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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 earning 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.
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
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
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.
• 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)
• 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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