

# News links from January 2022

## Inequality and Poverty

In January the looming hike in energy costs, exacerbated by rising inflation and other cost of living increases, occupied everyone's minds. Unsurprisingly the poorest households will be hardest hit by these increases. [Read more.](#)

This comes at a time when the [Joseph Rowntree Foundation](#) reported that the number of UK children growing up in "very deep poverty" has risen to **1.8 million**. [News report](#) [Read the full report](#)

Labour party research also reported in January that black children are at least twice as likely as white ones to grow up poor, with the proportion having risen from 42% in 2010-11 to 53% in 2019-2020: [read more.](#)

The [Northern Health Science Alliance](#) published a report showing the extent of inequality between north and south. Their **Children of the North** report found that poverty is the lead driver of inequalities which lead to worse physical and mental health outcomes, educational attainment, and lower lifelong economic productivity: [read the report.](#)

Moving further north, [Scotland's Poverty and Inequality Commission](#) warned that, unless significant work is undertaken, targets to reduce child poverty levels by 2023-24 will be missed. 25% of Scottish children were locked into poverty and over half were in poverty at least once over a 12 year period. [Read the report.](#)

## Online Harm

Where are we with the draft online safety bill? The controversy around freedom, privacy and whether the bill goes far enough continued. The House of Commons Library published [a reading list](#) of reaction to the draft bill, including the [select committee report](#) while critics pointed out that the bill would not stop image sharing and violence ([read more](#)) while others, e.g. Sarah Champion MP, alarmed by the surge in online sexual abuse, felt that tackling online abuse should be the most pressing issue for the bill: [read more.](#)

## Safeguarding

January began with a plea from Sir Peter Wanless, Chair of the [NSPCC](#), to make the protection of children a priority in 2022 - [read more.](#)

A report from the [Commission on Young Lives](#) looked at how children's safeguarding (in particular the social care system) needs to change to protect vulnerable teenagers: [read news report](#) and [read the report.](#)

## Nutrition

The 2020-21 data from the National Child Measurement Programme (NCMP) for children in reception and Y6 was published: [read more.](#)

The data highlighted increases: over 27% of reception children and almost 41% of Year 6 children are now obese or overweight.

The House of Commons Library published a briefing paper on school food and nutrition standards for England: [read more.](#)

A new healthy food campaign, aimed at parents, was launched by the Dept of Health & Social Care: [see here.](#)

## Education

It was widely reported in January that the percentage of children starting secondary school with a severe reading age deficit has been made worse by the pandemic and increased screen time, with an estimated 1 in 5 of 11-year-olds having a reading age of 6. Read the news reports [here](#) and [here](#).

Absenteeism was high on the agenda too, with Children's Commissioner Dame Rachel de Souza pledging to find the missing children, estimated at between 80,000 and 100,000, who are not on any school roll: [read more](#). Meanwhile Covid-related absenteeism continued to be a big problem, with 1 in 8 pupils and 9% of teachers absent in the last week of January, causing further disruption to education: [read more](#).

The Government announced a consultation in response to rising avoidable absences and differing ways of dealing with the problem: [read more](#).

## Mental Health

The mental health of children and young people continues to be in crisis, with unacceptable waiting times for treatment: [read more here](#) and [here](#). It is estimated that 15% (1.5 million) children in England have new or worsening mental health issues because of the pandemic and around 2,000 children per day are referred to mental health services. Before lockdown one in nine children had a diagnosable mental health problem. Now it is one in six, according to NHS data. Services are at breaking point, and waiting times for CAMHS are up to a record three years in some areas.

Early intervention and an increase in the number of mental health hubs are being called for by experts, backed by charities including [YoungMinds](#), and [Dr Alex George](#), the country's youth mental health tsar. There are currently around only 50 such hubs across the UK, staffed by counsellors, youth workers and mental health professionals. Creative therapy, board games, group counselling sessions and one-on-one support are among the services on offer. Staff are trained to spot problems and identify youngsters who may be at risk who they can refer to relevant services. [Read more](#).

The effectiveness of early intervention is evidenced by an impact report published in January by [Place2Be](#), who provide mental health services to schools: [read more](#).

Children's Mental Health week occurs this year in the second week of February, and there are plentiful resources [here](#).

## The Importance of Play

A new study from [PEDaL- The Centre for Research on Play in Education, Development and Learning](#) (part of Cambridge University) found that when younger children learn through guided play it can be as effective as adult-led instruction and, in some cases, it can have a greater impact on children's numeracy: [read the news report](#).

## Child Health

Are children healthier than they used to be? A review by the [Nuffield Foundation](#) explored developments in young children's health over the last 20 years, focusing on seven fundamental indicators, and found that children **are** healthier than 20 years ago and more children are receiving a better start in life. However, progress has stalled in recent years and, in some cases, started to reverse. Additionally, health inequalities are increasing and action on four different fronts is needed: [read the report here](#).

## Babies in low-income families

An American study has found that babies' brains can be positively affected by a cash injection to low-income mothers. The research found that giving low-income mothers financial support directly changed infant brain activity in the first year of life, i.e. babies whose mothers received higher cash payments had higher frequency brain activity (more common in babies born into higher-income families) than other infants.

Further research is needed to see whether these changes in brain activity last and whether they translate to improved cognitive development, and the researchers feel that there's good reason to suspect they might.

[Read the report.](#)