

Educational divides

One of the tragedies of the lock down is the growing educational divides it is creating.

The minority of pupils whose parents pay fees for their schooling may well be at a school that is teaching a full timetable of lessons today. Parents who pay directly for their children's education expect it be delivered. Many public schoolteachers are delivering their normal lessons on line. They give their lesson or lecture on video, supervise the class who log in and are required to participate, take in electronic work for marking and set homework electronically. Some state schools too are providing an excellent on line education.

The teachers doing this find it exacting as everything they say is recorded and can be reviewed by a parent or colleague, but they accept it is what they and the school are paid to do. Some are flourishing, learning to use the special features of internet programmes to encourage more participation and to share more material more easily. Universities too are often teaching a full timetable of on line lectures, seminars and classes. I will be giving an on line lecture soon in Oxford in a digital lecture series on central banking. It was possible to say Yes because I do not have to find four hours for travel there and back.

Some state schools are not offering this on line full timetable teaching option, so the divide between schools is in danger of widening. I have asked the government to look at bridging the computer divide where low income families in receipt of benefits do not have a home computer that can receive internet lessons. It would be good to offer a laptop or other suitable device programmed to receive intranet lessons and free educational information over the web to those who need one. Many families do have a number of digital and internet devices at home which could allow children in the family to pick up the lessons by borrowing that. The wider family might also help in equipping the pupils for digital lessons where necessary.

There is also a further divide within the state pupil community. The gap is not one between rich and poor. It is between homes with a parent or parents who believe in education and who encourage their children to listen, read, watch and download material which adds to their knowledge, and those who do not. Some high income families do not take time to encourage learning or to share books, articles and internet sites with children. They do not see it as their job to supervise learning. Some low income parents take much time and trouble to pass on knowledge. The gap is between the educationally rich and the educationally poor households. The privileged may of course include the children of teachers and of professional workers who have had to learn to earn and want their children to do the same.

It is time to review the role of technology in education. If we use on line lectures and classes more, we could give more students access to the best minds and the most accomplished work. It gives an opportunity to share

materials between schools, from one expert to another and out to the wider student body. One of the benefits I found from an Oxford undergraduate education was an open lecture list. You could go to lectures in subjects you were not officially studying as part of your general education as they were often pitched at the right for such an interest. You could hear the best known or highest regarded academics in person .