

8th December 2020

BritainThinks

Coronavirus Diaries: Reflecting and Looking Forward

Deep Dive Report

britainthinks.com

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Coronavirus Diaries: Reflecting and Looking Forward

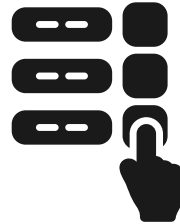
A BritainThinks study

Building on our Coronavirus Diaries work, this deep dive is an update combining insights from focus groups, polling and speaking to our original Diarists



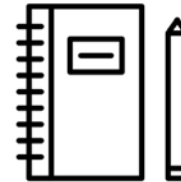
Online focus groups

25-26th
November



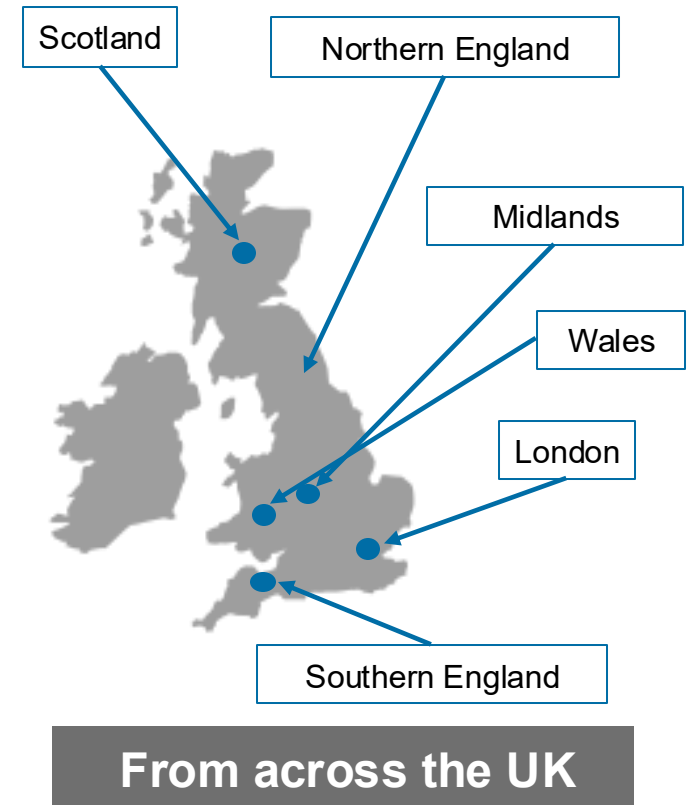
Polling

30th November –
2nd December



Weekly diary

4th – 7th
December



Today we are going to be talking about how it's been so far, and expectations for the future

Looking back...



**Individual
mood and
behaviours**



**CV-19 and
wider
society**

Looking forward...



Christmas



The future

The pandemic in objects: we asked participants which things best represent earlier and later experiences of the pandemic...



Fraser*, 22, Scotland

*"This is a chess set. I started playing chess as I was sick of watching movies and doing the same stuff, I **picked up something new.**"*

*"For the second lockdown, I have a PS4 controller. I'm still doing both, but **I haven't been playing as much chess** during second lockdown it has to be said."*

Robert*, 63, Wales

*"This is my **trainer**. At the start of lockdown **I used to do a lot of walking**, I'd walk for miles and miles and miles."*

*"I only wear pull shoes now. I don't put anything else on my feet, not even socks. I'd love to get out and about but you hear so many things about pubs and supermarkets, **I just don't want to go anywhere anymore until I know it's safe.**"*

Key findings

- 1** The overall mood is cautiously hopeful; the vaccine and promise of Christmas have not resulted in a wholesale optimism and uncertainty remains.
- 2** Across generations, people are frustrated that a chunk of their lives has been stolen, but are trying to find the silver linings in the moment or in how they and society will change.
- 3** Some have appreciated the opportunities presented by the pandemic for reassessing their direction in life, and for taking steps towards emerging goals and ambitions.
- 4** Christmas plans and mood are mixed with almost no-one expecting a “normal” Christmas and many unconvinced by the temporary easing of restrictions.
- 5** Looking towards the future, people are most looking forward to going on holiday, but also human contact, and being out and about without the threat of the virus looming.

1 Looking back...

How has the mood changed and how are people feeling now?

The mood of our Diarists has evolved from fear and anxiety through to hopeful relief, and to the current mix of emotions

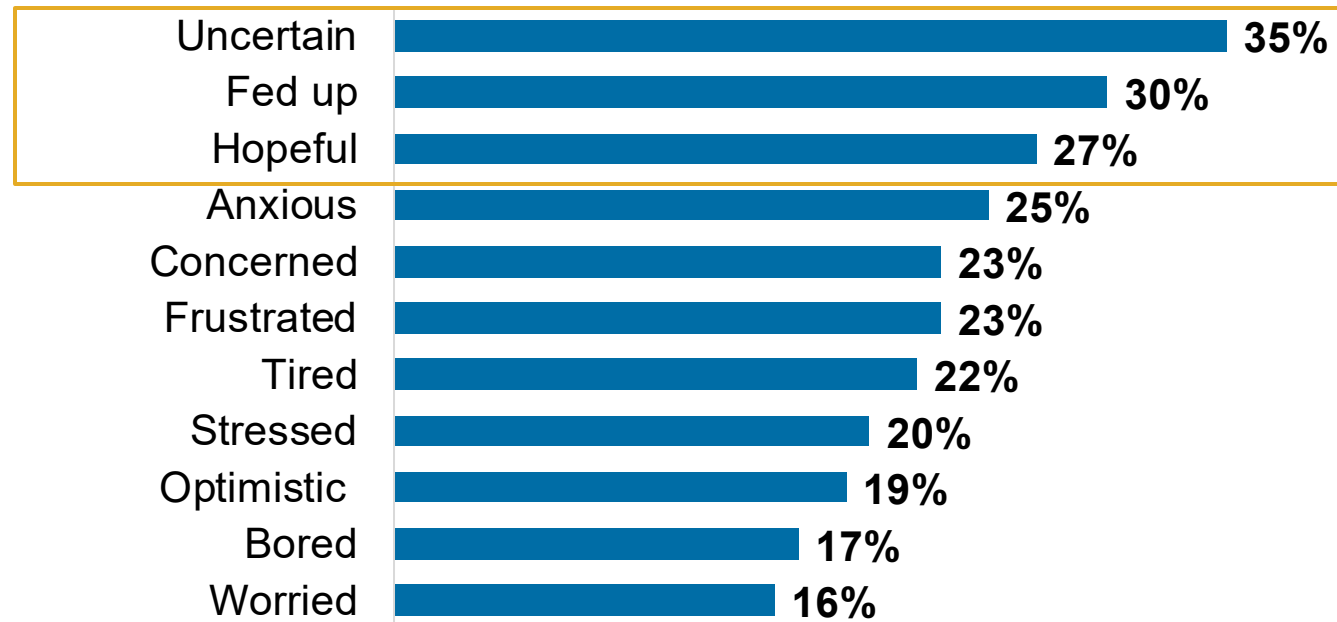
3 words used by *Diarists* to describe how they feel:

w/c 9th April

w/c 6th Julyw/c 7th Dec

Our national survey also showed this mix of uncertainty and being fed up but with an emerging sense of hope

How would you sum up how you feel about life at the moment in 3 words?



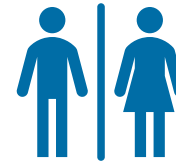
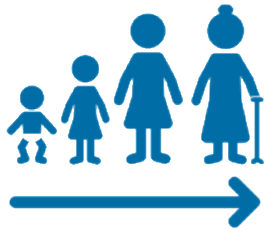
"I'm very tired of Covid to be honest, my work's on and off, lot of time off work at the moment but just want everything to go back to normal."

(Scotland, 23)

"I'm looking forward to 2021 because I have a plan now – from that point of view it's been good in terms of me finding myself."

(London, 38)

However, hope is not yet universal: older people, the less affluent, and women feel less positive (as do Labour voters)



Age

18% of 18-24s are feeling happy vs. only **10%** of over-55s

Affluence

31% of ABs are feeling hopeful vs. **23%** of DEs

Gender

28% of women are feeling anxious vs. **21%** of men

Political preference

28% of Conservative voters are feeling optimistic vs. **16%** of Labour voters

There is a widespread and profound sense that Covid-19 has stolen away valuable time and put life in limbo

62%

of the public agree that the pandemic has “stolen a chunk of my life and put it on hold”

“I’m frustrated because I can’t do anything, just stuck in. There’s only so much TV you can watch. I can’t go gym or out with friends.”

(Wales, 25)

69%

of the public feel to an extent that the pandemic “forced me to postpone plans that I already had”

“You’ve probably lost a year of your life, and at my time of my life it feels as though part of your life is getting stolen from you.”

(Scotland, 67)

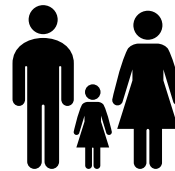
But different age groups have had different pandemics and have slightly different outlooks now



Young people under 25

Feel they have missed out but have been able to make the most of this time, and are more hopeful for the future

- 27% of those aged 18-24 feel stressed about life
- And 24% say they feel hopeful



Families with young children

Busy and tired from the constant juggling of family and work commitments, and keeping young children entertained

- 33% of those aged 35-44 feel fed-up
- And 29% say they feel tired



Vulnerable / elderly people

Most likely to have suffered from social isolation and feel the loss of their freedom more keenly

- 34% of those aged 65+ say they feel concerned

Back in April during the first lockdown, we identified 3 broad groups...



The Strugglers

- Finding day to day life difficult and struggling emotionally
- Includes those on low incomes/ in insecure work, those with health conditions and younger people



The Copers

- Facing many challenges but finding ways to cope
- Includes office workers, parents and essential workers



Business as usual (BAU)

- Are in a situation which means life hasn't changed that much for them
- Includes retired people and people who already worked from home and don't have kids

8 months on, people are still struggling and coping is the new BAU, but a new “segment” has emerged



The Strugglers

- Whilst many have adapted and found coping mechanisms, the older, financially and emotionally vulnerable have been left behind and continue to struggle

“I found the second lockdown a bit harder. I didn’t have the children at home with me and my husband was still working so I felt lonely and a bit isolated.” (South East, self employed)



Coping is BAU



- People who struggled have started to cope by forming new distractions
- Those who were unaffected have had to form coping strategies as their resilience has been worn away over time

“I’ve had a massive career change, and if it wasn’t for Covid I wouldn’t have time to sit down and think about what I want to do. It’s definitely brought out a lot of positives.” (Wales, 35)



Thrivers

- A new pragmatic group has emerged of people who have adapted quickly to the pandemic, who have made opportunities from challenge and adversity

**How have people changed their behaviour
as their mood has evolved and
circumstances changed?**

Initially the pandemic brought unwelcome changes to everyday life beyond the obvious and immediate risks and restrictions



Boredom and
frustration with
everyday life



Increased
domestic
responsibilities
and less time for
self



Increase in vices
and bad habits



Loneliness and
social isolation



Cancelled plans
and inability to
make new ones

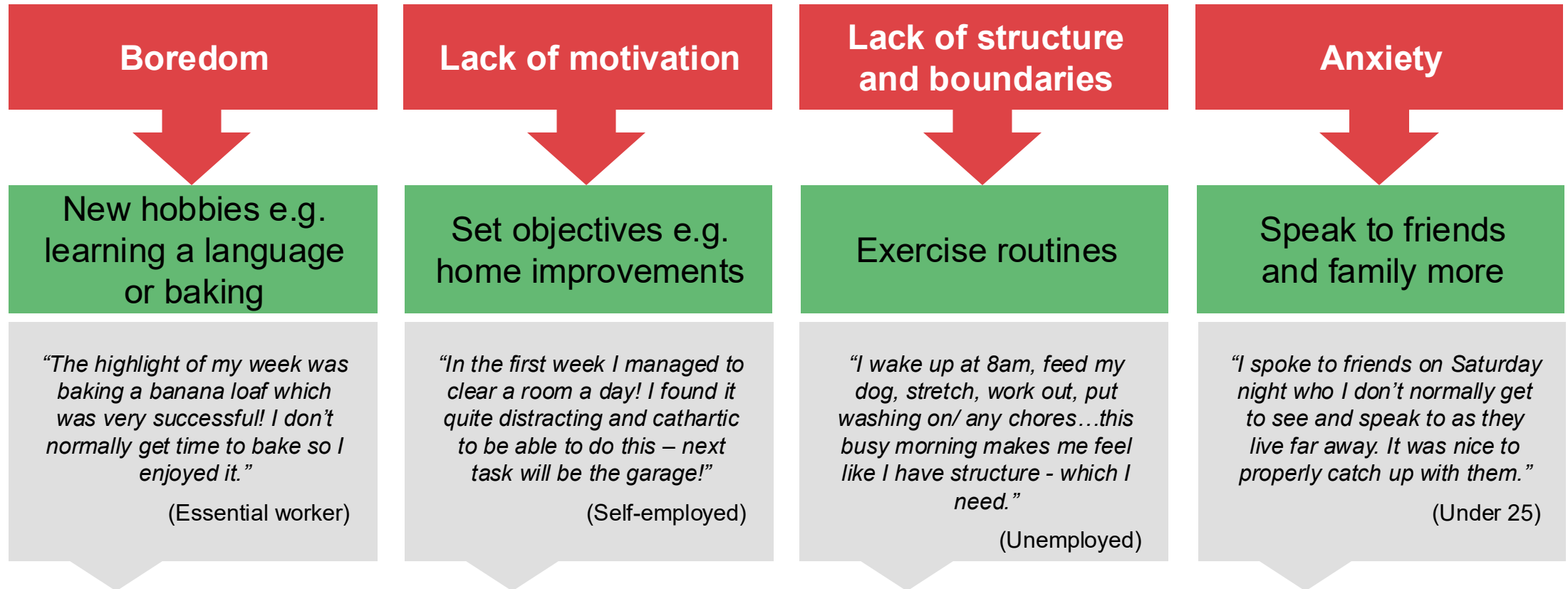
"Having some time to myself – I just didn't have an inch of it during lockdown [caring for my son] – I just didn't understand how anyone could do anything at home, all we did was play."

(Scotland, 44)

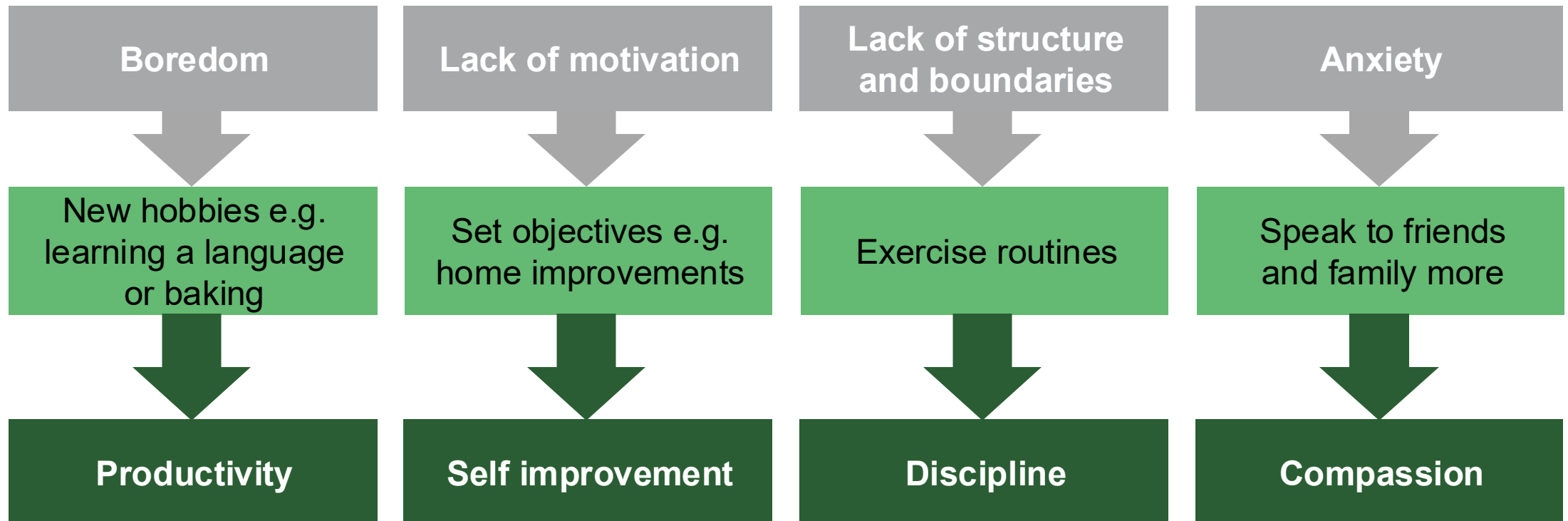
"The first lockdown involved lots of drinking, eating, and I put on a lot of weight."

(Manchester, 29)

Back in April, we saw how people were responding to the changes in their lives with a range of coping behaviours



Now, as these behaviours have become instilled, many have solidified into longer-term habits driven by new principles



What's more, as time has gone by, some people have reflected negatively on the way they responded to the initial Covid shock

Too much stress and anxiety

"If I was to go back, I would be far more relaxed – because I was anxious, it made my son anxious. Not gone against the rules at all, but just be a lot more relaxed, meditated or something."

(Scotland, 44)

Obsessive media and social media consumption

"I cancelled my Netflix subscription. I was spending too much time. I wanted to watch Peaky Blinders, but I'd just get carried away and everything else takes a back step."

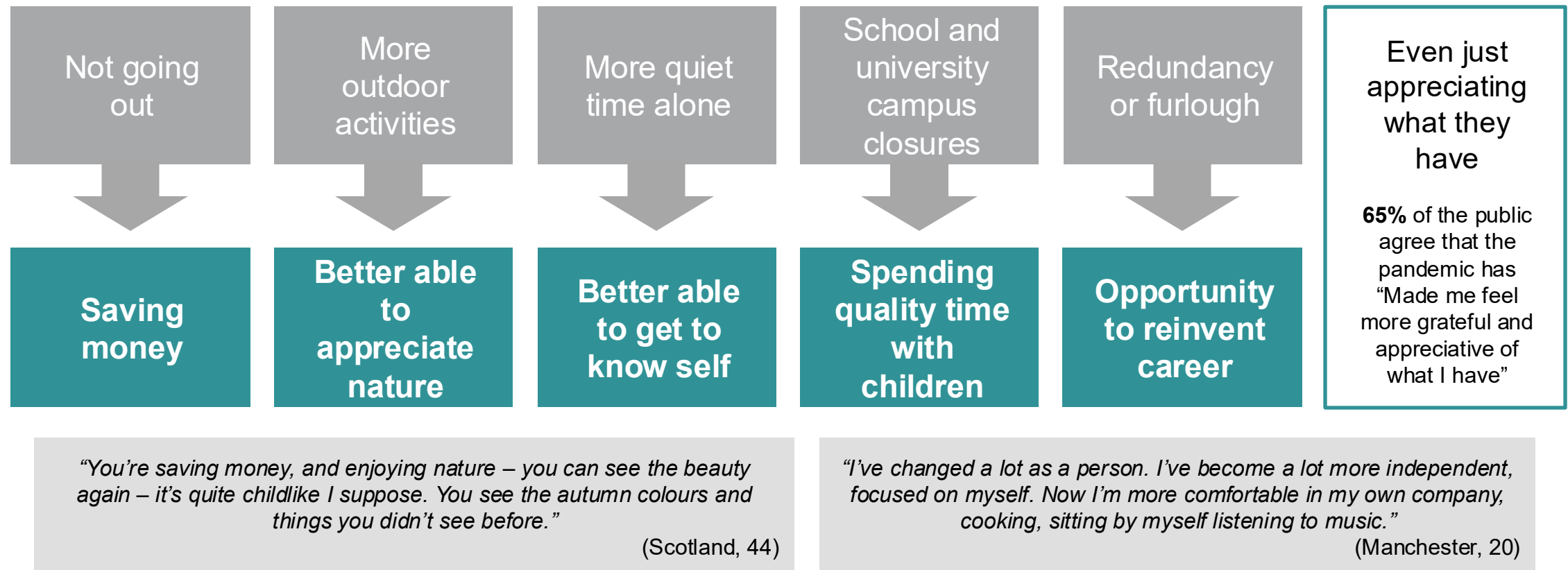
(Manchester, 47)

Indulging in self-pity

"[I'd have taken] it as an opportunity to excel and work on myself rather than an excuse for being lazy and slacking and feeling sorry for myself, so just see the positive instead of the negative."

(Manchester, 20)

Consequently, we see people now focusing on finding silver linings to draw some positives from the stolen year



Some people have grasped the opportunity to take stock and even make radical, positive changes to their lives

"I think I'm more confident. I'm looking forward to 2021 because I have a plan now – from that point of view it's been good in terms of me finding myself."

(London, 38)

Having the time and headspace to reconsider their ambitions and plans

Making significant, positive changes e.g. changing jobs or moving house

"Now I have enough money to put a deposit down on a house, I've invested in a training course, I'm trying to develop myself – and it's easier when you know you've got a bit of a target at the end of it – it doesn't feel like it's the end of the world."

(Manchester, 34)

35% of the public agree that the pandemic has "Given me the opportunity to make some positive changes to my life"

But as people look forward to emerging from a year of restrictions, a pervasive sense of their emotional foundations having been shaken remains

48%
agree that the pandemic has
“Undermined how safe, secure and confident I feel”
(women are more likely to agree)



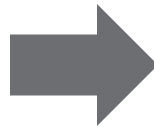
“I won’t forget that 2020 was like waiting for snow to clear that never cleared at all. When I’m back on my feet I won’t let any scare like this impact me financially the way this has...”

(North West, 37)

**What do people feel the impact of Covid-19
has been in wider society?**

Diarists describe being resigned in the second lockdown compared with the first

Earlier

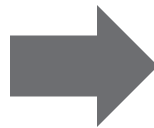


Current



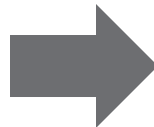
"Jigsaw puzzles - plenty to keep me busy and no excuse needed to spend hours on them."

"My car - getting me out of the house." (South East)



"A hamster on a wheel - trying to keep up with the madness at work and keep on top of my mental health with the gym being shut."

"A dog on a chain - calm and resigned to the fact that freedom still isn't what it was but less harassed by the situation." (North East, 26)



"A saucepan representing everyone coming out and clapping and banging utensils for the NHS."

"A clock - just passing time until the vaccine takes hold." (South West, 69)

Some feel that the second lockdown was a different kind of lockdown – indeed more of a “mockdown”

Lack of compliance due to feeling fed up

“People are fed but, I think the masks are on but social distancing is a concept from the past.”

(West Midlands, 39)

Insufficiently strict regulations

“This has not been a 2nd lockdown in my opinion and nothing like the first! Only difference is pubs restaurants shut! So many non essential shops were open and schools open and it was a pointless task sorry too say!” (Greater London, parent with school aged children)

Darker and colder

“During the second LD it’s been darker, colder and harder compared to the first LD and glorious summer weather.”

(East Midlands, 56)

It has been a busy news week, with Diarists reading about the UK's approval of a vaccine, Christmas restrictions and the new tiers

Domestic CV developments:

- **The approval of the Pfizer coronavirus vaccine**
- R rate dropping below 1
- New tiered system
- Christmas
- “Substantial” meals in pubs

“Uncertainty about arrangements for visiting family over the Christmas period.”

(East Midlands, 56)

“The rolling out of a vaccine programme across the UK. My only concern is that it is being organised by the same government that made such a mess of track and trace.”

(South West England, active older person 65+)

“The R Rate in the Midlands is below 1 and in Birmingham the numbers have dropped below 300 in every 100k, yet we are still in tier 3.”

(West Midlands, office worker now WFH)

“The vaccine is well and truly on the way, however I am fed up with the restrictions.”

(South East England)

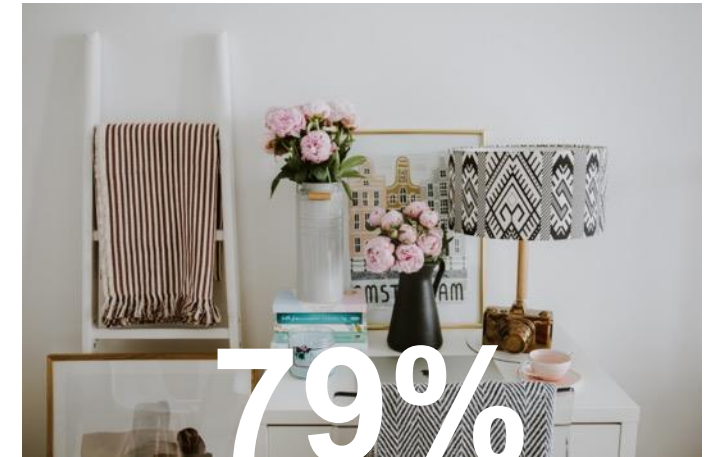
People agree that some of the positive pandemic narratives are true, particularly around simple, local pleasures



of the public agree that “We have a new relationship with the environment and appreciation of nature”
(women are more likely to agree)



of the public agree with the statement, “People increasingly want to buy local and support local businesses”
(women are more likely to agree)



agree that “People are embracing and appreciating home comforts and investing time and money into their homes”
(women and older age groups are more likely to agree)

They also recognise some more negative media narratives, particularly around isolation and loneliness



of the public agree that people are feeling lonelier and more isolated than ever
(women and older age groups are more likely to agree)

The future shape of our cities and working patterns are debated



The public are twice as likely to believe that history will judge Nicola Sturgeon favourably compared to Boris Johnson



26%

of the public believe that history will judge **Boris Johnson** as having performed well during the pandemic



31%

of the public believe that history will judge **Keir Starmer** as having performed well during the pandemic



53%

of the public believe that history will judge **Nicola Sturgeon** as having performed well during the pandemic

"The laws he is governing are about as ill thought out as his physical appearance, scruffy and thrown together."

(East Midlands, 29)

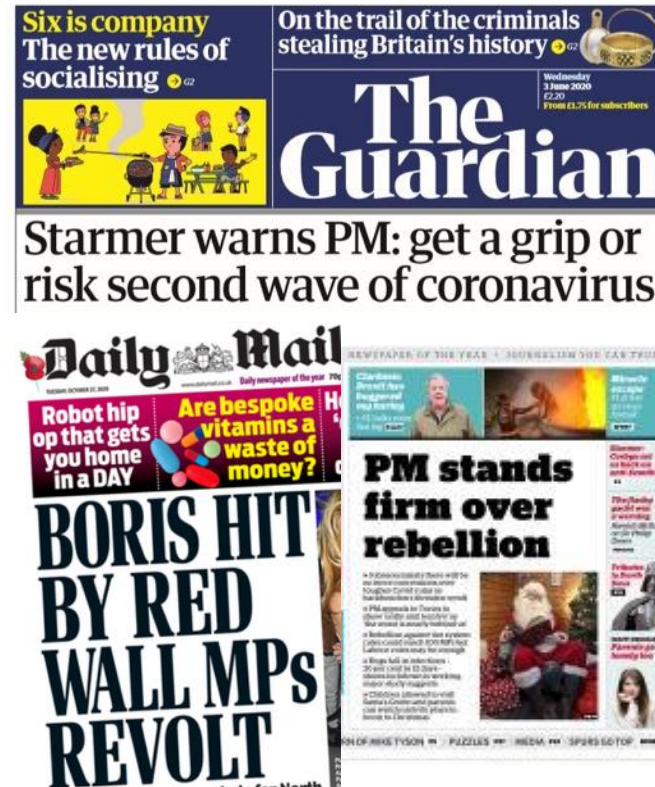
"I don't think [the Labour opposition] have had anything to do with it, I don't think they'll be judged."

(Manchester, 47)

"I think she has been a rock for our nation all this time, she is clear in what she says, admits when she is wrong and ultimately very human."
(Scotland, parent of school aged child)

However, a significant frustration around the handling of the pandemic remains its politicisation

- People are frustrated that its handling descended into political point scoring.
- Many express a desire for the parties to have come together and collaborated.



“I think all the parties have been very critical of each other – hindsight's a fantastic thing, and rather than criticise, I thought it was a time to unite rather than criticise each other. They were just trying to gain points against each other.”

(Scotland, 67)

02 Looking forward...

What does the immediate future hold?

While many are excited for Christmas, they are already wary of the price that they might end up paying

- While some agree with the restrictions as it legitimises their plans to combine 3 households, many had already planned to either have a scaled back Christmas, or to have a normal Christmas regardless of any rules.
- Older people are more likely to feel that the relaxed restrictions are an unnecessary risk.
- According to recent polling, most of the public would prefer Christmas restrictions (54%) over a new January lockdown (33%).

65%

**of the UK public
aren't feeling
Christmassy
(YouGov)**

7%

**claimed they would be
having "a normal
Christmas" irrespective
of rules and the virus**

Decision making around Christmas is heavily anchored around personal family and mental health circumstances; government restrictions are therefore secondary.

Many have noted disappointment that the exceptions have been made for Christmas, but not other religious holidays in 2020



“[They’ve] completely disregarded other religions’ celebrations, Eid we weren’t allowed to see family from the day before, Diwali was disregarded, Jewish festivals. When it’s Christmas we just got to drop everything. Pretty selfish of Boris and his team. It’s a Christian country and Christmas is Christian but opening that window doesn’t make sense, it contradicts the whole lockdown thing.”

(Manchester, 20)

And what about “when things get back to normal”?

The vaccine is a symbol of hope for many that will allow life to “go back to normal” between spring and autumn 2021

- It is, however, not seen as a silver bullet and we must still learn to live with the virus.
- Ultimately, the vaccine is a tool but shouldn't constitute a strategy.
- There is scepticism around how efficiently the government will be able to roll it out.
- In the meantime, we must survive winter and a relaxed Christmas will set us back.
- In our groups (pre-approval), the vaccine was not spontaneously mentioned as the only answer.

42%

Yes

Should the vaccine be mandatory? (Opinium)

No

45%

“Eventually we will get to a point where there is enough immunity. But I think there will be bumps along the way and it will be a slow process and never totally normal in 2021.”

(West Midlands)

While people are very hopeful about the vaccine, there are significant concerns around its implementation and its receptivity from the general public, as well as its actual efficacy.

The public are most anticipating having the threat of the virus gone so that they can be outside, go on holiday, and have human contact

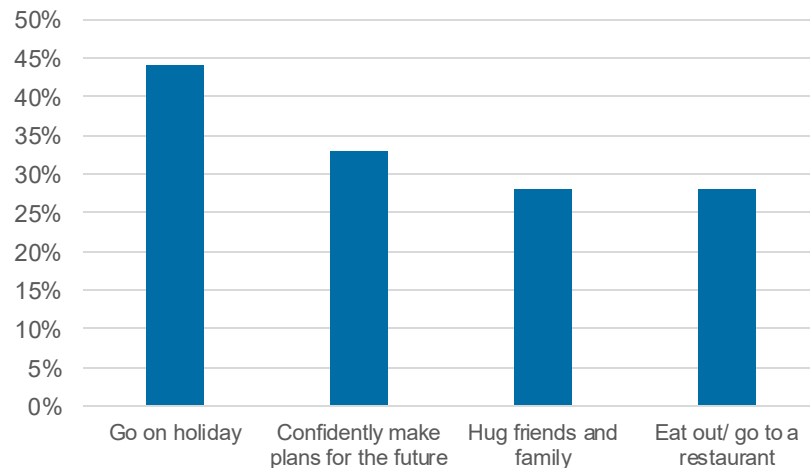
"Give everyone a hug instead of an elbow, go to the pub and have a nice meal. Hug every stranger."
(London, 29)

"To make plans, even something as simple as booking something for next weekend – just to look forward to something." (Wales, 35)

"I just want to get out and get some fresh air in my lungs. I just want to get on a bus and go somewhere – explore." (Wales, 63)

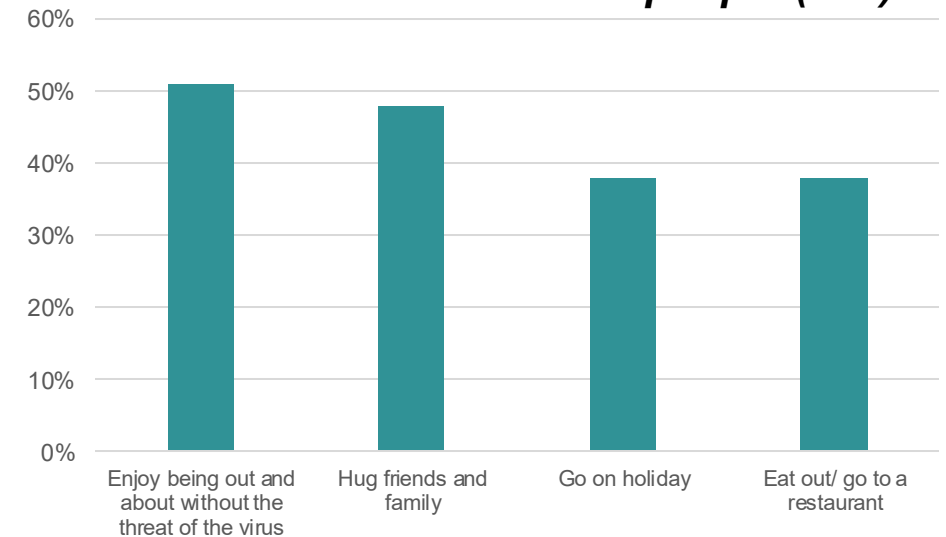
"Go on holiday and out for a meal."
(Scotland, 67)

Younger people (18-24)



Which three things will you do first when life goes back to "normal"?

Older people (65+)



3

Concluding thoughts

What is the outlook?

- 1** As the pandemic has progressed, we have seen people become resilient, resigned and even regretful but also patient, pragmatic even positive.
- 2** For some the emotional scarring might take some time to heal and a pervasive sense of physical, emotional and financial vulnerability will remain.
- 3** Whilst for many (perhaps the majority) a feeling of cautious optimism, hope albeit with a dose of uncertainty has taken hold bolstered by the promise of a Christmas break and a vaccine.
- 4** A minority have already taken the opportunity to change the course of their lives and are facing the future with relish.
- 5** But it is perhaps significant that 2 of the top 3 things that people are looking forward to most are modest “normal” activities of walking around without fear of the virus and hugging their family and friends again.

Thank you

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