

## Policy Brief

### Covid in Cartoons

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#### KEY INFO

**Research question:** Can learning about political cartoons support agency and resilience in young people during the COVID-19 pandemic?

#### Policy area or themes

- Communities
- Arts & Health
- Skills and Training
- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

**Methods:** mini-course delivery in 12 schools; pre- and post-surveys; focus groups; teacher feedback

**Geographical area:** England

**Research stage:** in progress



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### Summary of the research

**Covid-19** poses specific challenges for **young people** – particularly those in seldom-heard and/or under-represented groups – who may feel especially disempowered by the pandemic. Working together with partners Shout Out UK, a multi-award-winning educational platform, and Cartooning for Peace, an international organisation of cartoonists founded in 2006 at the UN headquarters, an interdisciplinary team from the University of Leicester has developed a four-lesson **mini-course** intended to help young people make meaning of their pandemic experience and to build their criticality, sense of agency, and belonging. The course, which is aimed at 15 to 18 years olds, builds on political cartooning during Covid-19 and on creative interaction with political cartoonists to support **resilience pathways**, as research suggests that fostering critical consciousness (a critical understanding of the social and political climate), and encouraging dialogue around sharing personal experience, is key to **positive youth outcomes**.

### Policy recommendations for Education ([Links to DfE Outcome Delivery Plan](#))

- Develop cross-cutting **curriculum options** that acknowledge the complex and intersectional nature of post-pandemic challenges.
  - **Level up education standards** by incorporating critical thinking skills and resilience in the recovery curriculum, especially in areas where standards are weak (2.1, 2, 3)
  - Increase opportunities for and recognition of **self-guided learning recognition** (e.g. Arts/CREST Awards, Duke of Edinburgh Awards) to recognise both learning needs and



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- benefits resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic and move beyond the idea of a 'lost generation'. (2.1, 2, 3; 3.2)
- Plan **apprenticeship pathways** to building careers in the high-income creative knowledge economy to improve the skills pipeline and drive economic growth (1.1, 2, 4).
  - Develop a **youth policy development group** in collaboration with Shout Out UK, APPG Political Literacy and APPG Coronavirus to work with examination boards and publishing companies on post-pandemic skills and practices in curriculum planning, delivery, and assessment. (3.2)
  - Work with the College of Teaching, the new Institute of Teaching, and the 87 Teaching School Hubs to embed concepts such as critical thinking, self-expression, agency, and resilience in **training standards**, best teaching and leadership practice. (2.1, 2)

## Key findings

Surveys of 184 students demonstrate that:

- Student scores of **personal resilience** are positively associated with their ability to critically think about their own political and social circumstances (i.e., **critical consciousness**).
- Provisional results indicate that critical thinking skills are particularly driving resilience for students from **disadvantaged backgrounds** and as such are a key vector for overcoming pandemic challenges and structural disadvantages enhanced by COVID-19.
- Student's ability to critically think about their own political and social circumstances is positively associated with reported likelihood of **engaging** in discourse about the pandemic.
- Students associate wellbeing benefits linked to lockdown where they are able to show agency, as shown by our focus groups: surveys confirm that approximately half of all students (55%) took up new interests during the pandemic.



## Teacher feedback

(Art, Politics, Digital Media, Graphic Communication, NCS)

*"Critical discussion is something we encourage completely with our A level candidates and this was perfect as a thought-provoking task which easily leads into all of our creative subjects."*

*"I think lots of [students] came away from the project with a better understanding of politics and world issues and how this is intertwined with the pandemic..."*

*"Using lots of global examples throughout was also incredibly helpful in getting students to understand how the pandemic has affected people in different ways, especially highlight the inequality between people from different countries."*

## Further information

[Website](#) - [Project blogs](#) - [Project playlist](#)

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