
- Employment levels are higher than in the rest of the country, however, wages have dropped. What are the implications of this for in-work poverty, and how can we ensure that the city attracts well-paid and secure employment?
- The move to working from home could open up more opportunities for disabled people. How do we encourage employers to provide the right equipment and working conditions to support a more diverse workforce?





WORK

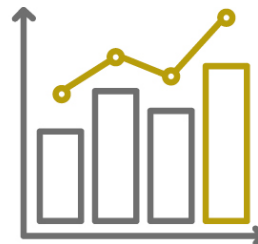
Statistics



6.1%

In May 2021, there were eight wards within Milton Keynes with unemployment rates above the borough average of **6.1%**. Levels of unemployment were highest in the wards of **Woughton and Fishermead (11.0%)**, **Bletchley East (9.7%)** and **Central Milton Keynes (8.7%)**.

Top 3



The latest UK Powerhouse report prepared by Irwin Mitchell and the Centre for Economic and Business Research suggests that Milton Keynes will be **one of the top three cities for economic growth by Q4 2021**.



EDUCATION

Theme Definition

Education includes all types of training and learning, from early years to adult education and continuing development programmes. For this report we concentrate on the impact of the pandemic on statutory education and apprenticeships. The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted all aspects of society and been felt sharply across all levels of education, from early years settings, through secondary schooling on to apprenticeships and universities.

Overview

Between March 2020 and the end of the summer term, early years settings, schools and colleges were asked to limit attendance to reduce transmission of coronavirus.

From the beginning of the autumn term schools were asked to welcome back all pupils to school full-time. From 5 January 2021, schools were asked to provide on-site education for vulnerable children and children of critical workers only. This remained in place until 5 March 2021. https://www.gov.uk/education/school-attendance-and-absence#research_and_statistics

Summer 2020 and 2021 exams were postponed, and teacher assessments replaced grades. The government has opted not publish results for these two years therefore we were unable to access this information.

Findings

Attendance

Early Years

Early years settings can include childminders, day nurseries, pre-schools, holiday playschemes and childcare in your own home.

After a drastic reduction of open early years settings and children in weekly attendance across April to December 2020, the figures for the first quarter of 2021 show a marked increase in open settings and children in attendance. The tables show the average number for each time period.

Milton Keynes	Q2/3/4 2020	Q1 2021	Change
Settings Open	162	249	54% increase
Children attending	1969	3460	75% increase
Vulnerable Children attending	74	136	83% increase
Buckinghamshire	Q2/3/4 2020	Q1 2021	Change
Settings Open	503	680	35% increase
Children attending	3857	7570	96% increase
Vulnerable Children attending	102	127	25% increase

The differential between the last quarter of 2020 and the first quarter of 2021 is less marked, but 452 fewer children were in attendance in Q1, a 13% decrease. Aside from the direct impact on children themselves, closed settings have put pressure and stress on families who need to go to work or work at home.

State Funded Schools

Schools across England reopened to all year groups from September 2020, with students sent home in bubbles to self-isolate when coronavirus cases were detected. Department for Education (DoE) figures show that Milton Keynes pupils, from state funded primary, secondary and special schools missed more than 200,000 days of face-to-face teaching in the autumn term after having to self-isolate or shield due to COVID-19.

During the autumn, the general absence rate, including any child being ill due to COVID-19, was in Milton Keynes 4.5% and across England 4.7%. However, in terms of face to face or in-person teaching the absence rate was 7.4%, equivalent to five days per pupil.

<https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/autumn-term-2020-how-covid-19-affected-englands-state-funded-schools/>

Schools recorded general absence – including when authorised and unauthorised – separately, although this could include a child being ill due to having COVID-19.

The general absence rate in Milton Keynes for the autumn term was around 4.5%, which was similar to 4.9% the previous year.

Percentage of students attending state funded schools on 12 May 2021		
School Type	Milton Keynes	England
Primary	95.8%	94.8%
Secondary	87.6%	88.6%
Special	85.1%	86.6%

On June 17th, looking solely at absence that was related to coronavirus, the DoE estimated that 3.3% of pupils were absent for this reason.

On the 1st July 2021, the government published statistics that showed, in England over 640,000 children were off school, of which 471,000 are self-isolating because of a potential

contact with a coronavirus case within their school bubble. A further 34,000, or 0.5 per cent, had a suspected case of the illness.

These figures all related to schools that remained open, but the proportion that had closed doubled in a week, from 0.2 per cent to 0.4 per cent. At those schools, a further 18,000 children were not attending.

England moved into step four of the roadmap on the 19th July and the government no longer recommended that it was necessary to keep children in consistent groups or 'bubbles'. Some protective measures remained in place for the autumn term, including "enhanced hygiene and ventilation", but face coverings were no longer advised for pupils, staff and visitors either in classrooms or in communal areas, or on school transport. The education secretary also said that "social distancing will no longer be necessary" from step four.

<https://www.tes.com/news/need-know-what-covid-unlocking-means-schools-gavin-williamson>

However, schools were being encouraged to prepare to reintroduce masks, bubbles and other protective measures in the event of local outbreaks. NHS Test and Trace identified close contacts rather than schools. Also, proposals were put in place for secondary school pupils to receive two on-site lateral flow tests, three to five days apart, when they returned in the autumn term.

Although attendance at all levels of schooling has bounced back, the impact of absences, self-isolation, inadequate home schooling and access to IT, friends and mentors, will have an ongoing impact on educational progress. Schools, teachers, parents, and pupils will all require some measure of extra support across the 2021/22 school year.

Pupil progress and learning loss

The government interim report into pupil progress in the 2020 – 2021 academic year and a summary report by the Education Endowment Foundation both show a consistent pattern of lack of academic progress across age groups compared to previous years and a marked gap in attainment for disadvantaged pupils.

According to the interim report, by the end of the spring term, primary-aged pupils had experienced a learning loss in reading equivalent to between 2.0 months and 2.3 months of progress and in mathematics, a much greater learning loss of between 3.1 months and 3.6 months.

The February and July DoE reports "Evidence summary: COVID-19 - children, young people and education settings" both clearly state that the evidence from recent studies is that every school day missed matters and likely to lead to reduced attainment.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/evidence-summary-covid-19-children-young-people-and-education-settings>

According to the Education Policy Institute (EPI), a think-tank, there is strong evidence that lower educational attainment has profound consequences for an individual's lifetime earnings, leading to lower future tax revenues. Under its central scenario, the EPI estimates total lifetime lost earnings of between £150 billion and £300 billion for England's eight million children.

The government has allocated the equivalent of £250 per pupil to make up for their three to four months of lost learning. Yet four months of the normal English annual school's budget is about £16 billion of spending, or £2,000 a pupil.

In their submission to the House of Commons Select Committee regarding COVID-19 and education inequality, Lee Elliot Major and Andy Eyles suggested that government had missed an opportunity to 'level up' the learning losses suffered by disadvantaged pupils during the pandemic.

They recommend a more targeted spending approach of the £1 billion catch-up fund directed for general school funding and the National Tutoring Programme. It should be directed specifically to help poor children or prioritised schools with a significant proportion of pupils on free school meals.

Following the publication of the House of Commons Education Committee's report "The forgotten: how White working-class pupils have been let down, and how to change it", consideration of specific post covid support for the largest disadvantaged ethnic group, Free School Meals (FSM) White British pupils, will be required.

Two main findings from the report were:

- Early years: In 2018/19, just 53% of FSM-eligible White British pupils met the expected standard of development at the end of the early years foundation stage, one of the lowest percentages for any disadvantaged ethnic group.
- GCSE performance: In 2019 just 17.7% of FSM-eligible White British pupils achieved grade 5 or above in English and maths, compared with 22.5% of all FSM-eligible pupils. This means that around 39,000 children in the group did not achieve two strong passes.

<https://committees.parliament.uk/work/237/left-behind-white-pupils-from-disadvantaged-backgrounds/news/156024/forgotten-white-workingclass-pupils-let-down-by-decades-of-neglect-mps-say/>

In the Vital Signs 2019 report, we reported that although schools performed well under OFSTED, results at GCSE and A Level were below the national average. The expected learning loss will further impact secondary school pupil performance.

Due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, most exams and assessments did not take place in 2019/20 or 2020/21. As a result of this, the government announced that it would not publish school or college level results data in autumn 2020 or autumn 2021.

Overall GCSE results are higher at grade 7 and above compared to 2020 (28.5% in 2021 compared with 25.9% in 2020, and 20.7% in 2019) and relatively stable at grade 4 and above compared to 2020 (76.9% in 2021 compared with 75.9% in 2020, and 67.1% in 2019).

The small overall increase in outcomes this year compared to previous years may partly reflect the change in assessment arrangements, for example, teachers may have given students some benefit of the doubt across the multiple opportunities many students had to show what they had learned – quite different from end of course exams.

Analyses show general stability in the differences in outcomes for students with different protected characteristics compared to previous years and increases in outcomes for many groups, this suggests that the changes to the assessment arrangements have lessened the unevenness in outcomes we may otherwise have seen.

Student self-esteem and confidence

Numerous studies and surveys over the last twelve months provide clear evidence that many children and students have suffered a loss of confidence and self-esteem as the pandemic

has increased challenges to emotional wellbeing and mental health.

<https://impacted.org.uk/covid-19>

Several key themes emerged from recent studies including:

- Access to education and activities reduced – lack of stimulation, structured time and development opportunities.
- Social media overuse and lack of exercise – has had a negative impact on teenagers’ wellbeing.

The COVID-19 Youth Economic Activity and Health Monitor report published in February 2021 noted that “Young women collectively experienced relatively greater negative effects on their well-being than young men. Well-being was also disproportionately worsened among all young people who were struggling financially before the pandemic.”

<https://epi.org.uk/publications-and-research/young-peoples-mental-and-emotional-health/>

The report also highlighted increased anxiety among young people, where three in five respondents felt more worried, anxious, and depressed than before the pandemic. About half felt less useful and less optimistic about the future. Over 60% felt less connected to their friends and significant others.

The ImpactEd survey report, which was published in February 2021, is built on the experiences of more than 62,000 pupils in England. A key finding for pupils in Year 10 and 11 was that a quarter of the pupils said they could not get help from their family if they had questions about their school work, and 40% said that they did not have a routine which helped them learn.

The pandemic has reduced self-esteem and confidence for a large number of school pupils from a diversity of backgrounds. Early indications are that children from economically disadvantaged backgrounds have been particularly hard hit and post-lockdown support should be evaluated to ensure those children benefit fully. Girls appear to have experienced the greatest anxiety during the pandemic and also in returning to school. Schools should consider whether girls may need more support in managing their anxiety.

Teacher Impact

According to the DoE, COVID-related absence amongst the workforce (includes staff with a confirmed or suspected case of coronavirus and those self-isolating) was consistently low (at or below 0.5%) during the first half of the summer term for both teachers and school leaders and teaching assistants and other staff. Absences have been increasing, data from 20th May – 8th July.

- The DoE estimate that 5.4% of teachers and school leaders in open state-funded schools were absent due to COVID-19 reasons on 8th July, up from 4.2% on 1st July and 2.5% on 24th June.
- The DoE estimate that 5.2% of teaching assistants and other staff in open state-funded schools were absent due to COVID-19 reasons on 8th July, up from 3.9% on 1st July and 2.4% on 24th June. <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/attendance-in-education-and-early-years-settings-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-outbreak>

Research for the Autumn term by the Education Policy Institute shows that teacher absences due to a confirmed case of coronavirus were significantly higher than those of pupils – COVID absence rates for teachers (those with the virus, not merely those self-isolating) were 6 times higher than pupils in primary schools, while they were up to 3 times higher in secondary schools. <https://epi.org.uk/publications-and-research/covid-related-teacher-absences/>

According to the NEU (National Education Union) analysis of the DoE and government infection rate data published in Q1 2021, the data shows that there were much higher COVID rates of infection amongst teachers and other school staff than for the general population.

On average the rate of COVID infection is 1.9 times higher amongst primary and secondary teachers than the general population. It is 2 times higher for special school teachers.

For teaching assistants and other staff, the rate of COVID infection is three times higher in primary schools and almost seven times higher in special schools.

The Education Support Charity survey of over 3,000 education professionals, taken at the end of the summer term 2020 shows the strain on mental health and well-being of working in education during the coronavirus pandemic.

52% of all teachers felt their mental health and well-being had declined either considerably or a little. In contrast 61% of all education professionals felt greatly or somewhat appreciated by parents/guardians of their pupils/students.

A survey in July of over 1,500 teachers and teaching union members conducted by Nottingham and Oxford universities found that Department of Education government guidance for schools was inadequate and a main source of stress for teachers and school leaders. https://schoolsweek-co-uk.cdn.ampproject.org/v/s/schoolsweek.co.uk/inadequate-dfe-covid-guidance-contributing-to-crisis-in-school-leadership/amp/?amp_gsa=1&_js_v=a6&usqp=mq331AQIKAGwASCAAqM%3D#amp_tf=From%20%251%24s&aoh=16267176802982&csi=0&referrer=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.com&share=https%3A%2F%2Fschoolsweek.co.uk%2Finadequate-dfe-covid-guidance-contributing-to-crisis-in-school-leadership%2F

Teacher mental health and well-being has suffered during the pandemic as they have battled to support both the academic progress and mental health of their pupils.

Sinéad Mc Brearty, CEO of The Education Support charity, commented on the Teacher Wellbeing Index survey that “There is a clear message here from teachers: involve us in decision-making, provide clear guidance, give us the time and resources required to support children and young people through this historic event. The education workforce has been purposeful and adaptable during the pandemic. It is time now for government to demonstrate respect, value and trust in the profession. Done well and quickly, this will provide a huge boost to morale across education.” <https://www.educationsupport.org.uk/resources/research-reports/covid-19-and-classroom-working-education-during-coronavirus-pandemic>

Apprenticeships and vocational courses

The COVID-19 crisis has seen apprenticeship starts in the UK fall by 46% overall in 2020, compared with 2019, with the worst affected sectors being health and social care, business management and hospitality. <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/apprenticeships-and-traineeships/2020-21>

A survey of apprenticeships by Small Business Prices revealed that despite the impact of COVID-19, health and social care was still the most popular choice for apprentices with more than 43,000 starts in 2019-20. This was double the number of starts in the fourth most popular sector: engineering. <https://www.fenews.co.uk/fevoices/69595-businesses-can-claim-3000-for-each-new-apprentice-they-take-on-as-part-of-the-plan-for-jobs>

In Milton Keynes, the latest apprenticeship starts figures for 2020/2021, to March 2021, that is 8 months of the academic year, total 680. For the same period in 2019/20 the numbers were higher at 1,480 starts. On a pro rata basis, the 2020/2021 starts are 55% lower than 2019/2020.

	White		BAME		Other/Mixed	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Milton Keynes	960	78%	190	15.4%	80	6.5%
Northampton	1,010	85.6%	90	7.6%	80	6.8%
England	462,480	85%	50,000	9.2%	31,510	5.8%

Milton Keynes has a higher percentage of BAME, and Other/Mixed ethnicity apprenticeship starts than the England averages. <http://lsect.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Appren-ethnicity.xlsx>

Although many companies are still hesitant about hiring apprentices, according to a survey by the Open University, 66% of employers that have embraced programmes during the pandemic report that they have been able to recover more quickly.

The survey also found that nearly three quarters (70%) of employers held the belief that apprenticeships and work-based learning would be vital to their organisations' recovery from COVID disruption, compared to just half (50%) of business in August of 2020.

Laura Burley, Apprenticeships Ambassador at The Open University responded to the survey findings: "At The Open University we've seen first-hand the steadying effect that embracing training and education has had on organisations throughout the pandemic. Not only does a continuous culture of workplace learning allow businesses to remain agile and competitive in these challenging times but has also provided a vital means of retaining loyalty, engagement and adaptability when workforces are dispersed across the country."

<https://www.open.ac.uk/business/apprenticeships/blog/naw-21>

From the 1st June, a new government scheme commenced to encourage more employers to offer apprenticeships and train the workforce they need for the future. It offers employers of all sizes in England the opportunity to apply for extra funding to help them take on new apprentices. The boost to the apprenticeship incentive scheme was confirmed by the Chancellor in the Budget in March, and businesses can apply to claim £3000 for each new apprentice hired as a new employee from 1 April.

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/899753/201920-July_totals-since-may-2010-and-2015.xlsx

Although apprenticeship opportunities and starts took a large fall over 2020 as the economy effectively closed for many industries and staff were furloughed, there are good signs that the numbers are starting to pick up. Employers with government support are seeing apprenticeships as a key part of their Covid-19 recovery plans.

<https://www.theguardian.com/education/2021/feb/09/how-apprenticeships-could-play-a-key-part-in-the-post-covid-economic-rebuild>

Applications to college and university

Despite the difficulties in secondary education during the pandemic, school closures, lack of face-to-face teaching, more students from the most disadvantaged backgrounds across the UK entered Higher Education in 2020 than ever before, even in the most selective universities and courses. <https://www.ucas.com/data-and-analysis/undergraduate-statistics-and-reports/ucas-undergraduate-releases/applicant-releases-2021/2021-cycle-applicant-figures-january-deadline>

The general UK 18-year-old entry rate rose to a record 37.0%, from 34.1% in 2019 and there were record numbers of 18-year-old acceptances from the lowest participation areas. Applications from mature students grew significantly, reflecting an increased demands for up-skilling and re-skilling as the economy entered recession.

<https://www.theguardian.com/education/2021/jul/13/covid-has-been-a-big-catalyst-universities-plan-for-post-pandemic-life>

There are several factors in play that aided this welcome increase. More students perceived higher education as a safe stable option in a difficult time for the workplace market. More students met the terms of their offers on 'centre assessment grades' than on their original exam results. The government increased capacity across Higher Education, and there was an immense national effort to offer more support than ever to the COVID cohort.

According to UCAS 2021 application data, although applications in 2020 were effectively the same as 2019, 2021 has shown an increase in all numbers of applications for a place, between 2% and 14%, with an average of 11% compared to 2019 and 2020. For applications from women, the increase was between 2% and 16%, with an average of 12%. For men, the number of applications increased by 10% overall, except double applications which decreased by 2%. Nursing has also seen a rise in applications of 34% to 39,700.

It is good news that university application numbers are rising, but students who spent months learning in their bedrooms and crave human contact are faced with many universities keen to retain and build on changes wrought by the pandemic, including moving to either a wholly online or a blended learning teaching model. Northampton University has already embedded a new way of teaching called "active blended learning", combining online teaching materials with face-to-face education. Such changes will not be made wholesale overnight, which will likely mean the higher education sector will be in a state of flux and perhaps turmoil for many months.

Vital thinking

- How can we share best practice developed during lockdown, including the 'Big Ask' consultation, across schools in Milton Keynes to support vulnerable children?
- How do we best support young people who are suffering anxiety as a result lockdown and self-isolation?
- How can we provide extra support for young people and ethnic minorities? How can we secure more apprenticeship opportunities in the Milton Keynes area and provide incentives to existing and new businesses to employ and train young people?

TARGET	4•4
	
INCREASE THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE WITH RELEVANT SKILLS FOR FINANCIAL SUCCESS	

Vital Action – SOFEA

SOFEA's is an organisation that provides education, employability and wellbeing programmes for young people. The grant awarded enabled them to provide vital support for 16-24 year olds. The young people have often been excluded from formal education due to disruptive behaviours or have withdrawn due to chronic anxiety and depression. The young people supported commonly present with learning disabilities including ADHD, autism and dyslexia as well as diagnosed mental health conditions including depression, anxiety, PTSD, personality disorders, developmental delay and brain injury. Whilst these characteristics are typically significant barriers for young people engaging with education, employment and society more widely, SOFEA's coaching and mentoring programme provides these vulnerable young people with coping strategies that enable them to engage fully, both within SOFEA's warehouse and training facilities as well as outside in their own homes and communities. Feedback from the specialist Community Initiative to Reduce Violence team shows "significant emotional and behavioural shifts in 90% of the supported cohort" and "realisation and acceptance of previous negative behaviours; intentions to move forward positively". The positive results reinforce SOFEA's position as a preferred partner of statutory organisations across Milton Keynes including Thames Valley Police, Youth Offending Team, MK Council and social services teams.



EDUCATION

Statistics



200,000

Department for Education figures show that Milton Keynes pupils, from state funded primary, secondary and special schools missed more than **200,000 days** of face-to-face teaching in the autumn term after having to self-isolate or shield due to COVID-19.

15%



Milton Keynes had twice as many young people from BAME communities taking up apprenticeships **15%** compared to **7.6%** in Northamptonshire and **9%** nationally.



13%
▼

There was a **13% decrease** in children attending nursey in the Q1 of 2021 as parents were reluctant to return to nurseries.

Looking ahead – Next Generation Fund

This year MK community foundation is proud to celebrate 35 years of grant giving and whilst we want to celebrate the past it is important to look to the future as a result our birthday sees the launch of our Next generation fund.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SxH4gAgGKi4>

The pandemic has hit young people particularly hard, youth unemployment has more than doubled since March 2020, with retail, hospitality and entertainment being closed for long periods – industries that are often the route into employment for many young people. Those approaching employment age have also been affected with schools being closed and reliance on home learning many young people will not achieve the exam success they need without considerable support. Coronavirus has had a considerable impact on young people with many fears that the “covid generation” could be out of work for long periods of time. In response to this the next generation fund aims to support our young people back into work or education. With the aspiration to close the gap created by the pandemic.

The criteria will be ‘Projects that support young people who have been disadvantaged due to COVID back into meaningful education, training or employment’

Ian Revell, Chief Executive of MK Community Foundation, said: “Thank you for everyone’s support and generosity – in time and donations. We celebrate the great legacy gifted to us and all that this has enabled us to do, and we also celebrate the amazing, life-changing, life-enhancing projects, programmes, community events and the specialist local organisations work that you have enabled. Thank you!”

This snapshot of Milton Keynes provides initial data on some of the issues arising from lockdown. This has will continue to provide Milton Keynes Community Foundation with insights into where our funding can be most effective.

We will continue to facilitate Vital Thinking Events throughout 2021/22 to inform our grant making, if you are interested in taking part in any of these events, please register your interest by emailing info@mkcommunityfoundation.co.uk.

We can only continue to fund these vital projects thanks to our fundholders, members, corporate supporters and the generous donors who responded to our appeal. We still need your support to enable us to deliver our recovery funding. If you want to get more involved, please email giving@mkcommunityfoundation.co.uk

Thank you to all those who have helped to produce this report.

Staff at MK Community Foundation

Volunteer researchers:

Amanda Saville, Andy Evans, Elizabeth Raybone, Henry Woodcock, Jessica Dell and Keetie Roelen

Critical Friends (editorial panel):

Arthur Ellis, Jason Sinclair (Trustee), MIND BLMK, Red Cross MK, St Mark's Meals and YiS (Young people's mental health)

Video/Production:

Storm Videos and Bluecube Creative

Case studies that relate to next generation

Aspire Oxfordshire -

Aspire were supported for the purchase of refurbished laptops and internet contracts so their clients in Milton Keynes will better be able to access online learning through their Aspire business start-up course and other job and housing priorities. This project meant that Aspire were better able to stay connected to enhance their prospects.

Citizens MK -

As a result of funding from Milton Keynes Community Foundation, Citizens MK were able to train teachers and students from 6 different Milton Keynes Schools to become community and school leaders. The training benefitted the participants by improving their confidence and ambition to help create social changes.

MK Melting Pot -

Funding received through our grant programmes; Melting Pot extended their previous fitness programme. The project addresses young people's physical and mental health within Milton Keynes and would encourage young people to eat healthier and exercise more.

Summerfield School -

Funding to Summerfield School means that they can develop their Early Years outdoor area, which is in need of refurbishment. This project will allow the pupils to work outside in all weather to develop their communication, motor skills and confidence in a safe environment

Sieve MK -

Sieve MK were funded for a project that aims to improve the social, emotional and mental well-being of Looked After Children in Milton Keynes. The programme will use a combination of full day workshops, coaching, mentoring and career profiling sessions to provide the participants with Functional Skills certifications.

It's What's Next IT -

Funding meant that It's What's Next IT could kickstart their Laptops for Students MK project with MK Community Foundation, helping to address the issue of digital poverty in Milton Keynes. The project looks at taking laptops donated from local businesses and people, refurbishing them and distributing them to families in need.

We are always looking for ways to improve and develop our Vital Signs report, so please do not hesitate to contact us if you would like to participate in future Vital Signs research.

Join the conversation

Get involved and have your say on the findings in this Vital Signs report

-  Tweet your **#VitalSignsMK** thoughts to **@MKComFoundation**
-  Send an email to **giving@mkcommunityfoundation.co.uk**
-  Send a letter to **MK Community Foundation, Acorn House, 381 Midsummer Boulevard, MK9 3HP**
-  Call us on **01908 690276** - We'd love to talk more about Vital Signs with you!

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