



COVID-19 online diary

Weeks 5 and 6



Overview of the research

- 20 Londoners were recruited through Talk London to complete an only diary over the course of 8 weeks.
- **This report summarises key findings from weeks 5 and 6 of the diary (17th June to 1st July),** which uncovered growing disengagement with the coronavirus outbreak and explored some of the positive impacts of lockdown.



Summary

- The diary has picked up on growing disengagement over the last few weeks. Respondents continue to hear about coronavirus and major announcements, but are starting to switch off. This has coincided with growing disapproval of the Government's handling of the outbreak.

Positive takeaways from lockdown

- Lockdown is readily acknowledged as bringing about some positive changes, notably environmental improvements and a renewed community spirit.
- On an individual level, many have also appreciated the slower pace of life – but only because they know it is temporary.
- Whilst large-scale positive changes *were* made – in terms of the environment and community interaction – there is pessimism over long-term changes. There is a sense of negativity about things 'getting back to normal', and that only individual lifestyle changes will stick.

Respondents continue to hear about coronavirus and major announcements, but are starting to switch off.

- Most reported becoming less engaged with the pandemic over the last month or so. They are not seeking out information or following the outbreak as much as they were before, especially compared to the first month of lockdown – for example, the current transmission rates and specifics of lockdown rules and developments.
- Some no longer see the need to be as informed on the coronavirus outbreak now that lockdown continues to ease and cases continue to drop. Others have reached saturation point with coronavirus or are trying to distance themselves for their mental wellbeing – fatigue has kicked in.

“I don't really know anything about transmission any more.”

“I don't know if I needed to take some psychological distance from the pandemic to lower anxiety...”

“I receive the important announcements on my phone... However, with so many different announcements and different dates of effect, I have no idea what the current rules are at this point in time.”

“When lockdown was first put in place, I was more keen to watch the news regarding the rules but now I don't feel I've had the need to as much.”

“I was following the daily briefings but not very regularly because I get too stressed.”

Disengagement has coincided with growing disapproval and frustration with the Government's handling of the outbreak.

- Despite feeling reassured that the coronavirus situation is getting better, many have lost confidence in Government's handling of the outbreak. They think Government has stopped following the science and are not being honest and transparent. The Dominic Cummings scandal had a key role to play, tarnishing the credibility of Government. Even though the scandal has gone away, it still brings up emotions and appears to have marked the point when respondents started to disengage.
- For these reasons, many had stopped watching the daily government briefings as often (when they were still happening) and instead switched to relying on social media or key updates from news sources.

“The more I think about how the Government are handling this, the more angry I become, even now as I type - which is why I generally tend to avoid the subject.”

“I found the briefings were too politically incentivised and got poorer and poorer in terms of transparency and honesty.”

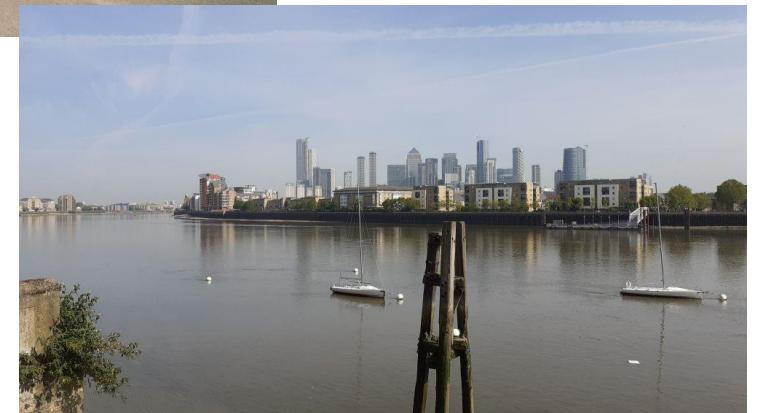
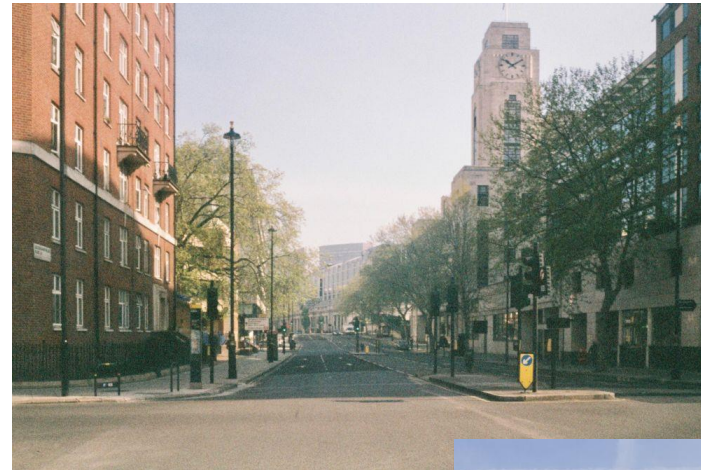
“Especially since the Cummings incident which destroyed any inclination to listen to the government or take them seriously at all. It's insulting when they talk about how well they've dealt with the pandemic completely ignoring the scandalous reality and their own incompetency.”



Positive impacts of Lockdown

Lockdown is readily acknowledged as introducing some positive changes into respondents' lives.

- There's widespread recognition that the positives of lockdown aren't a fair price to pay for normal life. **However, only a minority say there is nothing they'll miss about lockdown.**
- Respondents generally feel that, **whilst large-scale positive changes were made – in terms of the environment and community interaction – only individual changes will stick** (e.g. changes to lifestyles, spending money in different ways; making more time for hobbies).
- In one sense, therefore, **there is a sense of negativity about things 'getting back to normal'**. It is felt, especially, that the environment will suffer.



The environment has improved during lockdown – but respondents are pessimistic these changes will last.

- Respondents reflected on environmental improvements during lockdown – how they have enjoyed experiencing quieter roads; cleaner air and streets; and using public transport less and walking/cycling more. Many highlight **how grateful they are for London’s parks and green spaces.**
- Some appreciate the attention given to cycling (and development of cycle lanes) and hope this will be maintained going forward – but suspect it won't.
- Many note that, **as things return to normal, the roads are becoming dirtier. They suspect positive changes will not last.** Some say they won't continue with cycling as the roads get busier and more dangerous.

“The biggest one for me was the quieter streets and clearer air. I was off my asthma medication for the first time in years (I am now back on it). This dramatically changed quality of life in the city for the better at very little cost to the people who lived there.”

“Green space has really been key to a lot of people’s mental well-being. If the capital’s going to continue to grow in terms of population, and housing is going to be converted to HMOs, then I really think green space is going to be very important where people don’t have access to gardens.”



The other widespread positive change is a renewed community spirit.

- Almost all respondents remarked on the **feeling of community spirit during lockdown**. Many have been **getting to know their neighbours**, sometimes for the first time, establishing, e.g. neighbourhood WhatsApp groups. Some have also started helping others, through formal or informal volunteering.
- Several participants believe people have generally become more compassionate and appreciative of others, including appreciation for frontline workers and the NHS. That said, throughout lockdown there has also been frustration towards those breaking the rules – due to a perceived lack of regard for others.
- Respondents remarked on both themselves – and others – being more active and out and about more, making use of local spaces rather than rushing by them.

“I believe the lockdown made us feel closer, caring and more compassionate towards each other.”

“It's nice to see more people making use of the playing fields across the road. Kids and teens also making use of the football pitch. The park's been busier too.”

“I've felt a lot more connected to my local area and better understand the motivations of the people who live here (as I have very little in common with them from a socio-economic point of view).”



On an individual level, many have appreciated the slower pace of life – but only because they know it is temporary.

- Many talk about being forced to **slow down and being given the chance to ‘reset’** – highlighting the mental health benefits (in some cases) that lockdown can bring. For example, one participant who works in academia felt like she 'could breathe for once'. However, those who are more financially insecure feel differently.
- Several talked about **the gift of time** – being able to spend more time with friends and family; exercising and taking up new hobbies (e.g. learning the guitar, baking, DIY). The internet is highlighted as a valuable resource.
- Lockdown has also **revealed to some what they do and don't need to spend money on**. Some have realised how much they were 'wasting' on eating/drinking out and Ubers – and even the gym in one case. These are new spending habits they will try and replicate when we leave lockdown.

“We are doing online meetings, online lesson, studies, even online PE classes... There is so much to do online. I am regularly teaching Urdu Language lessons online.”

“I haven't been this healthy for a long time... exercising, cooking, cooking well.”

“We have been walking a lot. There are more people just out for a walk than before rather than going from A to B. The family next door play outside every day. They look happier than I have ever seen them.”

“One thing I will miss is being able to spend time with family, reconnect with friends and build good routines. In a sense, it has almost helped to bring me back on track mentally...”

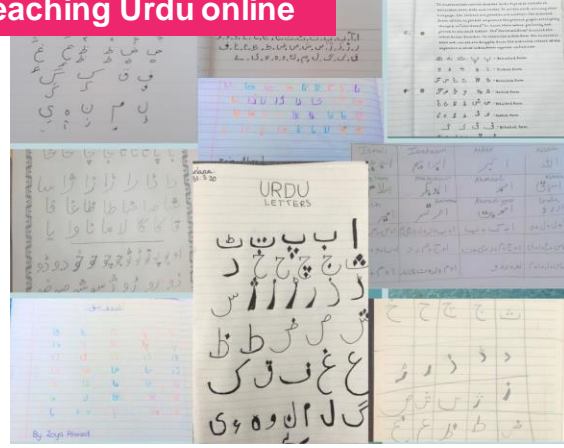
Our respondents' lockdown hobbies...



DIY



Baking



Teaching Urdu online



Exploring Greenwich

Exploring empty London



Entering the Rankin photo challenge



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Weeks 5 and 6 (July 2020)

For more information please contact Myles Wilson, GLA Intelligence
Greater London Authority, City Hall, The Queen's Walk, More London, London SE1 2AA
e-mail: Myles.Wilson@London.gov.uk
Phone: 07925 126 936

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