



Growing-up under Covid-19

Key messages from the second cycle
of participatory action research

June 2021

Acknowledgements

The research team would like to thank all of the young people who participated in the research panels during the period December 2020 to June 2021. Without them, this report would not have been possible. They include:

- ▶ **Singapore:** Anoushka Prasanna Rao, Avern Tan, Charmaine Chia, Delaney Lim, Devjeet Singh, Henrietta Tjan, Jese Tan, Marie Leo, Ronak Sanan, Wen Xin Lee, and Xavier Yeo.
- ▶ **Italy:** Andrea Romito, Adriano Coco, Clara Cadelo, Chiara Alestra, Francesca Pomarico, Rania Al Zawaideh, Youssef Taby, Ines Fatnassi, Dody Laid, and Micol Spina.
- ▶ **Lebanon:** Mira Ghali, Yasmin Haji, Ahmad Sayed, Nagham Hammad, Tiya Kastiro and Lara Bou Jaber.
- ▶ **UK:** Ewan Carmichael, Mimi Murphy, Lois Hill, Melissa Rouncivell, Abigail McGill, Nia Bendle, Naqi Azizi, Coll McCail, Monty Lord, Madalaine Wilson, Sumy Kaur Haven, Maisie Frost/Akosua, Isra Sulevani, Hannan Abinet, Karli Miller, Finlay Winter, Grace Shaw-Hamilton, Sara Mahmood, Tapiwa Chingati-Phiri, Georgia Howell, Eve Nancollis, Libby Doughty, Mollie McGoran, Tanaquil Lu, Francesca Ingram, Maisie Rouse, Nolan Orly, Phoebe Hanson, Ellie Knox, Archie Butler, Daniel Yilmaz, Rafael Yilmaz and Alice Betsy.

We would also like to thank members of the independent Advisory Group for their steer throughout the project to date.

The adult researchers from the Ecorys and University of Huddersfield team include Laurie Day and Barry Percy-Smith (Co-Applicants); Sara Rizzo and Enrica Lorusso (Italy), Leanne Monchuk, Angus Elsby, Malika Shah, Catie Erskine and Lilly Monk (UK), Chermaine Tay and Enrica Lorusso (Singapore), and Martina Diep and Irene Biundo (Lebanon).

This summary report was written by Barry Percy-Smith.

Nuffield Ref:	WEL/FR-000022571
Principal Investigator:	Laurie Day (Research Director, Ecorys UK)
Co-Applicant:	Barry Percy-Smith (Professor of Childhood, Youth and Participatory Practice, The University of Huddersfield)
Nuffield grant page:	https://www.nuffieldfoundation.org/project/growing-up-under-COVID-19
Project website:	www.GUC19.com

Disclaimer:

This project is funded by the Nuffield Foundation, but the views expressed are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the Foundation.



Contents

Introduction 4

Management of the pandemic 4

Media representation and information..... 5

Education 6

Mental Health 8

Coping mechanisms and self-growth 9

Youth voice, action, and empowerment11

Feelings about the future11

Recommendations 13

Introduction

This summary report presents key messages that young people have identified as key experiences and priority concerns during the pandemic since November 2020. These are drawn from the seven research groups across Italy, Singapore, Lebanon, and the UK home nations that have been undertaking their own youth-led research during the pandemic with a focus on the second lockdown. Recommendations put forward by young people are provided at the end of the report.

During this phase of the project young people have been reflecting on their ongoing experiences through journaling, keeping diaries, interviewing family and peers, surveying key workers, writing podcast scripts, producing illustrations, and making presentations. A key focus has been on communicating and acting on their research findings. In this interim report, we focus on key issues that have emerged from young people's research.

Management of the pandemic

Many of the young researchers experienced the last six months as a highly stressful time as a result of coping with an uncertain and constantly changing situation. There were both commonalities and differences in young people's views about the management of pandemic across the seven countries represented within the study.

In the UK, many of the young people in the panels felt there had not been a clear strategic plan to deal with the unfolding crisis, despite acknowledging that the situation could change very quickly. Periods of delay, changes in national guidance and late communication of key decisions had contributed towards this sense of uncertainty. Education policy was one area where this was experienced most acutely. For example, Mock Exams for GCSEs were thought to have been unnecessarily traumatic as a result of having been confirmed, then cancelled shortly afterwards, before being reinstated at short notice and counting towards final grades.

"They [the UK government] flip-flopped a lot. I feel like they were very unclear with what they were going to do in advance. It all seemed very unpredictable." (Male, 17, UK)

"There was a horrendous amount of clarity missing from nearly every instruction we received for exams and for going back to school. Young people all over the UK were confused. Authority figures just have not been clear about their handling of this crisis." (Female, 18, UK)

The introduction of a 'road map' with key milestones to aspire towards was generally welcomed in principle, but there were fears that the learning from the pandemic would be lost in the push to get back to normal as soon as possible and to carry on. Young people wanted to see more of a reflective approach, with government held to account on social issues that had been underlined by the crisis – social and health inequalities, the need for climate action, and educational reforms.

In Lebanon, fear, desperation, and determination in responding to the pandemic during the early stages had given way to an emerging sense of dissatisfaction at the public and official response. For example, through the failure to control airports, haphazard adherence to lock down of schools and restaurants and ineffective enforcement of mask wearing. Discontent with the Lebanese institutions and ruling class among the youth has deep roots and several youth protest movements that existed before the pandemic have grown in reaction to the widespread perception that more

needs to be done. Young people felt left out of the decision-making processes and that their needs were inadequately reflected.

"The Lebanese government has simply failed us; it made the nation lose its lifeline of hope as they failed again and again to protect us. ...The government focused more on superficial issues rather than focusing on imposing a real lockdown with proper financial aid for struggling families. Their lack of proper decisions led families to risk their safety to prepare the next bite for their children to feed on". (Female, 15, Lebanon)

The Italian panel of young people also had mixed views on the management of the crisis. Whilst generally agreeing with the harsh lockdown measures at the start of the pandemic they felt the three-tier system introduced at the beginning of the second lockdown was ineffective with similar impacts to young people in the UK causing uncertainty and disruption to their education and wellbeing. Subsequent decisions to prioritize tourism and commercial activities over safety and education, the slow and patchy rollout of the vaccine and an overall lack of foresight and planning suggested to the young researchers the government did not hold their needs in high regard. Whilst young people acknowledged the importance of economic considerations in opening up from lockdown, many shared concerns that travel policies could increase rates of infection again.

"My message to politicians and the prime minister: stop thinking about politics when you make choices about the pandemic, stop compromising with parties or getting influenced by some political views or your approval rating. We have tried this already, but citizens do not need this now. [...] You need to listen more to science and less to politics for once." (Male, 18, Italy)

Despite the latest outbreak in Singapore, many of the young people were in praise of the government's response to the pandemic including the stringent regulations to prevent the spread of the virus. The gradual approach to coming out of lockdown was appreciated and reflected the government taking account of people's views. Young people in Singapore were broadly supportive of the way teachers had managed the shift from home-based learning to in-person teaching.

The continued uncertainty arising from the pandemic across the study countries in turn has had impacts on young people's mental health and wellbeing with young people commonly reporting increased stress levels and becoming demotivated and unable to plan. Young people fully understand the challenges with managing educational provision in a context of the pandemic, however, they felt that more decisive decision making early on would have been preferable to constant change and uncertainty. Some of these concerns were expressed using visual material.

Media representation and information

Young people across UK and Italy shared similar views about the volume of negative and sensationalist reporting throughout the pandemic which they felt was counterproductive, stoking fear and panic including negatively impacting on people getting vaccinated.

"This year has been just panic [...] Why can't you just provide objective information? Why can't you also try to calm people down? By creating panic, you create desperate people, and desperation has only led to desperate actions which are not good for anyone." (Male, 14, Italy)

In addition to the perceived barrage of negative reporting, young people felt that as a generational group, they had continued to be unfairly represented in the media as being responsible for spreading the virus. They made specific reference to the portrayal of young people when they returned to school and how university students were dealt with when in halls of residence.

Education

Schools and exams have continued to be a primary source of concern for young people. Repeated school closures, the move to online learning, and changes to their assessments were all felt to have impacted young people's education and learning. Home-based learning has been experienced both positively and negatively with less time spent travelling to and from school and more time for rest, doing other things and interaction with family, but with the associated problems of too much time spent in front of a screen. In some cases, young people felt that online learning enabled them to interact with teachers more easily through chat functions and in this way, gain more information than is possible with face-to-face teaching. But for students with limited access to the internet, with limited space at home, or who lack confidence, home-based learning is experienced more negatively.

Young people across case study countries had very mixed educational experiences, and there was a general consensus that more could have been done to mitigate against the impacts of the second phase of school closures, by learning from the lessons of the initial phase of the pandemic.

Lack of face-to-face teaching and, in Italy, continual shifting between online and in-person teaching, were seen as especially detrimental. Many young people felt that virtual learning was variable across schools with little awareness of the distractions that some young people had at home. Some students reported difficulties maintaining attention with online engagement.

"I think last year I didn't really like it because I felt more distracted at home because, you know, you can do anything on your screen. You can have your friends calling you whatever, so - but I think now. Uh, I'm able to handle myself better, so I'm able to focus better, so it's not as bad" (Male, 16, Singapore)

The Italian young researchers felt overwhelmed with the amount of homework and substantial levels of testing, which underestimated the additional time and adjustment needed to adjust to remote education. When some young people had tried to voice their experiences with remote learning they did not always feel that their concerns were taken seriously.

"Our teachers did this ... mass survey to ... tell us how it felt and rank us on a scale of 1 to 10. But then, they were like 'oh most of the people enjoyed online learning'. I was like, that is a lie... So I think the schools were overplaying too much how well online learning went and how much young people were actually engaging with it ... all of us are like 'we hated it'." (Male, 17, and Female, 18, UK)

Contrary to narratives that this is a lost year, however, young people argued that, despite difficulties of online learning, there were opportunities and benefits from the time spent learning at home. These benefits were described in terms of improved capacity for self-study and personalisation of learning, stronger online support networks among young people, improved digital skills and (some) schools and teachers adapting and offering greater flexibility. It was considered important that these potential benefits were acknowledged and that there was not simply a return to the pre-Covid situation.

"At school we had never been taught how to use these resources. At school we were always with pen and paper, writing. Now it's different, now if they asked us to do any autonomous work, we would be able to do that." (Female, 17, Italy).

In Italy, young people felt they should have been consulted about when to return to school and said they should have gone back in January when they still had six months left rather than a month before the end of the school year when the teachers, but not the students, had been vaccinated. They felt this was only to test the students because the teachers hadn't managed to do that online. They were concerned that no improvement had been made with safety measures put in place and the response reflected lack of investment in schools and public services and proof that young people's needs were not important.

"Did you ask me? Did you conduct a survey asking: 'Do you want to go back to school?' These are all assumptions! I am so enraged." (Female, 16, Italy)

"There was no evolution throughout the year. It was like: 'OK, there is this situation, this is how we do, and that's it ... if you don't like it, I don't care.'" (Female, 17, Italy)

In the UK, young people felt that social inequalities had been reinforced by the pandemic, with an awareness that students from lower socio-economic backgrounds and those with special educational needs and disabilities were falling behind their peers. In Lebanon, educational inequalities were exacerbated by a stark digital divide between urban and rural areas, frequent power cuts (often with as little as 3 hours electricity a day), and a perceived lack of support for both teachers and students during online schooling. Thoughts of returning to school were marked by uncertainty and anxiety, with concerns about how their lost years of schooling will affect their futures. This is a source of considerable stress as a result of perceived lack of academic and professional opportunities, with some young people contemplating future plans to emigrate. This was in spite of the conflicting commitment to contribute to the recovery of the country and fight for justice and better opportunities.

Most young people in the UK groups were very pleased to be back at school and able to interact with their friends and felt that returning to school made life feel almost normal, although many found the readjustment to the school environment difficult in ways that had not been anticipated by schools and ministries. The extent of the psychological adjustment was particularly evident (see also 'Mental Health' below). However, many of the young people felt that schools were coping with the pandemic much better than last year, and that there was greater structure to their education.

"Schools knew what they were doing during the second lockdown to a far greater extent, and they roughly know what they are doing now, exams are sort of sorted." (Male, 16, UK)

Across the countries in the study, there was nervousness about examinations and learner assessment in the context of having missed substantial periods of face-to-face teaching, with widespread worries about knock-on consequences for further or higher education and future work.

"In the weeks leading up to mocks we were still learning new content from what we missed... Teachers were always emphasising how we are running out of time, missing lots of content. A lot more stressful than normal mocks, with teachers constantly reminding us how they may have been our last exams." (Female, 18, UK)

"Another set of predicted grades is just my biggest fear at the moment." (Female, 15, UK)

Young researchers in the UK found that many students did not receive the help needed with university applications because of lack of face-to-face contact with teachers, highlighting that it is difficult for young people to make such an important decision without being able to visit universities. Students at university who were interviewed by the young researchers reported that resources provided by their institution were confusing at best and non-existent at worst and that communication from the university was not satisfactory.

"We get told absolutely nothing and have access to a fifth of the resources previous years have been able to access without any kind of fee reduction." (Student interviewed by young researcher, UK)

Despite assuring prospective students in 2020 that adequate provisions would be put in place, students living in university accommodation had not been treated well.

"At the start of the first term, if we had to self-isolate the university would only provide us with food if we paid £17 a day. ...Students had to fork out for supermarket deliveries that nobody on a student budget would ever really be able to afford." (Female, 19, UK)

Mental Health

Mental health has been a significant priority issue for young people, exacerbated by the initial impact of the pandemic and further heightened as the pandemic has progressed. The cumulative impacts of multiple lockdowns, the uncertainty and disruption of school closures and changes to exams, social isolation and the lack of professional support, has worsened the situation for many.

"Mental health was already an issue, but the pandemic just made it sky-rocket" (Female, 18, UK)

"All of my existing problems were just exacerbated- in normal circumstances, with my friends around me, I'd be able to cope, but in total isolation, I've had no support bubble, and everything has been so much worse." (Student interviewed by young researcher, UK)

For young people in Lebanon, the disruption to education and social lives were compounded by further stress and anxiety as a result of poor digital infrastructure, perceived poor government handling of the pandemic and the massive impact of the explosion in Beirut. These impacts on young people's mental health were mirrored in the adult population.

In the UK, young people considered that concerns about mental health had not been taken seriously during the first phase of the pandemic and attainment in school was prioritised over wellbeing. In particular, the difficulties in not being able to go out and meet with friends was noted as having a particular impact on their wellbeing, as young people gradually start to socialise again are more appreciative of the time they can spend together.

Young people living in university accommodation emerged as particularly vulnerable to suffering mental health issues. Students indicated that living in university accommodation brought conflicting pressures to socialise and make new friends whilst also placing responsibilities to isolate on students who are often living on their own for the first time.

“Being put into a completely new city, not being able to interact with it at all... it’s not fun. You feel really isolated even though you know there’s so many people on campus. You can’t interact with any of them...” (Female, 19, UK)

Despite these pressures, young people talked about the limitations of mental health support available during the pandemic with mental health services in general so overwhelmed that they have been directing enquiries to generic, mindfulness-based online resources, that young people found inadequate for the symptoms they had. Young researchers identified a mental battle that young people suffer when seeking mental health support.

“You invalidate your own feelings because you’re constantly told that everyone’s in the same boat, so you feel like you don’t have any right to waste their [support services] time by asking for help”. (Student interviewed by young researcher, UK)

One young person shared that services in their area had adapted with varying speed and success to remote delivery. Some services had adapted quickly, whereas others have only been able to offer remote support at the end of the school year. This situation had left some young people not knowing where to turn to for help.

Coping mechanisms and self-growth

Young people talked about frequently being confronted with frustration about the current situation, and especially its monotony, loneliness, and the fear of missing out on crucial moments and experiences of their adolescence. They had deeply missed in-person schooling, human contact and the spontaneity of relationships, activities, and life prior to Covid-19 restrictions, and feel they have missed out on events and opportunities they would not be able to get back, such as residential trips.

Common coping mechanisms were identified across the youth research groups that young people have used to distract themselves from the “*very realness*” of the pandemic during the most recent phase and has helped them to become more resilient generally. Positive coping strategies included continuing to engage with activities remotely e.g. remote training for swimming classes, and scheduling regular online appointments to socialise with friends, to guarantee some form of consistent socialising each week. Many young people appreciated the benefits if regular exercise to cope with so much screen time and being indoors.

“When young people are able to stay in contact with friends, even virtually, it helps remove some of the damage done by that isolation. Currently, the infrastructure is not available for that. Many young people just do not have access. The government did a good job at rolling out laptops, but more could be done to help young people stay in touch with friends online.” (Female, 18, UK)

“I think that’s how I coped was through talking to friends and distracting myself through playing games and things like that. Just talking, in essence” (Male, 15, UK)

Young people said they had to teach themselves how to look after their health and wellbeing and pointed out the importance of talking to friends and learning to express their emotions and voice in different ways, such as virtual communication and creative/social media. Some started to refrain from constantly reading news/updates about Covid-19, which was making them anxious. Others resorted to art and imagination – including finding artistic inspiration in daily objects which characterised their confined lives – to escape the current situation. Young researchers also identified more negative coping strategies such as social withdrawal, either in themselves or their

peers. In some cases, young researchers observed peers increasingly drawing on alcohol to cope with the pressures of the pandemic.

Whilst some young people have just “waited passively for the pandemic to finish”, many have been proactive in using the pandemic as a positive opportunity for self-reflection, learning, personal growth and revaluing family life, including appreciating moments of social interaction with family and friends. For some, this has involved using their time at home to reassess their priorities, what is truly important to them and becoming aware of the mental strength they acquired from learning how to deal with the current situation.

“2020 in general was a challenge for me and I learned a lot of things .. I thought 2020 would be the year I get everything I want. Now I know 2020 is the year I appreciate everything I have ... I learned when you change your priorities you change your life.” (Female, 17, Lebanon)

Some rediscovered the value of family relationships during lockdown, although one young LGBTIQ+ young person reported that not all were supported by their families. One girl felt that the lockdowns had enabled her to grow in confidence and experiment with different activities without the pressure of other people’s opinions:

“I’ve changed as a person...before I was much more shy, I would get involved with things but not to my full abilities ... looking back, I don’t think I had anywhere near as much confidence as I do now.” (Female, 15, UK)

Other young people reported dedicating time to new and existing hobbies or learning new skills such as reading, art, poetry, exercise, painting, reading, writing, humour, embracing their existing or a new faith, experimenting with different forms of technology, joining new online groups, engage in forums and debates and getting involved in youth action projects. One young person (UK) outlined how the pandemic had opened their mind and allowed them to meet more people than they ever would have done.

“It gave me a chance to explore some things, I took up essay writing, which I wouldn’t have done otherwise. That was good in itself. The experience of it as a novel experience in itself was interesting, I’ve tried to apply myself to student voice and youth politics.” (Male, 16, UK)

“It actually really helped me a lot like even like signing up to do research projects and like doing mentoring, it gave me a way of like voicing my opinions and doing things I was interested in and distracting myself from everything that was very difficult in the world” (Female, 18, UK)

Young people often mentioned the importance of this project and the opportunities it offered to meet on a biweekly basis and discuss with peers who were experiencing the same feelings, struggles and emotions.

“Even with this project, maybe we would have never had a similar opportunity to gain new skills and better awareness, together with our peers, of how the pandemic is influencing us, the incentive to ask ourselves questions [...] Maybe we will be better able to face a difficult moment, compared to someone who has never gone through similar experiences at such a young age.” (Male, 18, Italy)

Young people did, however, recognise that each of these coping mechanisms exhausted their efficacy over time and stressed the importance of listening to one’s own need, having different coping mechanisms, and above all thinking about self-care. In the UK, it was felt that maintaining positive health and wellbeing should be embedded throughout the education system beginning in primary school.

Youth voice, action, and empowerment

The issues young people raised after the first phase of this research about decision makers and politicians needing to consult with and listen to young people rather than assume they understand their situation, have emerged as being even more important than they were before. Politicians are still not listening to young people to understand their situation and continue to exclude them from decision-making, for example, one young person (Male, 17, UK) stated: *“we have had minimal involvement, we have been considered the least”* with another adding *“we have just been brushed aside during the lockdown and pandemic”* (Female, 15, UK).

For many young people, the issues have become ever more acute and, as a result of the time they have had to reflect on key social issues including their own situations, their motivation to act and have their voices heard has become stronger.

“I feel like I’ve finally learnt how to swim, is sort of an analogy for it. Like going through all of this, it’s kind of like, oh, I’ve now learnt that I can get through all of this. And there’s a lot of issues that need to be highlighted even more now” (Female, 18, UK)

However, many young people have experienced a constriction of possibilities for having a say and getting involved with the result that some young people have been more creative with how they participate in civic and social activities and democratic processes. Some felt that the pandemic had facilitated more sophisticated forms of online youth activism, beyond the more structured involvement in organised youth groups and forums.

“Before I was trying to get involved with as much youth activism as possible and work that I was doing with my youth council. Now, as time has progressed, I’ve found new ways to get involved. Before it was quite structured in the way I was involved, but now it’s developed. I’ve developed new ways to interact online.” (Female, 15, UK)

“I really like the time I spent volunteering because I really got to understand more about the needs of the people in my community. I get to talk to them or directly and also ... get to talk to the MP ... So I get to hear both the community and ... get some insights on what those people in power ... can do. I found it very meaningful.” (Female, 18, Singapore)

Examples of good practice were noted, for example, in Northern Ireland where a student union had been set up in a school to campaign for change, and changes to recruitment procedures for the Northern Ireland youth assembly to avoid *“the same sort of people again and again that attend things and have their voices heard”*. (Female, 16, UK)

Beyond voicing their concerns and experiences, some young people have demonstrated enterprise in campaigning and engaging in social action themselves. For example, one young person in Lebanon for example pitching an idea for creating a healthy environment and provide support for those battling with mental health problems.

Feelings about the future

Young people had mixed views about the future. Some of the young people in the UK groups talked about generally feeling more positive about the situation and hopeful about the future due to the apparent success of the vaccination rollout and the governments roadmap which they felt provided a greater sense of certainty, in spite of some residual anxiety about a possible third wave.

"I'm definitely hopeful, I feel like this summer is going to be a really good summer, we'll be able to go out and things...but at the same time I feel like I'm a bit scared of people now." (Female, 17 UK)

"I think a lot of the stuff back in September about exams, there was a lot of uncertainty and I think we've got a bit more to grasp onto now." (Male, 16, UK)

Young people were looking forward to making plans to see their friends, reclaim their social lives, have weekends away and plan gap years. A number of young people in the UK were starting to think about work and were keen to start earning their own money and getting work experience. One young person had applied for a role in the hospitality industry and was looking forward to being able to interact with a variety of people as part of the role. Another young person had recently started a part-time role at a company which does youth research, which he was feeling positive about. One of the other participants had developed an interest in sewing and making her own clothes during the first lockdown, and later decided to take an A-Level in textiles. She is now considering pursuing a career in fashion, which had not occurred to her prior to the pandemic.

"Tomorrow I've got an open day with this fashion university and I'm like I might be going down that career path. I was interested before, but now it's my favourite lesson and in all my frees... I'm in the textiles room creating and making. I suppose the lockdown has done that!" (Female, 17, UK)

Others were anxious about future career opportunities with some rethinking ideas they had about career options in terms of job security and the ability to work from home, which they had not previously considered:

"Before the pandemic I was very secure in what I wanted to do, but the pandemic has made me think about it a bit more, so what do I want to do with my life?" (Female, 15, UK)

Anxiety about work and the future was mirrored in Italy to more significant degree with young people perceiving the future as *"painful"* and *"bleak"* to the point that they preferred not to think about it. They agreed that, if youth employment opportunities in Italy were scant before the pandemic, they are even more disheartening now.

"People of our age, an age of decisions you have to take, of changes you have to make, which found themselves projected in a reality of crisis, I think they suffer way more from this situation." (Female, 16, Italy)

Italian young people were worried that promising initiatives such as the Italian Recovery Plan and the Next Generation EU Funds without concrete measures, would not yield real benefits for the youth, in a country where geographical inequalities, and unpaid, temporary or informal job opportunities are the norm for young people who they see as historically having been left behind.

For those going to university, whilst some were looking forward to meeting new people their age, there was also some anxiety about the challenges of adapting to a new university environment whilst being locked down. And for those already at university, circuit breaker measures have affected career prospects and experiences.

"I'm not really looking forward to that because it's really hard to talk and connect and make friends when you're online ... a few of my friends they had internships lined up but now because they are advised to work from home so they can't really learn as much during that internship" (Female, 18, Singapore)

More broadly however, young people were concerned about continued lockdown (Italy) and, in UK, easing of restrictions to quickly and without full consideration of the new variants and possible increased rates of infection

again. There was also concern that the importance of key social issues the pandemic had thrown into the spotlight would be forgotten with the “quest to return back to normal quickly”.

“As a collective generation, many young people have picked up on issues highlighted from the pandemic of inequality, poverty and more and have more hope going forward that such issues can be resolved.” (Female, 18, UK)

Recommendations

The experiences of young people in the country panels set-up for the project, and the findings from their research, point towards a number of areas for action at the current juncture (June 2021). These build on, and take account of, the recommendations that were made after the first report.

Mental health and wellbeing

- ▶ **Prioritising mental health support in schools** including face-to-face and virtual modes of delivery, better signposting to support services and school counsellors, sharing coping techniques including the use of creative therapies, reducing stigma around mental health and creating an environment in which young people feel comfortable to share their experiences and feelings and talk about mental health.
- ▶ Ensure that **learning to promote positive health and wellbeing** is embedded into learning from primary school upwards.
- ▶ Review and expand the **quality, availability and access to mental health and wellbeing services** for young people in a post-COVID context.
- ▶ Develop **national minimum standards for healthcare and educational settings** and independent evaluation and appraisal to ensure that standards are met universally.
- ▶ Ensure investment to **provide equal access** to healthcare and education in all communities including preventative public health services, including vaccinations, screenings & health checks to minimise inequalities.

Education

- ▶ Implement a **standardised platform for remote learning** across schools which would be simple for teachers to use, engaging for students, and effective for teaching the required content, with a particular focus on ensuring online schooling for struggling students.
- ▶ Universal **mental health training** for teachers and working with students to find solutions for school improvement.
- ▶ Undertake a **national independent evaluation of the response of schools to the Covid-19 crisis**
- ▶ In Italy, young people argued for **finishing the school year online**, supporting students to catch up on missed learning (rather than be overwhelmed by end-of-term evaluations) and invest in better **preparing schools for restarting at full capacity in September**, with all safety measures and logistics in place.

Youth voice and democratic decision making

- ▶ **Young people have reiterated the recommendations from the first phase of the research** to increase representation of young people in central decision-making forums and in democratic participatory structures, as well as recommending the establishment of effective communication with young people and schools about their rights to education and in addition emphasised the following:
- ▶ Addressing the exclusion of young people from decision making by **including them in public consultations, on relevant boards & panels and co-decision making** about education and other issues that affect them rather than assume they understand the issues affecting young people.
- ▶ Young people should be **involved in decision-making around their education** to ensure that their needs are met and involved in rebuilding the mental health services that serve them.
- ▶ Being more open to young people's opinions and stances by increasing opportunities for all young people to speak out and influence decisions to **enable widespread youth engagement for all young people** in a way that works for them i.e. creative means/social media
- ▶ **Ensuring the voices of from a wide range of diverse backgrounds are heard** including specific groups such as LGBTIQ+ young people and support provided

Media reporting

- ▶ Discourage negative and sensationalist reporting and mis-representing young people as reckless in the media and instead **promote more positive factual reporting** that recognises the enormous contribution and sacrifice young people have made during the pandemic to safeguard the elderly and vulnerable and that encourages people to think about what they can do to avoid worsening the situation and provide reassurance.

Future proofing

- ▶ Young people recommended the government to clearly outline and discuss concrete measures which could **improve prospects for youth employment**, including to fight informality, ensure job guarantees and provide scholarships to young people from low-income backgrounds.
- ▶ Politicians, teachers, media and the wider public need to be **more empathetic and understanding of other people's situations and experiences** when dealing with people and before making decisions.
- ▶ **Address gaps in the existing broadband infrastructure** and ensure technologies are available to their full potential to help address digital exclusion, improve educational equality and reduce loneliness and isolation.
- ▶ In Lebanon, ensuring **adherence to lockdown** in all areas including rural areas and provide proper **financial aid to families** struggling with "Lockdown poverty".

www.guc19.com



Answering
tomorrow's
challenges
today

University of
HUDDERSFIELD
Inspiring global professionals