Doing things differently - 'The New Normal'
Post-event summary

Participants
- [Professor Hisham Mehanna](#) (Chair)
- [Professor Dominique Moran](#) (Co-Chair)
- [Dr Suzanne Bartington](#)
- [Professor Deborah Youdell](#)
- [Dr Pilar Rojas Gaviria](#)

Background to the series
The spread of COVID-19 is one the biggest challenges the global community has faced, and our research teams have a key role to play in the fight against it, to reflect on its impact on all aspects of our lives, and to learn lessons from it.

The [Institute for Global Innovation](#) at the University of Birmingham has therefore organised a series of webinars, where experts consider the different issues surrounding the pandemic.

The session was first broadcast on 18 June 2020. You can watch the event in full by [clicking here.](#)

What is the future of travel, local and international?
Dr Suzanne Bartington, Clinical Research Fellow and Honorary Specialty Registrar in Public Health

Public health and transport are inextricably linked. Transport is tied to health (both physical and mental), environmental harms (particularly air pollution and emissions), and health and social inequalities, such as access to vital services and employment.

Broadly speaking, the last 70 years has seen a huge increase in journeys made by car, van or taxi and a corresponding decrease in the use of public transport – although rail has seen a slight recent resurgence.

This is driven by a number of factors; demographic and lifestyle trends, shifts in consumer demand, technological innovation (decarbonisation of travel etc.), and government frameworks.

Policy is perhaps less of a factor in the overall trend, but in post-COVID-19 recovery it is very important, particularly on the local scale.

COVID-19 has had a significant impact on local travel, and how we move around, with particular implications for active travel (walking, cycling etc).

Data from both Oxford and Birmingham show a near 60% reduction in all vehicle traffic throughout April. At the same time, we saw a large increase in recreational active travel. After a very short decrease in cycling over the first few days of lockdown, we're now seeing an 3.5-fold uptick in active travel.

The pandemic has introduced new drivers for how we travel. In the immediate term this is defined by health protection measures (social distancing etc), behavioural change, government interventions and the impact of economic recession and businesses adapting to the 'new normal'.

It does also provide a once in a lifetime opportunity to reverse the trend of the last 70 years, and rethink our approach to active travel. Doing so will have lasting benefits for health and transport alike.

Behavioural change, in the mid to long term, is an obstacle. Once drive-thru restaurants reopened we saw a surge in queues and traffic. It is hard to change embedded behaviours. But swift, effective policy can help that.

This is an active area of research and it will be interesting to track, alongside the bigger picture of national and international travel.

How will we educate our children in the coming two years?
Professor Deborah Youdell, Professor of Sociology of Education

It is too early to say what the 'new normal' for education will be. There are significant gaps in knowledge about:

- the diverse approaches adopted by schools
- the way children and young people and their families have experienced these

- the short and medium-term implications of these new forms of education on pupils of different backgrounds for learning and for wellbeing

Our response to this situation has been to establish the University's 'Birmingham Education and COVID-19 Initiative' – working with Birmingham City Council and other organisations to understand and support education responses to COVID-19 in the city.

Through a survey conducted over half time, our preliminary findings showed:

- Parents felt 85% of children were doing well before closures, but believe half will now fall behind
- Almost half of parents reported that they are not confident about the support they can give
- For almost half of children, parents reported getting feedback or marked work from school
- A third of children are doing 1-2 hours school work a day. A third were doing 3-4 hours, 15% were doing more, but 15% appeared to be doing none

There are significant concerns about children and young people's learning and social and mental wellbeing in the context of school closures.

'Vulnerable pupils' have been foregrounded formally, but we need to think more widely and include: those from low-income households, from Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities, who are new migrants or refugees/asylum seekers, and with special educational needs and disabilities, and about the intersections across these groups.

We also need to think about communities particularly affected by COVID-19 and the trauma and bereavement being experienced – and this may be more so for some communities and neighbourhoods than for others.

As yet we don't know what gaps might have opened between the most disadvantaged and advantaged groups of pupils, but the Educational Endowment Foundation have projected a six month gap by the end of the summer.

Schools are working together, as Academy groups or in local networks, and working with the City and with their memberships organisations such as Chartered College of Teaching and Birmingham Education Partnership and are identify ways of supporting their pupils and their learning.

As we think about doing things differently and whether we are moving to a 'new normal', we need to think and work through a number of issues that might not have straightforward answers.

For instance, in the press and amongst educators there are concerns about a digital divide – and what learning at home means for low tech and no tech households. This is incredibly important and needs fleet-footed responses. For instance the Birmingham Education Partnership has been working with local community organisations to get unused computers and laptops refurbed and out to pupils who need them but who are not covered by the DfE programme.

We also need to analyse the nuance of potential effects and legacies.

On the plus side, online learning might bring in a move to high quality, highly interactive forms of digital education that foregrounds collaboration, enquiry and creativity. This could rejuvenate the sector, match it better to the realities of work and the economy, offer new opportunities for children and young people who struggle with school institutions, and bring a new set of solutions to shortages in school places.

At the same time, if low quality, passive, individualised modes of digital education prevail, then this is a major loss. We have to remember that too many students struggle to access online learning because of lack of equipment and broadband.

There is also the question of whether an even bigger independent / state sector divide is opening up, with reports of much higher levels of online interactive and live teacher-led learning in the independent sector than in the mainstream.

All of this is likely to be true.

Importantly, as things settle down a little, we can begin to shift from a short to medium and longer term view. Identifying:

- effective strategies to support the learning and wellbeing
- the longer-term provision and strategies required to address any widening inequalities and emerging gaps

Further reading: 'Education project launched to understand Birmingham learning at home during COVID-19' – 22 May 2020

Retailers in Transformation – shopping and retail post COVID-19

Dr Pilar Rojas Gaviria, Lecturer in Marketing

Retailers and shoppers across the globe are in transformation due to COVID-19.

Unplanned disruptions always bring challenges, they demand all of our attention and urgent answers.

You could see this in the response of the retail sector. The blank white April cover of Vogue Italia was telling. As per the editor-in-chief, "to speak of anything else while people are dying, doctors and nurses are risking their lives and the world is changing is not the DNA of Vogue Italia."

Shopping and retailing became awkward in the context of the pandemic. And so, businesses rapidly transformed themselves and found new ways of doing things. For magazines like Vogue, it was to shift their attention towards heroes of the pandemic, frontline healthcare workers, rather than be 'business as usual'.

Grocery stores, too, had to change. They introduced exclusive timeslots for key workers and vulnerable customers, and actively started asking customers to buy less.

Local restaurants and store owners moved online, offering delivery services when they might not have done before.

Across the sector we've seen rapid innovation, and a desire to create value for customers. They also want to capture the demand for companies to act in a different manner, to be more ethical. This is not a new idea but COVID-19 has certainly amplified the trend.

Now, though, the non-essential shops are reopening and the high street is back. It may be easy to be tempted to go back to normal, to business as usual. There is a real risk that everything we have learned throughout the pandemic will be forgotten.

And so we require courage. Redesigning our consumer practices will take courage. As consumers we showed that we want different things, and that people actually enjoyed the 'slowing' of the consumption process, it made it more meaningful and connected. Now is the time to remind companies of what we've learned, and what the future of retail could be.

Further reading: 'Retailers on a Mission for Transformation' – Birmingham Business School Blog – 2 April 2020

Future events

The next webinar on COVID-19 will on the post pandemic economy. The webinar will run on Wednesday 8 July at 12pm, via Zoom (places limited) and Facebook livestream.

Before that, though, will be a one-off webinar on #BlackLivesMatter. This webinar will run on Wednesday 1 July at 12pm on the same platforms.

You can follow the Institute of Global Innovation on Twitter @bIGIdeas_UoB.