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Cost-effectiveness of virtual schooling: a UK perspective

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Cost of virtual learning in comparison to traditional schooling

- The overwhelming majority of providers charge between £236-375 per GCSE and £280-540 per A-level.
- Such figures do not include examination costs.
- Some providers fall outside these parameters however.

Virtual learning providers outside the pre-mentioned cost parameters

- SCHOLAR in Scotland
- Online College of Art and Design charging £600 for GCSEs and £2500 for A-levels
- Bright Futures charging £1595-2495 per AS/A2 completed in one year, including examination fees for one sitting at their Central London centre.

Comparison of virtual learning costs in comparison to traditional UK schools

For the purposes of comparing funding for traditional schools in comparison to virtual learning provision 3 quoted figures for the 2009-2010 academic year will be used, the latest figures available.

These figures are £7207/pupil per year for a secondary school in Lambeth, £6199/pupil per year, the average for England in 2009-2010, as well as £5021/pupil which is the average for a school with low levels of deprivation outside of London.

Comparison of virtual learning costs in comparison to traditional UK schools

Comparative figures to be used will be:

Average secondary school in Lambeth:

$$£7207 * 4 = £28828$$

Average English secondary school:

$$£6199 * 4 = £24796$$

Average English school with low-deprivation:

$$£5,021 * 4 = £20084$$

Cost of distance learning in comparison to traditional schooling continued

Three hypothetical students will be used to provide some insight in comparing costs for teaching virtual in comparison with traditional students :

Bare minimum Jane: 6 GCSEs (EBacc subjects) and 3 A-levels (no maths/sciences)

6 GCSEs:	$(£236-375)*6=£1416-2250$
Exam fees for GCSEs:	$£50*6=£300$
3 A-levels:	$(£280-530)*3=£840-1590$
Exam fees for A-levels:	$£50*3=£150$
Total estimated cost range:	£2706-4290

Average Joe: 8 GCSEs and 3 A-levels (one math or science)

8 GCSEs:	$(£236-375)*8=£1888-3000$
Exam fees for GCSEs:	$£50*8=£400$
2 A-levels:	$(£280-495)*2=£560-990$
Exam fees for 2 A-levels:	$£50*2=£100$
Math or Science A-level:	$£350-540$
Exam fees for math or science A-level:	$£250-600$
Total estimated cost range:	£3548-5630

Highly ambitious Joanne: 10 GCSEs and 4 A-levels (including biology and mathematics)

10 GCSEs:	$(£236-375)*10=£2360-3750$
Exam fees for GCSEs:	$£50*10=£500$
2 A-levels:	$(£280-495)*2=£560-990$
Exam fees for 2 A-levels:	$£50*2=£100$
2 Math or Science A-levels:	$(£350-540)*2=£700-1080$
Exam fees for math or science A-levels:	$£500-1200$
Total estimated cost range:	£4720-7620

Actual cost comparisons

- A potential savings of 62 to 91 percent can be obtained based on the costs for teaching virtual students in comparison with traditional schools based on current funding models!
- Such potential e-learning savings could be applied across Europe, as per pupil education spending in 12 countries is +/- 15 percent of UK spending, including Germany, France, Spain, the Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden and Finland.

Quality of virtual learning provision

- Virtual learning providers do not generally provide information about numbers of students in their programmes
- Overall, there is extremely limited information about the quality of virtual learning provision (SCHOLAR is an exception)
- Similarly, there is no easily obtainable information in relation to the quality of virtual learning provision overall (SCHOLAR is also an exception in this regard)

Conclusions

- Most GCSE and A-level virtual learning provision is offered within a relatively narrow cost spectrum
- The quality of virtual learning provision overall in Britain is unknown at present
- SCHOLAR could provide a glimpse into the potential benefits of virtual learning provision, particularly because they claim both higher attainment and lower costs.
- International implications for cost savings could be greater, particularly for countries in which governmental educational authorities are totally responsible for marking examinations.
- In Britain, cost savings could be greater if schools, local governments and/or the national government developed examination centres and virtual learning platforms and virtual educational materials en masse, reducing costs through economies of scale.

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