#ScotYouthandCOVID2

Children and Young People's Participation Through Crisis

A Research Report

Report Authors: Jenny Wood & Jamie Hamilton, A Place in Childhood. Supported by the Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland

Report Contributors: APiC's Young Consultants from Aberdeen, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Rural Stirlingshire and Rural Falkirk

APiC A Place in Childhood

CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE'S Commissioner Scotland

About A Place in Childhood

We're A Place in Childhood (or APiC, for short). We partner with anyone who shares our vision of making Scotland a great place to grow up. Harnessing our experience in academic research, we work with and for young citizens to explore and understand real-world systems and practices, and to amplify the voices of children and young people.

Information about all of our projects can be found on our website: www.aplaceinchildhood.org

To discuss the content of this report or discuss ways of working with us, please contact Jenny Wood: jenny.wood@aplaceinchildhood.org

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Design: Daniela Miler

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Executive Summary

This report tells the story and process of wave two of the #ScotYouthandCOVID2 project. This was a Virtual Participatory Action Research Project with 25 Young Consultants across Scotland. Participatory Action Research is an approach that involves researchers and participants working together to understand a situation and/or problem and change it for the better. The findings detailed here explore the experiences and ideas for change from children and young people precipitated by the COVID-19 pandemic, as the UK moved into and through a second national lockdown at the start of 2021.

> *'If someone told me last year, that at this time that we'd still be in like lockdown a whole year later. I wouldn't believe them. I would be really, really, really like freaked out and like, I'd be like, sad.'* Young Consultant, girl, age 11

Understanding these experiences and insights is vital to ensure we collectively respect, protect and fulfil children's rights during and beyond the current crisis.

The project consisted of six in-depth participatory workshops over a collaborative online environment, with the focus of building on insights from the first wave of the study in April/ May 2020 (#ScotYouthandCOVID), as well as delving deeper into future ambitions and solutions. The Young Consultants took part in five place-based teams, covering different parts of Scotland: Glasgow, Aberdeen, Edinburgh, Rural Falkirk and Rural Stirlingshire. All Young Consultants were aged between 11 and 17, with six new participants joining the 19 Young Consultants who contributed to the wave one work.

Across the course of the project, Young Consultants discussed and agreed to reorganise themselves into Taskforce groups that led to some mixing between age and location. These Taskforces were organised based on key themes and findings from the first and second workshops. Young Consultants voted on these themes, and agreed on a final set before individually selecting the Taskforce with which they felt the strongest motivation to explore more thoroughly.

The project culminated in a set of 34 Asks to the Scottish Government from our Young Consultants, listed below. It is broadly in order of their priorities, and highlighted with quotes on the topics where they had the most direct experiences to share:

Motivation and School

> *'Everybody's sort of lacking motivation due to like, living the same life for near enough a year. But online learning is like eat sleep and repeat, basically.'* Young Consultant, girl, age 14

> *'We've been back to school, like for a week. And I feel completely overwhelmed.'* Young Consultant, girl, age 17

> *'I think they [teachers] must be overwhelmed as well… there might be an issue where we need to understand what the teachers are going through too.'* Young Consultant, girl, age 13

1. We find it extremely difficult to learn without a teacher being there. In periods of remote learning, we need to find a way to have live video teaching available for everyone.

2. We understand that remote schooling is difficult for teachers too, but we need quick, clear and thoughtful feedback. It really matters for helping us understand how we're doing, feeling valued, and motivating us to continue working hard.

3. Some teachers have gone the extra mile for us during lockdown and it's made a huge difference. Let's learn what has worked well and what has worked less well so that we know what to do in future.

4. We know some of our teachers have been really struggling during the pandemic. You need to support them to support us and hear their concerns in times of crisis and uncertainty.

5. Our schools and teachers need to work together to ensure our combined workload and schedule is not overwhelming.

6. Sometimes we need additional support to do well at school. We would welcome optional sessions in school where we can talk about what is going well and less well for us and receive help with tasks when we need it.

7. We often have important and useful views on things outside of school. We would welcome discussion groups in school so we can give the Government information on what is happening for us and we can be involved more in improvements.

Addressing Inequalities

8. Take concerted action on addressing the Gender Pay Gap and school and workplace discrimination and bullying. This currently affects too many people.

9. Commit to better and more meaningful engagement between Government and children and young people, recognising the wide range of issues that affect us and the interests we have in our shared future.

Skills and Employment

10. Ensure safe and secure employment and good work experience opportunities for everyone. We are worried about our futures and want to know that our skills and contributions will be valued when we leave school.

11. Ensure children and young people also get a good quality education on genuinely useful life skills such as effective money management, understanding bills and taxes, cooking, and how mortgages and other types of finance work.

Local Issues

12. We want to feel safe and included where we live. Work with us to hear and understand issues in our local areas and improve opportunities for all children and young people.

13. Improve rubbish collection, maintenance of public space, and educate people about protecting the environment and keeping places clean. It affects our well-being.

Exam Years with High Workload and Stress

'Even though this year, and last year haven't been ideal, the general idea of a continuous assessment model seems a fair method of assessment and one that could work really well, if it was properly organised.' Young Consultant, girl, age 15

14. Redesign assessment processes so that we are judged on the work we've done across the course of a year instead of exams at the end.

15. Provide clear guidance to schools to ensure there is no confusion, changing or duplication of materials needed to make a fair and accurate assessment of our progress.

16. Work with young people to design an exam assessment system that is fairer and more effective for S4-S6, which learns from the stress and uncertainty during the pandemic.

17. Have a clear national education plan in place for crisis situations, including how assessments will be structured and organised.

Well-being for Us

'We need to feel like we are valued as people as the effort we are putting in and not just like a machine that basically we just feel like, we need to constantly work and we need to feel like we're children again.' Young Consultant, girl, age 14

18. Set up a helpline for children and young people to ring to discuss our well-being and get information and advice to help improve it.

19. Understand that we've had a really difficult year and we need time and space to recover. Remote schooling has been challenging and it's often not been clear what has been expected of us.

20. Focus on creating opportunities for us to feel young again and be childish.

21. Improve mental health support and services for us. Long waiting lists are bad for the well-being of ourselves, friends and families.

Well-being for All

22. Improve mental health services for everyone and address loneliness. This is about both services for people in current need and making sure people feel included and supported in society to tackle the causes of poor mental health.

23. Take preventative action on drug and alcohol misuse by supporting all young people to have good mental health and make healthy choices.

24. Improve help and support for people of all ages that are suffering the effects of drug and alcohol misuse. The high rate of drug-related deaths worries us and seeing drug and alcohol misuse in our neighbourhoods can make us worried about going outside by ourselves.

Recovery

25. Conduct a thorough and full inquiry of what happened during the COVID-19 pandemic so that we can understand and genuinely learn from experience.

26. Ensure a transition out of the pandemic that allows everyone to get the rest and leisure they have been missing.

Uncertainty

'There needs to be a lot more communication between the government and teachers and schools and everybody that they're not 100% on any of their decisions. And they need to be either 100% on what they're saying, or they give you the options for what else is going to happen.' Young Consultant, girl, age 14

'Since we've been exposed to more social media than ever. It's been a bit confusing for everyone.' Young Consultant, girl, age 13

27. Decision-makers need to communicate clearly and effectively. Give us the information we need when we need it, and in a clear form. We want to hear information directly, but we also only need to know what is relevant to us so keep it concise, tailored and in clear language.

28. As far as possible, wait until you can give information that you are 100% clear is accurate and won't change. If a decision is uncertain then tell us why and inform us about the decision-making process. Sudden and unclear changes in decisions affect our well-being.

29. Consider setting up and/or supporting young people to set up a news organisation that delivers clear, accurate, and engaging news that we need to know. This could be like a young person's version of Newsround to help combat fake news and misinformation on social media. We want a feature where we can ask something from social media to be fact-checked, so we don't spread or get worried by misinformation.

30. During the remainder of the pandemic, keep high risk activities closed and get everyone vaccinated quickly. Prioritise outdoor activities that improve well-being and be really clear on the schedule and reasons behind it.

The Transition from Primary to Secondary School

'And being locked down and everything is, is kind of hard because we would usually be being eased into high school and what it would be like, and I'm not gonna know, really what high school is going to be like… they usually bring like they do tours and everything… it's gonna be just a bit sudden.' Young Consultant, girl, age 11

31. Transitions are really important to us. Ensure there are good transitions between primary school to secondary school by:
    - Asking us directly about our concerns or worries and working together to find solutions.
    - Making sure everyone has opportunities to meet with new teachers in small groups, even if they can't go to new school buildings.

Climate Change

32. Address the climate emergency by improving our production and use of renewable sources of energy and transitioning to using electric cars only.

33. Protect and enhance nature across the country.

34. More needs to be done to educate people about the causes and impacts of climate change, and practical things we can learn and do to adapt to its effects.

We also worked with the Young Consultants to devise a strategy for transforming these Asks into a Scotland-wide manifesto for change from children and young people. This forms the penultimate chapter of this report and revolved around seeking to ensure wide representation; thorough and appropriate communication; bringing on board the right people that can make change happen and who will listen to children and young people; and recognising the context and implications of the fact that these were developed over the course of the pandemic. This strategy will commence over the summer and into Autumn 2021.

Overall, the chapters of this report speak to the journey the Young Consultants took with us to develop these Asks and associated strategy, and the experiences and insights which underpin them. Their level of consensus on these outcomes across different ages, backgrounds and

diverse settings, provides a strong case for the external validity of the findings, despite the small numbers participating overall. As such, there is a good degree of confidence that they will have general resonance for children and young people nationwide. This will be confirmed/amended in carrying out the follow-up strategy.

We hope that you and/or any organisations you work with, or for, may be open to helping and empowering the Young Consultants to take their strategy and aspirations forward.

Our ask to you is that you join them in progressing rights for children and young people across Scotland as they emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Chapter 1

Introduction

The UK Government ordered a nation-wide lockdown on the 23rd March 2020 as a response to the COVID-19 crisis, which led to the closure of nearly all face-to-face services, offices, and most shops. By this point the Scottish Government had already closed all schools and the population was being advised to stay at home as much as possible. Everyone, no matter their age, also had new guidelines to follow around social distancing and places where they were no longer allowed to go.

In response to this unprecedented crisis, APiC self-funded a Virtual Participatory Action Research project in May 2020 and published the first #ScotYouthandCOVID research report in July 2020. Participatory Action Research is an approach that involves researchers and participants working together to understand a situation and/or problem and change it for the better. Through this, both participants and researchers can promote democracy and challenge inequality via an iterative cycle of research, action and reflection. It also leads to capacity-building of participants, in that they develop greater awareness of their situation and can carry forward the findings into everyday life. This contrasts with more traditional styles of research, whereby the researcher takes the lead in determining and asking questions, and in independently analysing and writing up the data that has been collected.

To our knowledge, #ScotYouthandCOVID was the only Participatory Action Research project held exclusively with children and young people in Scotland in the first lockdown. This complements the ongoing Nuffield-funded action research project with 14-18 years olds, 'Growing Up Under COVID-19', which covers seven countries and includes young people across the UK (Day and Percy-Smith 2021).

APiC initiated this project on the basis that children and young people have the right to participate in the matters that affect them (Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child). This was especially important to uphold during the first lockdown in Scotland, at a time when a range of other human rights had to be temporarily curtailed to slow the transmission of COVID-19. In March 2021, we resumed workshops for stage two of the project, this time supported by the Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland. #ScotYouthandCOVID2 recalled 19 of the Young Consultants who participated in our original project and brought on board six additional peers where original Young Consultants were unavailable this time round.

Picking up where #ScotYouthandCOVID ended

The first report told the story of the initial changes and challenges that children and young people across Scotland experienced during the first COVID-19 lockdown (Hamilton and Wood 2020). Twenty-five Young Consultants aged 10-16 from Edinburgh, Glasgow, Stirlingshire, Falkirk, and Aberdeen formed groups who led APiC through their experiences over the course of three online workshops, and devised a set of small changes that would make a big difference to their lives. It showed key insights into:

- the experience of loss of face-to-face social interaction;
- drastic changes to schooling practices;
- increasing stress on family resources;
- an overload of screen-time; and

- limited access to the outdoor play and recreation activities that usually underpin youth stress-coping strategies.

It emerged that remote schooling was taking a toll on their well-being and that direct 'end user' involvement would improve the roll-out of future emergency strategies. Though it is understandable that strategic priorities change in times of crisis, the report showed the value of qualitative projects with children and young people about their experiences and views during a crisis.

The Young Consultants showed that they value their right to be involved in decision-making, with consequent benefits to their health and well-being. Moreover, their insights show how their involvement in such decisions could have improved both the quality and outcomes of overall strategic decision-making. The report ended with a set of recommendations for ensuring a better experience for children and young people during times of future crises:

1. Develop a protocol for the early participation of groups of children and young people in emergency situations.
2. Ensure measures are in place that do not unfairly disadvantage children and young people.
3. Create a grounded contingency framework and principles for remote and blended learning which is informed by the experiences of lockdown to date.
4. Develop appropriate and resonant resources and messaging around COVID-19 and following crises, with children and young people.

We emphasised that whilst the initial threat of COVID-19 was abating, future lockdowns were likely. The Summer offered an ideal opportunity to work within education authorities on the contingency framework referred to, and to learn more from the Young Consultants' experiences of the impact of COVID-19. This could inform an effective response to future outbreaks, and other crisis situations such as Climate Change, which the Young Consultants highlighted remained.

Children and young people have both the willingness and capability to participate in all matters that affect them, and we should uphold these rights, even in lockdown situations, through online methodologies. Moreover, supporting children and young people to develop their capacities for difficult decision-making in uncertain and complex times is paramount to ensuring they have adaptive skills needed for the future. It could be argued that the development of a contingency framework in Summer 2020, with the participation of children and young people, may have mitigated what may prove to be even more catastrophic impacts on Scottish education of the second lockdown, and any others which may come.

Research conducted since #ScotYouthandCOVID has revealed a complex picture of children and young people's experiences in Scotland and the rest of the UK. Surveys have documented the well-being and educational impacts on many different groups. Across these, there is a broad suggestion of declining well-being amongst children and young people overall, however, there are differences between the stages of the pandemic, ages and other characteristics (Children's Parliament 2020, Scottish Government and APS Group Scotland 2020, Scottish Youth Parliament, Young Scot, et al. 2020, Scottish Youth Parliament, Youthlink, et al. 2020, CO-SPACE Study 2021, Ford et al. 2021).

Remote schooling has widely been recognised as challenging for all involved. In particular, considerable concerns have been raised around the disproportionate impacts for children and young people living in more deprived areas and/or in poverty (MCR Pathways 2020, Scottish Youth Parliament, Young Scot, et al. 2020). Indeed, whilst some children and young people have spent more time outdoors because of the pandemic, many have in fact spent significantly

less time, with clear inequalities present between those from the most and least disadvantaged areas (Natural England 2020).

Unfortunately, with the pace of change in the pandemic and related restrictions, it is difficult to ascertain the extent to which experiences have changed between the summer of 2020 and the start of 2021, where a lengthy lockdown was once again reinstated across the UK. This report, alongside upcoming publications such as the Lockdown Lowdown phase three report from Young Scot, Scottish Youth Parliament and Youthlink helps paint a picture of new and emerging experiences as we entered a new phase of the pandemic. This picture has historical significance and value, which can also inform our national response to similar crises.

#ScotYouthandCovid2 consisted of six new workshops, significantly increasing the depth of conversation and insights we have gained. This has allowed the Young Consultants to discuss a wider range of experiences, sharing with us their insight into what took place between the first round of the study ending in June 2020 and the new one beginning in March 2021.

This report tells the story of how the Young Consultants came to agree their Asks for the new Scottish Government in 2021 and provides, in their words, the real experiences which underpin them. We end by discussing the strategy the Young Consultants have proposed towards transforming these Asks into a Scotland-wide manifesto for children and young people's priorities, and which we and our partners shall be seeking to take forward under their guiding framework.

A Rights-centred Approach

As explored in the first #ScotYouthandCOVID report, we see the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) as a pivotal framework for guiding policy and practice towards approaches that understand children and young people and respect, protect and fulfil their rights. Of primary concern to A Place in Childhood (APiC) and other children's rights organisations, is the lack of opportunity for many children and young people to participate in the matters that affect them (Article 12). Additionally, a suite of other rights that encompass wider participation in public life have been significantly disrupted since March 2020, such as:

- **Article 13** – A right to freedom of expression, which allows children and young people to express their views in a variety of ways of their choice;
- **Article 15** – A right to gather and use public space for their own activities, provided they are not breaking the law;
- **Article 16** – A right to privacy;
- **Article 24** – A right to health;
- **Article 27** – A right to an adequate standard of living;
- **Article 29** – A right to a broad and varied education that teaches children and young people about the world and other people; and
- **Article 31** – A right to play, rest, leisure and access cultural life.

We highlight the above rights, but in the spirit of the UNCRC we see all rights as universal, inalienable, and indivisible, with all rights having equal status. Therefore, all other articles such as the four guiding principles in Articles 2, 3, 6 and 12 – non-discrimination, ensuring the best interests of the child, right to life, survival and development, and right to be listened to and taken seriously – must underlie meaningful work with children and young people.

We are further concerned that impacts of this pandemic and lockdown itself fall disproportionately on certain groups in society, including children and young people. Particular groups of children and young people are likely to be affected more than others such as disabled children and young people, care experienced children and young people, young carers, Black and Minority Ethnic children and young people, and asylum-seeking families. Most worrying is that children and young people already facing disadvantages have been exposed to:

- greater risks of isolation from peers and professional support to which they may be accustomed;

- disproportionate access to private space and good quality public space;

- increased risks of financial hardship;

- greater risk of other disadvantages that may be broadly classified as Adverse Childhood Experiences (such as witnessing or being a victim of domestic violence, or of parental substance misuse); and

- significant disruption to schooling practices and everyday routines for a sustained and highly stressful period.

Children and young people can recover from the above impacts, but this will require dialogue and understanding of their own experiences.

A useful, empirically supported framework that informs our approach is Social Determination Theory (SDT). This proposes three needs that are fundamental to the intrinsic motivation of children and young people and adults alike: autonomy, perceived self-competence and relatedness, or sense of belonginess (Ryan and Deci 2001). Within this, autonomy is the preeminent need, upon which the impacts on the other two are contingent. Combined with our rights-based approach, we incorporated SDT to help determine methods and approaches of participation that would most draw on children and young people's intrinsic motivations and be enjoyable for them. Offering choice and basing workshops on the outcomes and direction of prior discussions was thus a vital consideration of structuring the entire approach.
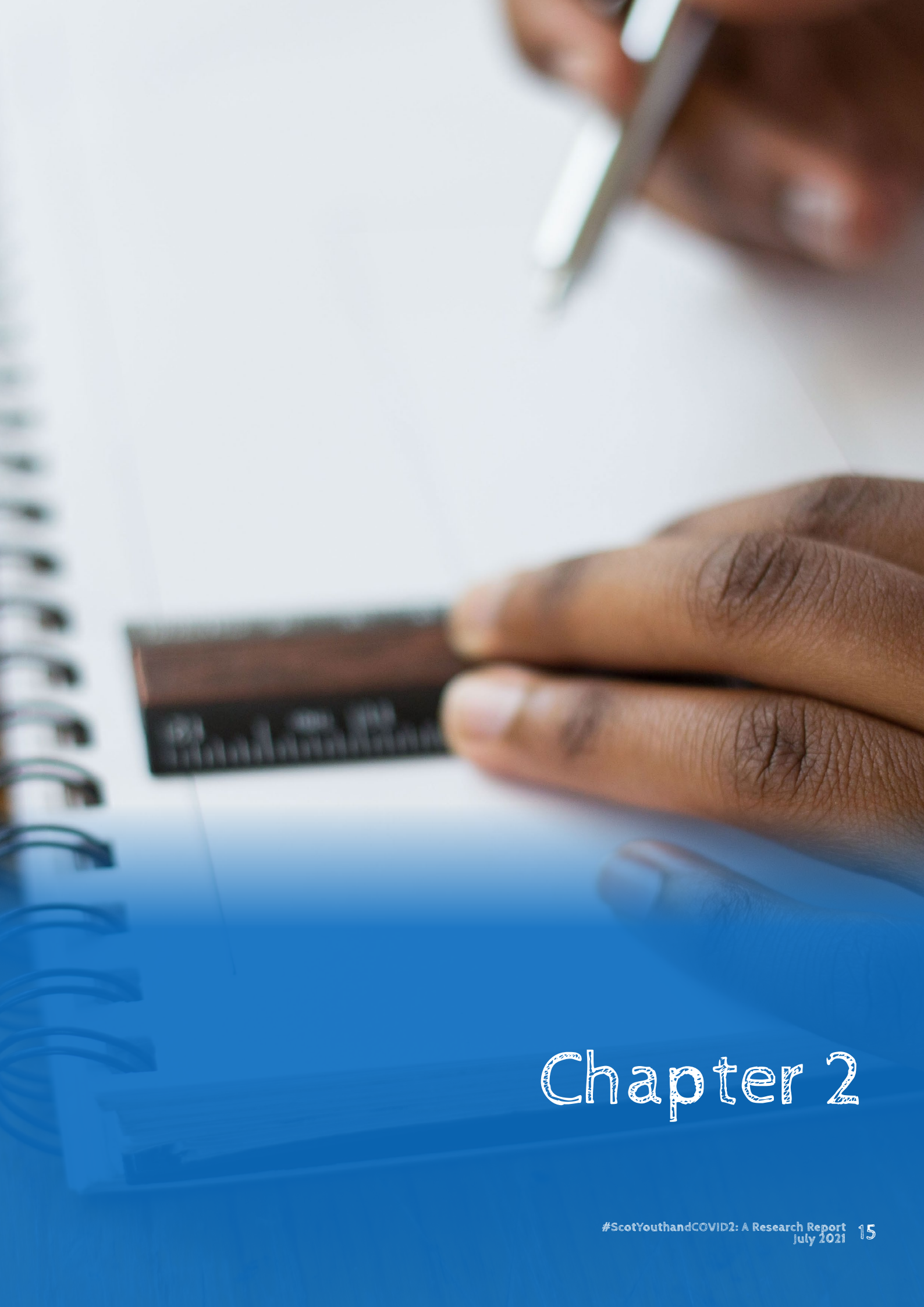
Chapter 2

Project Design

We sought to engage with a diverse range of children and young people, aged 10-16 in the first round of the study. We chose this age group as it covered the key transition phase between primary and secondary school as well as the key exam years at secondary school, providing a diversity of experience to draw from. We deemed that due to methodological constraints, it was unfortunately practically and ethically difficult to engage with children below the age of 10. However, having developed our online methodologies we feel that in future this could be possible.

To highlight the commonality and differences in experience of everyday life in different types of places and in different circumstances, we sought to work with groups from across Scotland at the same time. We included children and young people from both urban and rural backgrounds, and a breadth of areas representing differing levels of relative deprivation, as indicated by the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation. In this second wave, we recalled our original Young Consultants and included everyone willing and available to take part. The six gaps left within project teams were filled by peers of our original Young Consultants. The online environment used in the project consisted of a mix of video conferencing (Zoom) and use of a collaborative creative online platform (Mural).

We took a grounded and iterative process developed in previous APiC projects. We were guided by ascertaining what the big changes and challenges had been for them since the first phase ended in June 2020, what experiences illustrated these changes and challenges in different time periods, and how we might find solutions in the short, medium and long-term. We were also keen to understand their views about and ideas for the future of Scotland that might be presented to the Scottish Government.

A Collective Leadership Approach

While APiC enabled, facilitated, and wrote up the project overall, we endeavoured through mindful practice and reflection to ensure its direction, discussions and outcomes were all led by the Young Consultants to the greatest extent possible. We thus frame all participation in this project – adult (APiC) facilitators and Young Consultants – as 'Collective Leadership'. This has a specific definition here which is important to set out.

The underlying principles of our Collective Leadership Approach are:

- **Service.** APiC's overarching principle and aim was to be of service to the faithful articulation of the Young Consultants' experiences, and of the themes, priorities and ideas which emerged from these. We were explicit about this at all times and invited feedback on how we might do better throughout. One measure of success for us was unprompted commendations such as the one below:

  'I always come out of APiC meetings feeling like I've actually said things that will be listened to and matter, which is unfortunately rare when you're a part of groups at my age! The whole setup and way of discussion just really works and I look forward to seeing the outcomes of this project.' Young Consultant, girl, age 15

- **Youth-led discussion.** All discussion, categorisation and summaries within the workshops were generated and facilitated by the Young Consultants' views and ideas.

- **Open-ended.** All discussion prompts were open-ended and emerged directly from

the Young Consultants' agreed group summaries from the previous workshop. Young Consultants were also always given explicit freedom to propose or act upon options outwith the prompts.

- **Non-interpretative.** We sought always to understand and articulate Young Consultants' outputs without any layer of interpretation and analysis. This involved listening to, probing on, and reflecting back what they had told us to verify from them that we had understood this correctly.

- **Youth-verified outcomes.** All findings written up by APiC between workshops were presented to the Young Consultants for their objections, comments and improvements prior to subsequent discussion, to ensure that nothing had been missed, misunderstood or lost in translation.

- **Collaborative process.** As a rule expanding on themes and priorities that emerged in feedback sessions at the end of each workshop drove the structure of the next. However, there were occasions when the approach we attempted did not work. On these occasions, we invited the Young Consultants' ideas on what we should do instead, and when agreement was reached, we proceeded in the new direction.

Through application of these principles from workshop to workshop, including from the first to the second phases, the emergent process was shaped collaboratively by the Young Consultants and APiC facilitators. We regard the findings of this research to be youth-led on the basis that they are the direct product of discussions and summaries facilitated by the Young Consultants.

Our Framework for Participation

We aligned our approach with Horelli's (1997) framework for action research with children and young people, which sets out that meaningful participation involves a suite of methods that should be tailored to suit the needs of participants:

- **Diagnostic methods** to 'evaluate personal, environmental and situational variables' (p.110).

- **Expressive methods** to liberate participants from the constraints of their experiences with traditional designs, and encourage them to express themselves in new ways.

- **Situational methods** which structure learning in a way that makes it easier to understand and apply new ideas.

- **Conceptual methods** which help re-organise abstract thinking.

- **Organisational methods** which support the realisation of the results of the project (p.112).

- **Political methods** which establish how the research findings will gain visibility and contribute to political will.

Within this approach, we sought at all times to incorporate the Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland's (2013) '7 Golden Rules for Participation'. These are:

1. Understand my rights
2. A chance to be involved
3. Remember – it's my choice
4. Value me
5. Support me
6. Work together
7. Keep in touch

These emphasise the core principles of children's human rights across the process, incorporating a cycle of feedback and continued reflection that is not always present in participatory projects.

APiC facilitators provided the initial prompt for the broad discussion, but Young Consultants facilitated their own group discussions and fed back to the full group at the end. At each stage, a consensual decision-making process was used to confirm current and future priorities. To determine consensus, we used nodding of heads on camera, use of 'thumbs up' capability on Zoom, preferential voting (1st, 2nd and 3rd) priority on post-it notes through Mural, and posting of (anonymous) objections. Findings agreed in a session were then put together into simple frameworks and presentations for the following workshop, whereby Young Consultants had the opportunity to query, or add to the previous workshops findings. When participants agreement was given, these were then used as the stimuli and basis for subsequent discussion. APiC facilitators also undertook live blogging to share insights and gather support across the course of the project.

Over the course of six (90-120 minute) workshops, our project teams collaborated within and across groups to address the following broad questions. These evolved over the course of the project as a result of the direction Young Consultants chose to take the discussion:

1. What are the biggest changes you've experienced since June 2020?
2. What are the biggest challenges associated with your big changes?
3. What experiences best illustrate these challenges to other people?
4. What might we learn from good practice in how people/organisations have responded to the pandemic?
5. What are your core concerns and how might we work together to find solutions?
6. What do you want for yourself, peers, family and all people in Scotland as we transition out of the pandemic?
7. What are your Asks to the Scottish Government that might improve your and other people's experiences now and in the future?
8. How might we share your Asks with others and see if we can find out the priorities and ideas for more children and young people in Scotland?

The workshop schedule involved three phases. Workshops one to three took place over the last three weeks of March 2021, during the second lockdown. There was a break for the Easter holidays, with workshops four and five resuming for two weeks upon the return to school in April, including for many the evening of their first day back. The final workshop took place mid-May, which was attended by Bruce Adamson, the Children and Young People's Commissioner

Scotland and Gina Wilson, his Head of Strategy.

We also collectively considered the kind of impact the Young Consultants might want to have in sharing their views, and planned sessions according to their priorities.

- **Workshop 1** focused on explaining and establishing the virtual environment and reminding participants of what they told us in the first round of the study. We then set about answering the first three questions in place-based breakout groups.

- **Workshop 2** involved a continuation of this first exercise and reflection on the core messages coming out of their discussions.

- **Workshop 3** focused on questions 3 and 4, after which followed the Easter break.

- **Workshops 4 and 5** addressed questions 5, 6 and 7, and also involved sharing experiences about the return to school following the second lockdown. During these discussions, Young Consultants began to shape the emergent outcomes of prior discussions into a set of Asks in Taskforces based around particular priorities of personal significance or interest.

- **Workshop 6** worked around questions 7 and 8.

All teams were initially brought together in every session into one online 'room', with tasks and discussions happening predominantly between teams in their own breakout groups on Zoom.

Due to the limitations of the online environment, as adult (APiC) facilitators we set up the main workshop activities through Mural and managed Zoom breakout groups. This posed some unfortunate limits on the extent to which Young Consultants could organise themselves and team activities, or change their minds about which group to take part in. Conversely, in other ways, the online environment allowed for differing power dynamics than those prevalent in 'face-to-face' interaction. Especially notable was that our Young Consultants needed only limited support to understand and take to the online approach. Within groups, the Young Consultants also frequently helped each other out when the technology was not functioning correctly for some team members.

The online environment also enabled a greater level of anonymity and privacy than face to face activities – something usually very difficult to achieve between participants in qualitative participatory research. For instance, use of Mural does not require an account and so Young Consultants could contribute written comments anonymously, with no way to link the comment back to them unless they told others it was their contribution. Many Young Consultants also kept their cameras off on Zoom most, or all, of the time.

Our Young Consultants

Due to the difficulties in building group dynamics over remote engagement, we concentrated on finding children and young people that already knew one another and could therefore work enjoyably, and constructively in a group. Using existing school and other third sector contacts, we convened five project teams of Young Consultants from across Scotland, which stayed the same across all workshops:

- **Team Aberdeen** (Northfield)
- **Team Edinburgh** (Leith)
- **Team Glasgow** (various locations across the city)
- **Team Rural Stirlingshire** (a range of villages)

- **Team Rural Falkirk** (Denny and Bonnybridge)

Our teams covered some of the most and least deprived urban and rural areas in Scotland. The age range was 11-17 and the gender split was 11 boys and 14 girls.

Limitations on engagement were experienced by some members of some groups (and a facilitator in one workshop) as a result of unreliable home internet connections. While access is a clear limitation of online methodologies, we had full engagement across the project with the exception of a participant having to miss a workshop here-and-there.

Feedback from participants was that they particularly enjoyed the opportunity to collaborate with their peers and feel part of something bigger, where their experiences were at the forefront of the agenda. In one workshop it was agreed by all to be a positive healing experience to learn and share about things which until the project, it had felt like they had been going through alone:

> *'I think it's good, like hearing different people's opinions. Because when you've been locked in a place for so long, like, obviously, we're all restricted to like our areas. And I think we sort of think the world just revolves around [our area]. And then when you actually look at that you've got Glasgow, Stirling, Falkirk, Aberdeen, Edinburgh… And then I think it's good to hear people like, around about your age. You know, we're all going through the same thing. And it's just good to see and talk to people.'* Young Consultant, girl, age 14

It is heartening and inspiring that despite some difficulties, many of our Young Consultants persevered in their engagement even when the technology available to them was sub-optimal (e.g. participating entirely on a mobile phone or reverting to a 4G connection).

Facilitation

Building on previous work and taking our Collective Leadership Approach, we worked on the basis that our teams would define the areas of focus for our research and facilitate their own collaboration. We thereby set out at the outset of the first workshop the role of a group facilitator, and 'our 3 core principles' of facilitation, to ensure full inclusion. These are outlined in Figure 1.

WHEN YOU'RE A FACILITATOR
Your job is to:

- Make sure everyone respects the **3 Core Principles** of Facilitation.

- LISTEN! Try to keep people from straying too far from the question or task.

- Make notes of points which are important to people

- Present those points back, and check with the people who discussed and agreed them if you are correct.

- Add or change anything you have missed or anything you didn't understand the first time.

OUR 3 CORE PRINCIPLES!

1. **Everyone's view matters!** It is important that no-one speaks too much and that all are given equal time to speak. If you have something to say which is important to you, say it!

2. **Respect each other.** Only one person should speak at a time, and when they do all should respect and listen. Resist the temptation to jump in.

3. **There are no right or wrong opinions.** You don't have to agree with other people on everything or 'win', just try to understand the experiences which have formed their views, and see if and how they affect your own. If you can find a compromise which you can both live with, great! Otherwise it's fine to agree to disagree and move on.
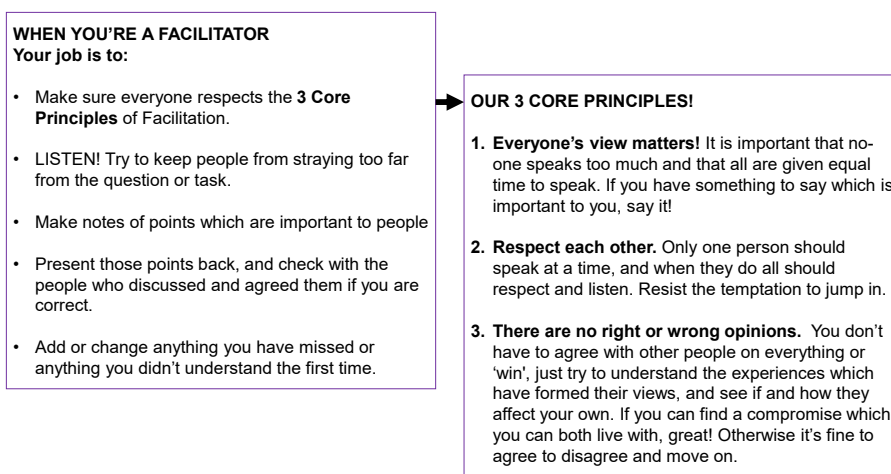
Figure 1 The role of a group facilitator and the 3 core principles, developed as part of APiC's collaboration with Play Scotland in developing a Place Standard Tool for Children and Young People for Scottish Government

Each team determined 1) which Young Consultant would facilitate their group, with the option of that team facilitator being a rotating responsibility, and 2) feedback at the end of each workshop could be given by the facilitator alone, or by several team members. The idea was to leave options as open as practicable for the teams to self-organise and determine what they felt best amongst them, with minimal intervention from adult (APiC) facilitators.

From workshop three onwards, many Young Consultants also moved into non-place-based groups of their choice as they decided to work in theme-based taskforces instead. These groups ranged from 2-6 people, with seven groups in total. This meant that some Young Consultants began collaborating with peers who they did not have an existing relationship with.

Feedback

At the end of each session, we offered all Young Consultants the possibility of staying on the call and discussing any new ideas or feedback they had for us. It is here that some Young Consultants proposed reorganising into thematic groups, which was then voted on as a proposal in a later workshop. After reaching the halfway point in workshop four, we also began the session by asking our Young Consultants what we should stop doing in the workshops, what we should start doing, and what we should continue doing. You can see in Figure 2 that they noted a wish for more opportunities to present feedback in small groups rather than to the whole group. Otherwise, they were happy with how the project was panning out and the opportunities they were having to explore the key themes of their lives over the last year.

STOP Things that are not working well	START New Things we could try	CONTINUE Things that are working well already
	Jamie or Jenny coming into our groups to discuss our points rather than sharing with whole group via one person?	I really like how inclusive everything is / I LIKE THE DIFFERENT CATEGORIES THAT WE WRITE ABOUT AS IT COVERS DIFFERENT AREAS AND EXPERIENCES IN LOCKDOWN / like how we can share what we think needs change / I appreciate that we have time for just us to discuss our issues and brainstorm

Figure 2 Feedback from Young Consultants on how the project was going

In response to the feedback, we (APiC facilitators) spoke to more groups individually for small group feedback, and in the reflection session at the end of this and remaining workshops reported back on behalf of some groups where this was their preference. Creating opportunity for small group feedback became a priority for us in remaining workshops, and we sought to factor this in as far as possible.

Ethics and Data Protection

This project followed APiC's ethics and data protection policy (A Place in Childhood 2020) and the requirements were discussed and approved by APiC's Board of Trustees. Full and informed consent was gained from all participants and their parents/carers, giving full information around the implications of participating in the research and in the use of the online environment as compared with traditional face-to-face approaches. Complying with this policy, no names of participants are used at any point in this report, or in the blogs that preceded this output. Some parts of the workshops (mostly end of workshop roundups) were recorded via Zoom's in-built function, and stored securely in accordance with our data protection policy. Unfortunately, internet connectivity issues means that workshop five was not recorded at all.

In line with traditional approaches to online engagement, such as market research focus groups, it was deemed appropriate by APiC to offer a consultancy payment of £15 per workshop. This would compensate our Young Consultants for their time, specific knowledge and expertise, as well as for use of their own equipment, and account for the new and more uncertain use of online tools, without the ability for APiC to provide direct support.

The remainder of this report details each workshop setup, results and outcomes. We then draw out the core learnings and next steps for the project in the discussion and conclusion. It should be noted that many of the quotes draw on the summaries given by the Young Consultants who kindly offered to facilitate their breakout groups – in workshops 1-3 these were determined by the place they lived, and in subsequent ones, by the Taskforce they had joined. Girls are represented more than boys because they more often offered to facilitate, but their statements can be regarded as indicative of the views of these subgroups, a significant majority of which were a mix of boys and girls.
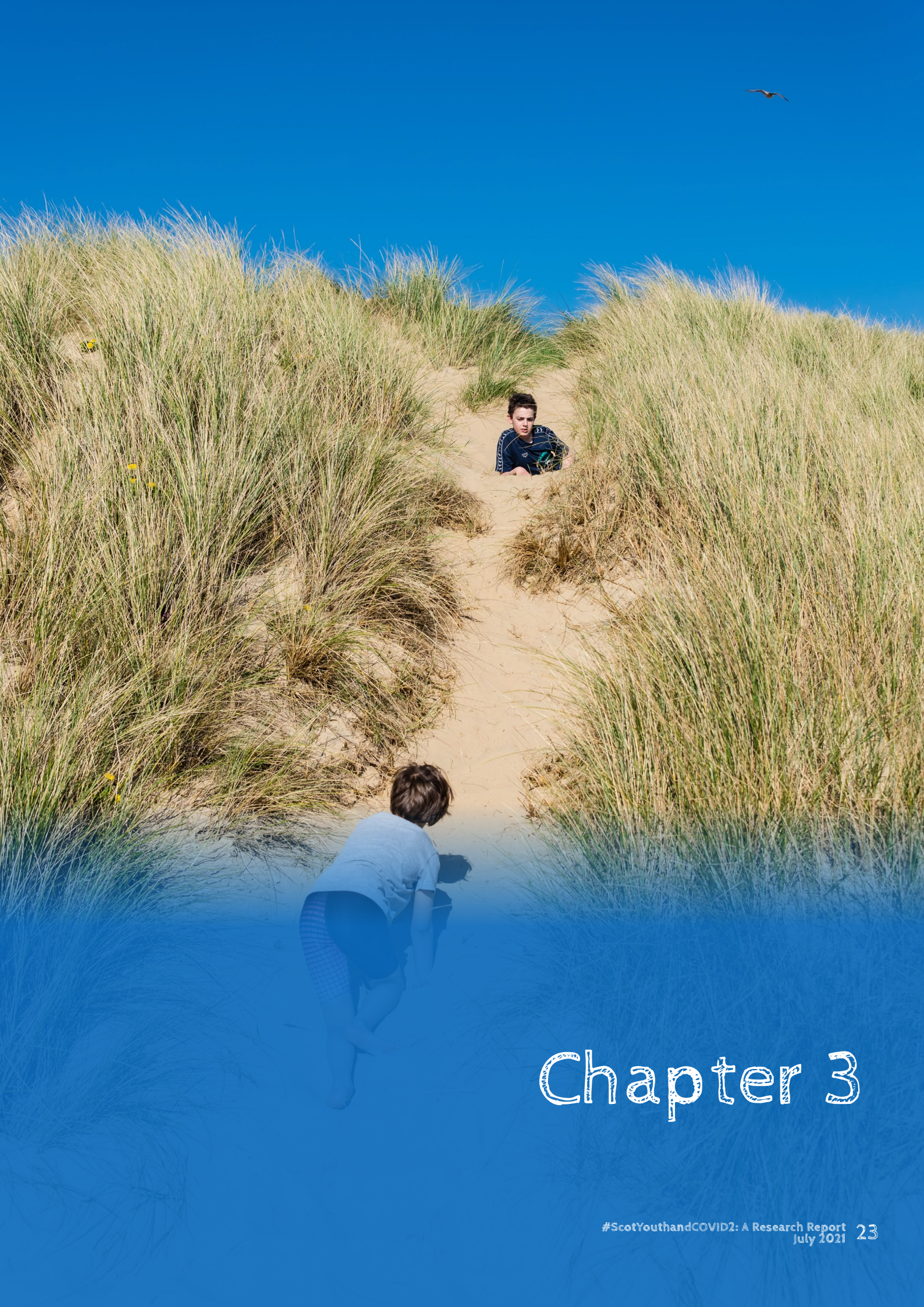
Chapter 3

Big Changes for Children and Young People Since June 2020

Workshop 1

In the first workshop (held 15th March 2021), we reflected on Young Consultants' experiences since June 2020, and the aim was to work out whether the five Big Changes they identified in the first wave of the study were still relevant. These were:

1. Remote schooling
2. My freedom to go outdoors and travel
3. How I spend my free time
4. My face-to-face interaction with friends and family
5. The COVID-19 related rules

We also wanted to know if anything new had emerged since. All teams self-facilitated their workshop activity, shown in Figure 3. Through this, they discussed whether/how each of the five Big Changes had affected them in four broad time periods:

- The Summer Holidays (late June to August 2020)
- The Autumn Term, when they went back to school buildings (August to December 2020)
- The Christmas Holidays (Late December 2020 to Early January 2021)
- The Spring Term when they returned to remote schooling (January 2021 to present)

They also noted any new Big Changes that had emerged in the meantime.

CHANGES AND CHALLENGES				
Spring Term 2020 (the first lockdown)	Summer Holidays 2020	Autumn Term 2020 *(return to school)*	Christmas Holidays 2020	Spring Term 2021 *(return to lockdown)*
New Big Changes and Challenges since Jul 2020				
School • Less collaboration with classmates • Less help from teachers • More distraction, demotivation and stress • Too much work • Challenges of process				
My freedom to go outdoors and travel • Not being able to go where I want, with who I want • Not being able to do fun outdoor stuff I enjoy • Not being able to go on holidays and outings • Not being able to eat out • Having to find interesting stuff to do without being able to leave my home or garden				
How I spend my free time • Too much screen time! • Lots of board games • Not enough sport and exercise • Staying up too late				
My face-to-face time with friends and family • Not being able to see friends and family (who I don't live with) in person and do things together • Only being able to meet friends online • Only being able to interact with the people I live with • Social distancing rules				
COVID-19 rules • Washing my hands (and not touching my face). • Going shopping				

Figure 3 The Mural Grid used in workshops 1 and 2

Young People's Experiences

The Young Consultants relayed a huge amount of insight and depth in just one workshop. It was clear that the five Big Changes remained and the challenges they caused had intensified over the last year, becoming significantly harder to cope with since the start of 2021:

> *'I hate it when like I ask, like, sometimes I just get annoyed. And I say, och, when are we going to get through this? And I hate 'I don't know', when someone says that because no one knows. But it's just I want to know, and if someone told me last year, that at this time that we'd still be in like lockdown a whole year later. I wouldn't believe them. I would be really, really, really like freaked out and like, I'd be like, sad.'* Young Consultant, girl, age 11

The additional new changes reported by our Young Consultants were:

1. School holidays becoming less restful
2. The stress of COVID-19 tests in school, and vaccination programmes and priorities
3. Increasing strains on friendships
4. Confusion and uncertainty caused by ever-changing rules and unpredictable schedules

The small changes that could make a big difference, reported by our Young Consultants in the original #ScotYouthandCOVID project had largely not come to fruition, especially around remote learning. Nothing had been learned from the impacts of the first lockdown, and indeed, many viewed the Winter lockdown as a bleaker rerun of the first.

After a year of disruption, our Young Consultants reported huge concerns for the well-being of themselves, their peers, and significant anxieties about what the consequences of the pandemic would mean for their future. However, not going to school buildings did have its plus points for a few Young Consultants:

> *'School isn't just learning, you do need to deal with other people. That's very stressful. I don't like it. I like hanging out my friends but my friends aren't the only people at that school.'* Young Consultant, boy, age 13

The hope was that this time round, the views of our Young Consultants will be taken onboard by those who can make a difference, and that a genuine dialogue with policy makers and partners on effective responses may be possible. This aligns with the incorporation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, passed as law by the Scottish Parliament in March and now awaiting Royal assent.

Workshop 2

At the second workshop with our Young Consultants (held Monday 22nd March 2021), we reflected further on the above changes and discussed whether/how each of these had affected them over time. On their Mural grids, we asked them to circle the points that they felt most highlighted their experience and/or they had greatest motivation to share with others. There was a high amount of consensus amongst Young Consultants on the main changes and challenges, especially within age groups. We report on the themes that emerged and the experiences that underlay them in the Summer Holidays; Autumn Term; Christmas Holidays; and Spring Term.

Summer Holidays: Relief, but Social Distancing with Friends a Struggle

The Summer Holidays brought some important respite for our Young Consultants, who reported enjoying the improved weather and greater freedoms. Many even travelled further than usual and discovered new places with their friends and family. In fact, some additional leisure options reopened. Others were worried about catching COVID-19 and avoided crowds, with more time spent indoors than previous summers.

Figure 4 shows the most emphasised point of our discussion – meeting friends was great over the summer. However, it was hard to social distance and some people were more committed to the rules than others.
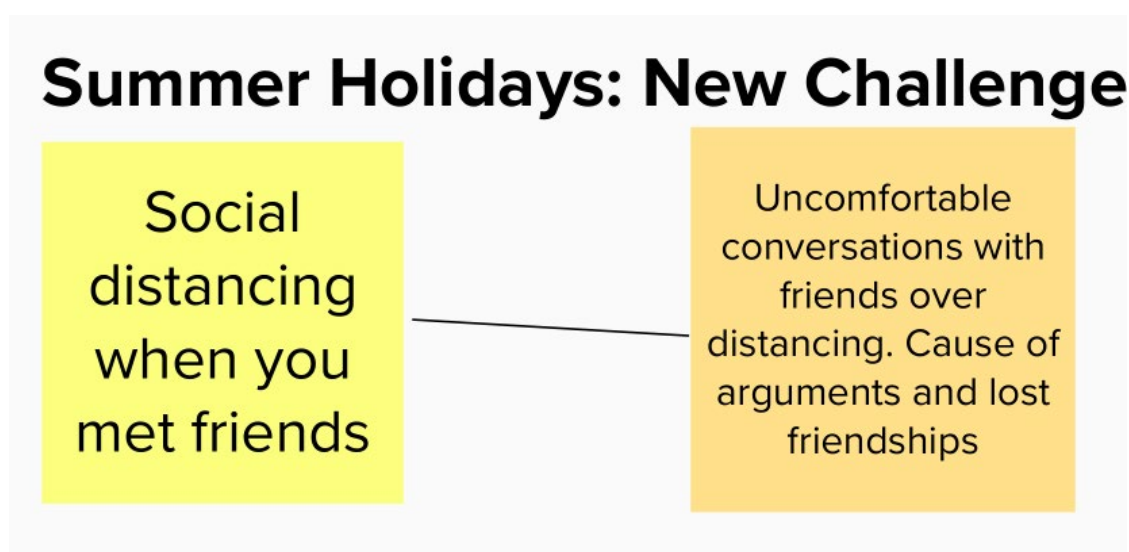

Summer Holidays: New Challenge

Social distancing when you met friends

Uncomfortable conversations with friends over distancing. Cause of arguments and lost friendships

Figure 4 Challenges highlighted for the Summer Holidays 2020

Autumn Term: School Pressure and Guilt Meeting Friends

The Autumn Term brought around a return to school buildings which was a relief for our Young Consultants. For many it even started to feel a bit like normal and that things would be better from here. Yet, they also reported teachers spending a lot of time going over the same material from the Spring Term of 2020, on top of teaching new material. This was most pronounced for those in S4 and above:

> *'Later on towards November time, we did our prelims. And it was very, very stressful. And because of the first lockdown, when we went back to school in August, teachers were doing that thing of, we were redoing what we'd done in the first lockdown. So it felt like in the run up to our prelims, it was kind of, first of all really slow and like boring because we've done all this during lockdown, and then it was suddenly like the teachers realised we need more stuff for our prelim and then they were kind of trying to all cram and then we didn't end up getting any study leave, which I think we all found quite difficult because it meant we were in school, five days a week…. usually we might have had a little bit of a break somewhere. It was just school, and then you study and then you go to bed, school study bed. And that was it.'* Young Consultant, girl age 16

For Young Consultants in primary school their experience in the Autumn Term was much closer to early 2020 before the first lockdown and the establishment of COVID-19 related restrictions. Unfortunately, those in secondary school articulated significant new changes and challenges. For example, in school masks had to be worn in corridors and in classes for older pupils, yet not when sitting with friends at lunch. Outwith the school context, Young Consultants also noted that COVID-19 restrictions were increasingly confusing and different depending on the local authority area, place, and age group.

The image in Figure 5 shows the points they emphasised most. There were increasing feelings of guilt in meeting up with friends and frustrations around how much peers and other people in the community were following rules and restrictions. For some, this meant they spent less time outdoors than they would like.
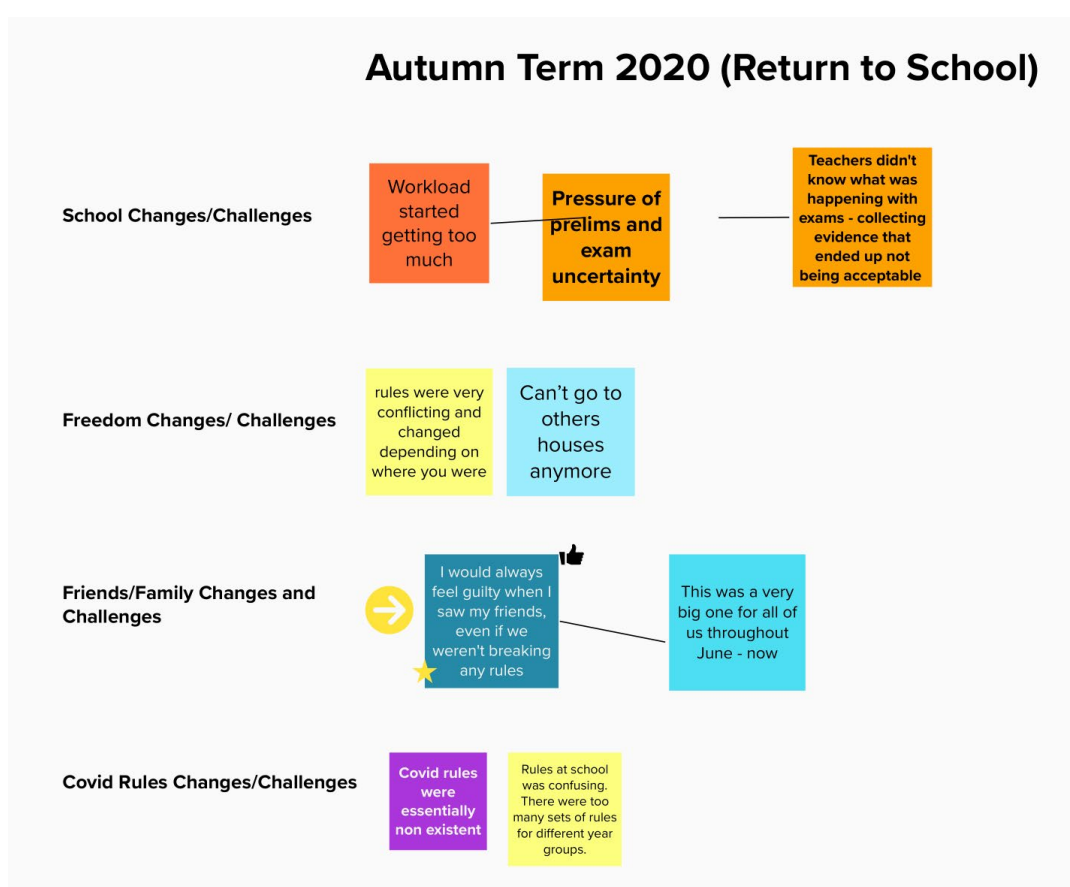
Figure 5 Challenges highlighted for the Autumn 2020 return to school

Christmas Holidays: Missing Family and Uncertainty over Next Term

The Christmas Holidays were a welcome break from school for our Young Consultants. Yet, they were not nearly as restful as usual. Increased uncertainty about whether they would get to go back to school and whether they would be learning remotely again was mentally tough and exhausting. Some also felt the pressure to keep doing schoolwork over the break.

The changing of restrictions around Christmas day also meant that many Young Consultants were incredibly disappointed not to spend more time with friends and family. These were emphasised strongly on their whiteboard (see Figure 6).
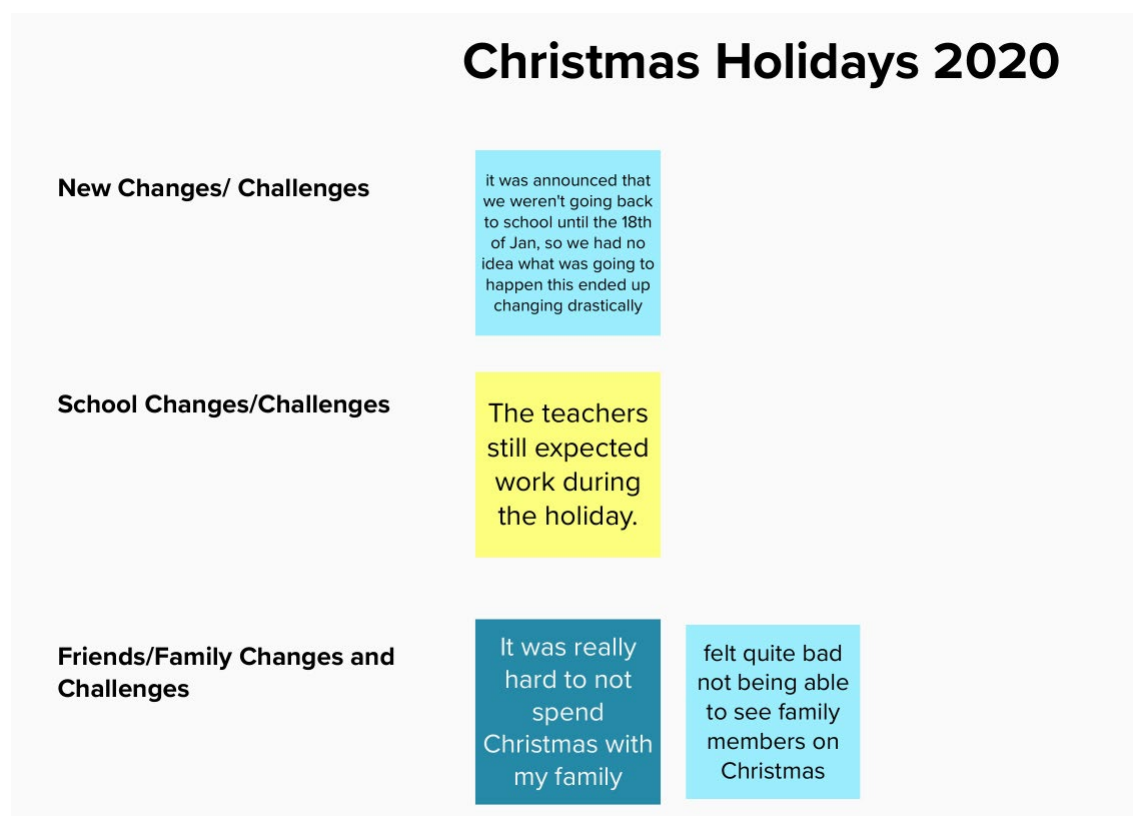
Figure 6 Challenges highlighted for the December 2020 holidays

Spring Term: Remote Schooling is Demotivating and Overwhelming

After a year of disruption, our Young Consultants reported huge concerns around the well-being of themselves and their peers, and significant anxieties about what the consequences of the pandemic would mean for their future:

> *'I mean, personally, it's like I've had to make like my four [subject] choices, virtually, which is quite difficult. Because, you know, I don't know what the future holds. I mean, like, we've had a pandemic, so I just had to make the most of what I can do... there was no Google Meet. Or no conferences with teachers. So we just had to sort of pick and just hope we get it.'* Young Consultant, girl age 14

This was summarised as a feeling that a year of their lives had been stolen or lost.

Another Young Consultant highlighted how each person has different home circumstances, and that their teachers were not always aware or sensitive to how this might affect a pupil's ability to complete work:

> *'They don't understand that, like, everybody who's doing home learning has different circumstances. And like, my family, I've got like, a sister who's got medical conditions… And I think just teachers didn't understand like people's personal circumstances.'* Young Consultant, girl, age 14

> *'The teachers don't want to ask. Yeah, they can't, they can't ask you about your personal life. I mean, maybe you want them to, but like that, that'd be really hard for them to know.'* Young Consultant, girl, age 11

One Young Consultant in primary school detailed their experience of learning during lockdown in a school hub for children whose parents are keyworkers. They noted that they would spend the time undertaking the same tasks as peers, on an iPad but in the school. This was a strange experience as they thought they might get more live help and support within the school building and found it strangely isolating:

'We would get like a different teacher, like every day, but we would still have our normal teacher, and it [the work] would just be sent to us. And they would only like help, if we needed it… it would always be like busy as well.' Young Consultant, boy, age 11

In Figure 7 we show the Mural Board with their most emphasised points around the Spring Term. We draw on these issues further as we progress through the findings.
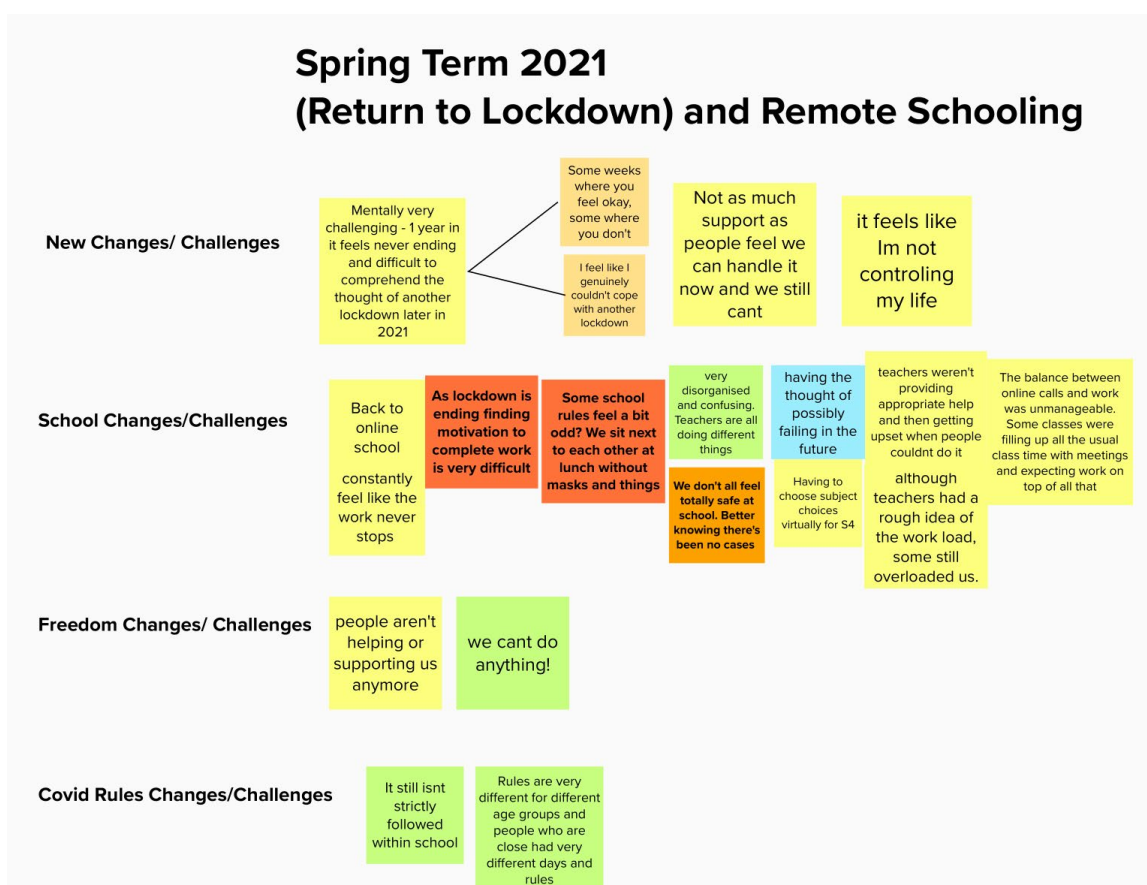

Figure 7 Challenges highlighted for the Spring 2021 return to lockdown

Returning to School

At the end of the workshop, some Young Consultants reflected on the return to school for secondary school pupils, with many about to face a phased return. Whilst overall welcome, several Young Consultants felt that a part time return just before the Easter Holidays had limited valued:

> *'So we're gonna go back to school one day a week. And it feels kind of like pointless. If you're kind of putting yourself at risk for something that's only one day a week, and you only get to see a couple teachers, and most of them aren't even your teachers. So it just kind of feels like a lot of risk for something that isn't necessarily worth it.'* Young Consultant, girl, age 14

Having only a short time of remote learning left, was also hampering motivation for some:

> *'As lockdown is almost in the past… finding motivation to do work at home has been increasingly more difficult, at least for myself… it's just something that I find quite difficult to do. Because it's so repetitive… because I know that I'll be in school quite soon. It just feels like there's not much point in doing work at home, I'm just going to be doing it again in school.'* Young Consultant, boy, age 15

The quantity of work was also a significant problem, with a feeling that no one at school understood the amount individual pupils were receiving overall. Moreover, some of the same material was being taught as in lockdown, whilst some was completely new, leaving Young Consultants feeling confused and overwhelmed:

> *'In school for me, like they're going over stuff, we did a lockdown, like, what we've meant to be doing, because some folk havenae done it. And so like they go over that, but we're meant to be learning new stuff on top of it. So it's like, it's just, like, totally confusing for me.'* Young Consultant, age 16

> *'We've been back to school, like for a week. And I feel completely overwhelmed.'* Young Consultant, girl, age 17

Indeed, breaks continued to be less restful, especially for pupils in senior years:

> *'We really don't feel as if we've had a break. Because our school hasn't been very clear when it comes to prelims. They've not been clear about coursework. And they've not necessarily been clear about what we should and shouldn't be studying. So even when we are getting breaks, instructions are like varying and we aren't necessarily getting a break because we are still having to put time towards studying.'* Young Consultant, girl, age 17

Ultimately, many Young Consultants in secondary school would have preferred to return to school only after the Easter Holidays. There was also increased fear from some about returning this time around:

> *'One of the main things was how kind of normal things felt when we went back in the Autumn and about how really not normal they feel now because now obviously, when we're going back, numbers [of COVID-19 infection] are a lot higher than they were. And it feels like there's a lot more of a risk.'* Young Consultant, girl, age 15
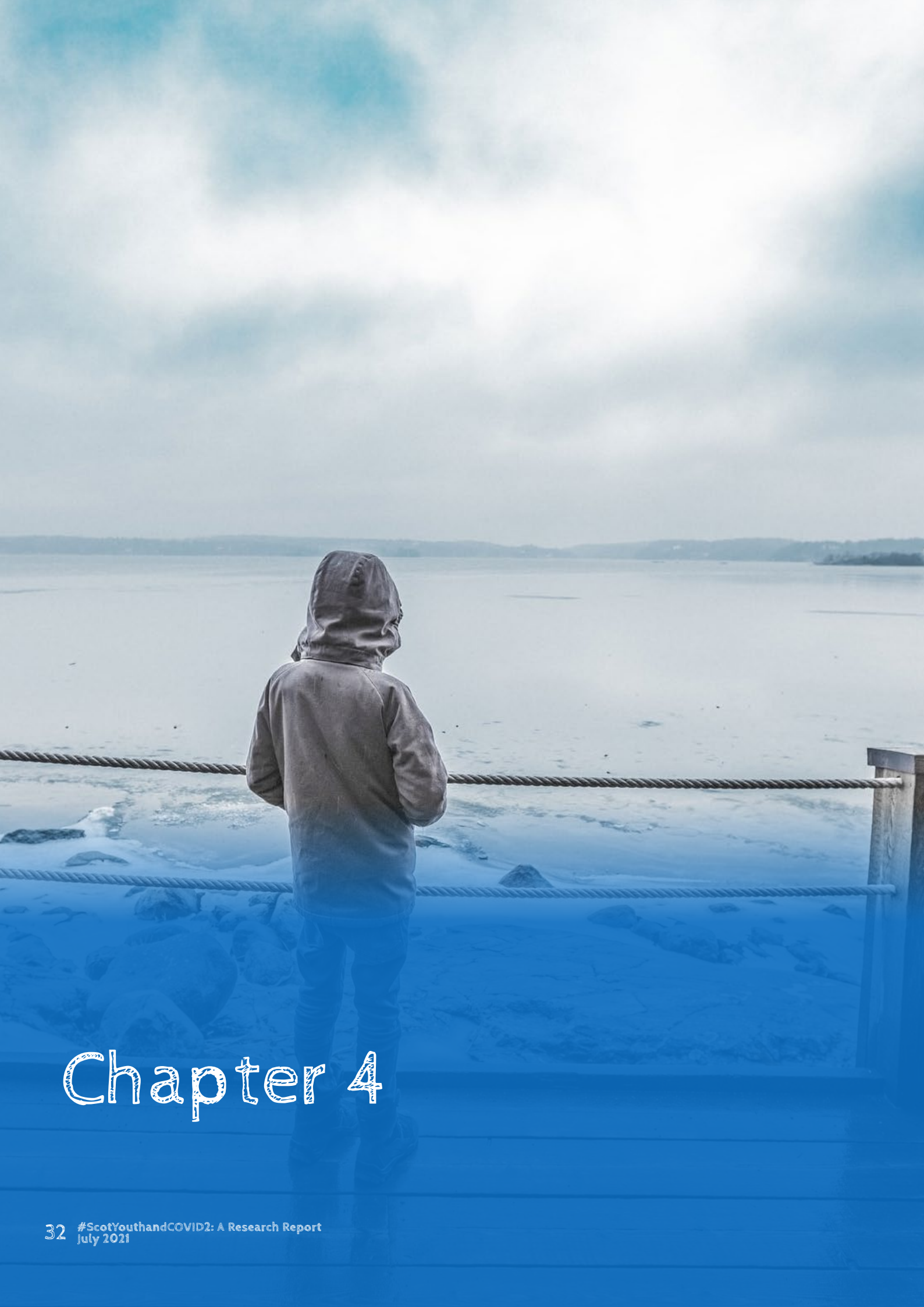
Chapter 4

Communication and Relationships Matter

Workshop 3

Despite variation in experiences expressed within the previous workshops, which differed depending on age, location, personality, and home circumstance, clear themes were emerging by the close of workshop two. Several Young Consultants made the suggestion, subsequently voted for by all, that we (i.e. APiC Facilitators) might have a go at naming these themes, and that this could then enable more focussed discussions on related challenges and remedies. We therefore collectively looked at ways we would transition from place-based groups to Taskforces based around the particular interests, motivations and priorities of the members.

At the beginning of workshop three (held Monday 29th March 2021), we proposed a set of themes for consideration and improvement, and which received full consent via a Mural task. Young Consultants each then voted on what would be most important to them, by placing a 1st, 2nd and 3rd vote on the themes in a Mural board. There was also an opportunity to add other themes to the Mural board for collective voting. They then agreed the following Taskforces, and picked which group they would like to join:

- 'Exam' Years with High Workload and Stress (one group)

- Well-being Outside of School

- The Transition from Primary to Secondary School (one group, covering both transition and well-being outside of school)

- Motivation and School (three groups)

- Uncertainty (one group)

- Local Issues (one group)

Each new group then worked together to fill out a grid on Mural (see Figure 8), to get to the bottom of the problem and possible solutions.

1) **What important** Experiences illustrate the priority to others?	2) **Why** are these Experiences Important?	3) **How** could things be done to address the priority?	4) **Barriers** that could prevent the priorities being addressed?

Figure 8 The Mural grid filled out by taskforces in workshop 3

Initial Findings and Key Asks

At the end of this workshop we asked each Taskforce for the top priority initial points from their discussions. The idea was that we might communicate these to policy makers to start gathering understanding and support. We note these below:

'Exam' Years with High Workload and Stress:

1. Provide clear structure to schools on the evidence gathering process for determining grades. Too much time has been spent gathering information that cannot be used. This has been stressful and inefficient.

2. Consider a better approach to grading pupils in future years. Exams don't work well for many, and we have an opportunity to think again about what children and young people and our society needs from education:

   'It's been a bit of a train wreck [this year]. And also kind of for future years, we were quite interested in talking about the potential of alternative exams. And we're talking about kind of implementing the evidence system in a better way in future years, which could have kind of less of a toll on mental health for young people. And also takes into account that, for some people, exams don't really show what they're truly capable of. And it could be seen as a bit of a like an outdated system.' Young Consultant, girl, age 15

Well-being Outside of School:

1. Not knowing when restrictions will end is really difficult. A helpline could be set up that children and young people could ring so that they can talk to trusted adults about how they are coping with lockdown and restrictions:

   'It can maybe help if there's sort of helplines. Maybe they, you know, there's ChildLine and stuff, and also, obviously, chatting to someone, an adult or a friend. It can be overlooked by other problems.' Young Consultant, girl, age 11

2. Young Consultants reported wanting opportunities to feel like children and young people again, which many have sorely missed in the last year:

   'We need to feel like we are valued as people as the effort we are putting in and not just like a machine that basically we just feel like, we need to constantly work and we need to feel like we're children again.' Young Consultant, girl, age 14

   'I feel like everything has been stripped from like, going to the universities and like senior things like booking holidays, your graduation, your leavers, like we're not getting any of that'. Young Consultant, girl, age 17

The Transition from Primary to Secondary School

1. Not going to see new schools in person has been very difficult, and Young Consultants in P7 had either only met some of their new teachers in large groups on video call, or not at all. They recognise that teachers and schools have been trying hard to make it easier for them, but they would like to meet with new teachers in small groups to help them prepare and feel less worried about the change:

   'Being this year in this position. And being locked down and everything is, is kind of hard because we would usually be being eased into high school and what it would be like, and I'm not gonna know, really what High School is going to be like… they usually bring like they do tours and everything… it's gonna be just a bit sudden.' Young Consultant, girl, age 11

   'It's kind of like a guessing game.' Young Consultant, boy, age 11

Motivation and School

1. After living the same life for a year, our Young Consultants told us it's really hard to know if they are doing anything correctly. More live video teaching would help, as for some subjects they get lots, and for others they get none at all:

   'Everybody's sort of lacking motivation due to like, living the same life for near enough a year. But online learning is like eat sleep and repeat, basically. And teachers basically take forever to reply to work. And that means that we're getting demotivated because we don't know if we're doing it correctly, or if it's up to their standard, and, and there's not much support and because teachers just upload work and leave you to complete the work, which is quite a lot, because there's so many different due dates.' Young Consultant, girl, age 14

2. Feedback from teachers really matters. Some give lots and some give barely any at all. Some teachers are really nice about it, but for some the feedback is really blunt and hard to handle:

   'History's one of the [subjects] that I'm really struggling in… it's like, you try to email your teachers. And then, like, sometimes it takes them forever to respond. And you know, like, sometimes they try to divert your question that you've asked… Yeah, it's just difficult.' Young Consultant, girl, age 14

   'Just like you spend an hour and a half on an assignment and the teacher just says like 'oh yeah, good work', and you're just like, 'well, what was the point in that then?' If I'm not getting any praise for it, you just think they copy and pasted the same for loads of other people.' Young Consultant, boy, age 14

3. The difference in the style of teaching over lockdown makes our Young Consultants think that more could be done to learn from good practice. In fact, some subjects that they used to really love are now demotivating because of the way they are being taught and

whether and how feedback is given:

'Now, like, I'm scared to ask and like maths used to be one of my strong subjects in like, now I feel like I'm just falling behind… just like not being able to cope.' Young Consultant, girl, age 14

'Some teachers do like give you a shout out if you've got like 100%, but others, just like they don't care or even mark it.' Young Consultant, boy, age 14

4. Young Consultants understand that things are difficult for teachers as well, and they can tell that some teachers who they really liked before the pandemic must be really struggling because they can see a change in their enthusiasm and approach. Teachers also need more support and for their concerns to be heard:

'I think they must be overwhelmed as well… there might be an issue where we need to understand what the teachers are going through too, to find the reasons why they're finding that [feedback and workload management] difficult.' Young Consultant, girl, age 13

'I feel for the teachers a lot. Because they have been doing like, their job is completely turned around by doing home schooling. And what we're all saying is, like, they're giving us way too much. But they don't know… they have to do a lot more things remotely which must be really hard.' Young Consultant, girl, age 11

'I think the teachers are learning just as much as we are.' Young Consultant, girl, age 14

Uncertainty

1. Our Young Consultants noted that across society people seem to be communicating poorly with each other. In terms of announcements from Scottish Government – especially about school – Ministers need to be firmer in their decisions and clearer about assumptions:

'There needs to be a lot more communication between the government and teachers and schools and everybody that they're not 100% on any of their decisions. And they need to be either 100% on what they're saying, or they give you the options for what else is going to happen.' Young Consultant, girl, age 14

2. Making vague announcements about what will happen and then backtracking, or suggesting something might happen that never does creates a rollercoaster of difficult emotions for children and young people. This is made harder when different announcements and plans are being made by different governments across the UK without being clear as to why and what data is being followed:

'Nicola Sturgeon states like data not dates, which is quite confusing, because, you know, you've got England, and Scotland and Wales all different at different phases. And it's very confusing and conflicting.' Young Consultant, girl, age 14

3. Young Consultants also reported feeling increasingly that they cannot trust the media and working out what is and is not fake news is getting harder:

'Also as well with like in the newspapers, media, they seem to know things before the actual government know themselves. So they like may come up with a publish article saying 'all schools reopen and blah, blah, blah'. And it's like, Nicola Sturgeon doesn't even know herself.' Young Consultant, girl, age 14

Feedback, Communications and Relationships Matter

The overarching theme of our Young Consultants discussions was that the absence of live feedback, poor communication, and strained relationships was the key factor underpinning their decreasing well-being. The stability we usually strive to give children and young people had disappeared and not knowing for sure what arrangements are for even the next two weeks was very troubling. However, at the end of our session Young Consultants were unanimous that talking about these issues and realising how common their feelings and views are helps them to feel better.

Chapter 5

New Experiences and Looking to Good Practice

Workshop 4

In workshop four (held Monday 19th April 2021), we reflected together on how the project had gone so far, anything new that had emerged over the Easter Holidays, and within each Taskforce group looked at how we might learn from good practice for developing further recommendations. We explore these new findings below.

New Themes Emerging

You can see the new themes and experiences highlighted by our Young Consultants, all of which relate to the return to secondary school in Figure 9. The key messages coming through are that:

- Some teachers were setting tests which our Young Consultants did not think was fair in the first week back and after so long without face-to-face teaching;
- School buildings felt very crowded for some and therefore unsafe; and
- Rules about COVID-19 tests, mask wearing, and hand sanitising were unclear and not always enforced:

    'Although one-way systems are in place, there is still a lot of crowded stairways. And then like half of the windows in the school are broken which can't allow like proper ventilation in the school, which also is a COVID risk and hazard. And the lunch hall feels a little crowded because there's not much space to safely distance.' Young Consultant, girl, age 14

One Young Consultant in primary school detailed how they were now doing cycling proficiency training which was good, but strange as all activities had to take place on the school grounds rather than in the local community. Some pupils would also get less time as their school would close for polling on the 6th May which they were not sure was fair:

    'It's good being back to school… on Thursday, there's a local election. And they're using our school, which I don't think it's very good, because there's so many empty buildings, and we just got back. So why can they use like a sports centre or something like that? But we're doing home schooling again on Thursday… I just don't I don't think it's fair that they use a school. I mean, it's just, you know, they should use their imagination.' Young Consultant, girl, Age 11

Have any new themes or experiences emerged over the Easter Holidays or at school today for us to consider?

Over-testing in schools

Wasn't well communicated as we didn't know what was happening next

First day back we were told that we had a test to complete which was overwhelming because we hadn't has a class in person for 4 months

School is very busy and not much communication between staff and pupils

Although 1 way systems in place the stairways and corridors are still crowded

Have to eat lunch outside as the lunch hall is severly crowded and it fells safer to eat lunch outside.

Lack of clarity and direction over testing. Not everyone doing tests or collecting them, school not making it easy to know when/if to get them

Even if they can't make it mandatory it should be really encouraged more than it is.

People have forgotten/stopped caring about sanitizing/mask wearing

Since Covid cases are lower, we're allowed to do way more activities within practical subjects

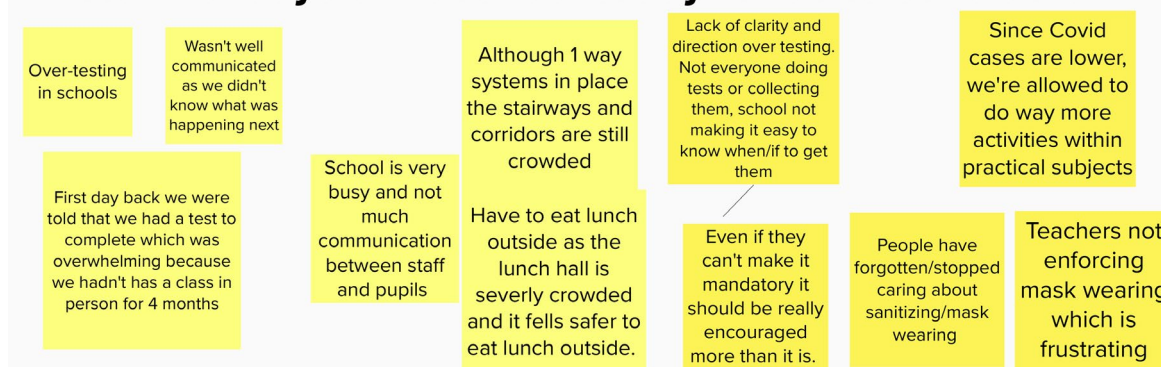Teachers not enforcing mask wearing which is frustrating

Figure 9 New experiences that emerged for Young Consultants over the Easter Holidays or immediate return to school

However, and more positively, the lower instances of COVID-19 were allowing more activities to take place within practical subjects. Young Consultants also talked about appreciating more opportunities for fun out of school activities, which had been precipitated by the Scottish Government announcing more exceptions to restrictions for children and young people.

Learning from Good Practice

We asked our Young Consultants what examples or experiences they had of good practice during the pandemic that we might learn from. We list the core findings below:

- Some teachers had arranged assessments to take into account the possibility of pupils being overwhelmed, given how little face-to-face teaching they had experienced. At some schools the general consensus was not to set tests in the first two weeks back:

  'Some teachers have been quite understanding of how hard lockdown had been for some people. And some were choosing not to kind of pile on the stress about assessments or not having done stuff over lockdown. And were more kind of emphasising it's what you do now that matters.' Young Consultant, girl, age 16

  'If all teachers thought about that, then the whole thing overall would be so much more manageable, like, if the teachers just all had a meeting together. And they said, like, 'okay, instead of doing all these assessments and prelims within the space of one or two weeks, we're gonna do them within the space of a month or so'. Like, even just that would make it so much more manageable.' Young Consultant, boy, age 15

- Some teachers put a lot of effort into giving good and detailed feedback to pupils and delivering it quickly so they understood how well they're doing at a subject and feel included:

  'There are some teachers that are like good, and like they give you like, what you can make better and what you've done good and all that. But there's a lot of teachers that are just blunt.' Young Consultant, girl, age 13

  'Some teachers will give you like detailed stuff. And like, if you've done something wrong, they'll like try and explain it to you, instead of being like, just give your final score.' Young Consultant, girl, age 13

- For pupils transitioning between primary and secondary school, some had great calls on Microsoft Teams with new teachers that had helped them feel less worried and more prepared for the change. Some were also getting surveys to fill out to explore how they feel about moving to secondary school so that staff could help more specifically with their worries.

- Having more outdoor clubs and activities available to socialise had helped some Young Consultants feel more in control of their well-being:

    'Outdoor clubs starting back is good, because then you can socialise with more people. And that helps you mentally.' Young Consultant, girl, age 11

Some of the good practice examples are provided in Figure 10.

Figure 10 Good practices highlighted by Young Consultants

While some Young Consultants found it easy to think of good practice examples, others found it very hard because of perceiving more negative experiences over the last year or because they felt exceptionally stressed at that point in time. It was becoming incredibly clear that Young Consultants in years where exams would normally be taking place were struggling especially with changes to assessment, workload, and worries about their future.
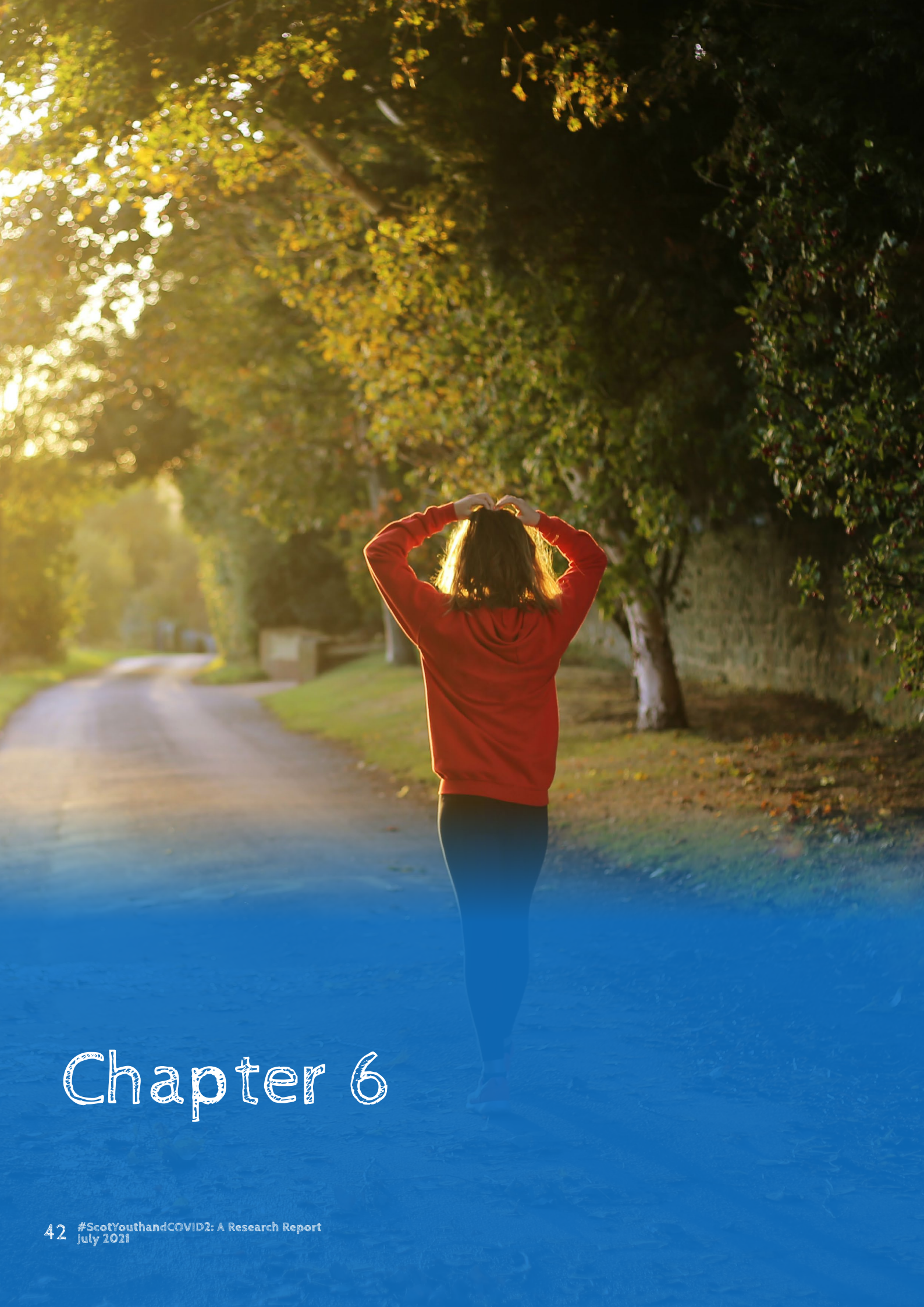
Chapter 6

Our Post-Pandemic Vision

Workshop 5

In workshop five (held Monday 26th April), we looked at the visions our Young Consultants have for the future, across the next session of the Scottish Parliament. We split this up into ideas for the short, medium, and long-term. In Figure 11 you can see the blank Mural grid they filled out in Taskforces.

What is the most important thing that needs to happen and why...	In the next six months (Short term)?	In the next 2 years (Medium term)?	In the next 5 years and beyond (Longer term)?
For me and people my age?			
For my family and other people I know?			
For other people in Scotland?			

Figure 11 A Mural grid filled out by Young Consultants in workshop 5 to consider their visions for the future

Young Consultants also commented on the draft Asks that emerged from all their work so far. These had been initially pulled from the outputs of workshop three around their key Taskforce priorities so far, and other core messages that emerged in workshop four. We also collectively developed additional Asks from their visions in this workshop and voted on which were the highest priority through a 1st, 2nd and 3rd preference voting system on Mural. We reflect on some of the newest insights below.

Mental Health is Paramount

Young Consultants visions for the future included many ideas and a strong emphasis on tackling mental health issues. This included loneliness and isolation for themselves, friends and family and everyone in Scotland. In voting, this was by far the top priority. Not only did this refer to tackling long waiting lists for Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services, but also addressing the root causes such as creating environments where children and young people and others feel included and valued. They also noted the importance of having their voices heard, and for others to have that opportunity as well (see Figure 12).

Figure 12 Visions of better mental health from our Young Consultants

Young Consultants were also clear that they would like to see preventative action on drug abuse. Some note that it feels accepted in society that some young people will start taking drugs and get into difficulties. They were also very aware of seeing drug abuse in the community, and the impact it has on feelings of safety.

Address Climate Change

Climate change and related environmental problems and worries were prominent in all visions from all Taskforces. Much of this centred around longer-term visions of a Scotland that runs on 100% renewable energy; where electric cars are used instead of petrol and diesel cars; and where habitats are protected and restored (see Figure 13). This latter point was especially prominent from Young Consultants growing up in more rural areas of the country.
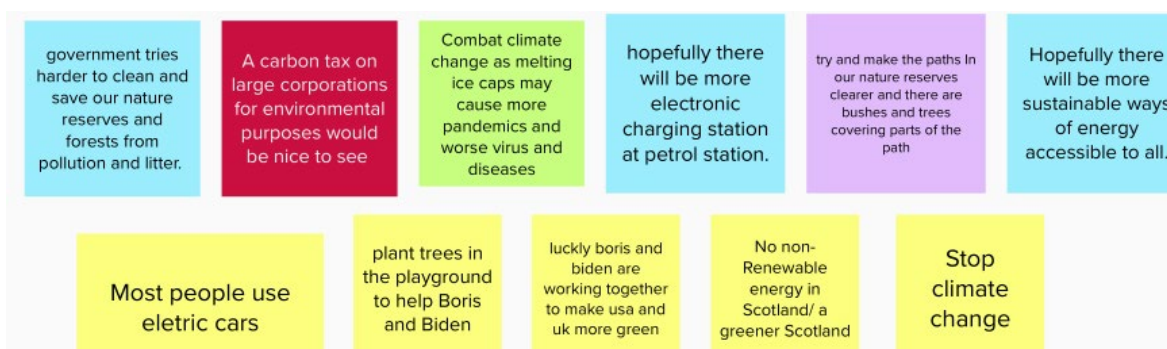
Figure 13 Ways to address climate change from our Young Consultants

Address Inequalities

Young Consultants were very clear that they see no reason for a gap in pay between genders to remain in the modern day. They also noted other areas around equality between genders in clothing access, support, and in having equal opportunities. Indeed, they were keen to move towards more inclusive environments for everyone and tackle discrimination overall (see Figure 14).

Figure 14 Equality and inclusion concerns from our Young Consultants

Chapter 7

In Conversation with the Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland

Workshop 6

In workshop six (held 17th May 2021), we were also joined by the Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland, Bruce Adamson, and his Head of Strategy, Gina Wilson. We reflected together on a successful project, and determined a final list of Asks for the Scottish Government. We also co-developed a possible strategy for progressing these into a manifesto of core priorities for as many children and young people across Scotland as possible.

During the activities, Bruce and Gina dropped into the Young Consultants Taskforces for a lively conversation about their fantastic work to date. There was also a dialogue about how the Asks might align with Scottish Government policy priorities, and ways this might be built upon towards making Scotland a better place for all.

This discussion surfaced some new insights about the return to school, especially after having several weeks to settle back into the routine:

The 'missing voices' from the 2020 transitions. The Young Consultants who had been discussing the difficulties and uncertainties they are facing this year around the transition from primary to secondary school, raised the matter of those children who went through this last year. It was agreed that a lot could be learned from these 'missing voices' about the COVID-19 pandemic experience and to inform an effective strategy in the event of future breakouts.

It was good to be back at school. While minor aspects of lockdown were missed (e.g. more time in bed!), and notwithstanding the significant stress among the older young people around assessments, there was no question that being back at school was preferred, even with the aggravation and inconvenience of the rules. The immediacy of being able to talk to teachers meant some had made huge leaps in subjects they had lost hope in during lockdown, when some felt they had been "teaching themselves" without the qualifications to do so:

> *'I sort of felt was like I was being my own teacher. It's like, I have never been to university and gotten a teaching degree. And all these subjects and then miraculously, I'm forced to teach myself, be in charge of my own work, my own schedule when I work, and like it's not really fair.'* Young Consultant, girl, age 14

They also noted that during remote schooling, the work might change, but it seemed like the same day on repeat, whereas at school, every day felt different:

> *'Yeah, I don't like online school that much, it's just so much more stressful and overwhelming, but in real life as well, like, it just gets over and done with like, every single day, but when online It was, like, I just felt like I was doing work the full entire day in or just the say everyday was the exact same, it was just not good.'* Young Consultant, girl, age 13

'My teachers have been helping me a lot as they know I've been struggling during lockdown.' Young Consultant, girl, age 14

Ever-changing rules at school was increasing apathy and risk. They talked about the constantly changing, and sometimes inconsistent, rules (e.g. one-way systems between lessons but not at break and lunch), and lack of enforcement, leading to their public flouting by children and teachers, and spreading loss of discipline:

'There is a few people that don't seem to understand that COVID is a serious thing. And they just sort of go into class, don't put a mask on, they don't sanitise their hands. They think it makes them look cool. But it's just, it's just disrespectful.' Young Consultant, boy, age 14

'There's some people that like are just chucking their masks about the corridor … And it's just annoying because you have to do that and they're just getting away with, like it.' Young Consultant, girl, age 13

'No one had the one solid piece of information. And that was changed and so often that the signs in the school were out of date and we don't have enough time to change them. So if you relied on information from one sign or one teacher it was completely different to another sign or a different teacher... It also means that rules and things are not being followed.' Young Consultant, girl, age 14

Some felt a consistent stable set of rules applied for the long term – as in supermarkets – was preferable to constant change, even if at times they seemed overkill compared with general regulations.

Our Young Consultants' Asks to the Scottish Government

Between engaging in direct conversation with Bruce and Gina, in workshop six our Young Consultants also checked over, added to, and redrafted aspects of the draft Asks developed over the course of our workshops. We list these finals Asks below under key headings and sub themes, and they are broadly ordered by our Young Consultants' priorities.

Each of the following 34 Asks can be taken as a starting point for further conversation, giving vital insights into the experiences and current and future needs of a diverse set of children and young people over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic. While some relate specifically to children and young people, others encompass wishes for the wider population of Scotland.

Motivation and School

1. We find it extremely difficult to learn without a teacher being there. In periods of remote learning, we need to find a way to have live video teaching available for everyone.

2. We understand that remote schooling is difficult for teachers too, but we need quick, clear and thoughtful feedback. It really matters for helping us understand how we're doing, feeling valued, and motivating us to continue working hard.

3. Some teachers have gone the extra mile for us during lockdown and it's made a huge difference. Let's learn what has worked well and what has worked less well so that we know what to do in future.

4. We know some of our teachers have been really struggling during the pandemic. You need to support them to support us and hear their concerns in times of crisis and uncertainty.

5. Our schools and teachers need to work together to ensure our combined workload and schedule is not overwhelming.

6. Sometimes we need additional support to do well at school. We would welcome optional sessions in school where we can talk about what is going well and less well for us and receive help with tasks when we need it:

   'When a teacher is explaining something, like over the computer, I don't really understand that. And it goes in one ear and out the other, I just forget what to do. But having like a teacher there beside me, like, tell me like what to do, and like how to do it properly. And making sure I'm not getting it wrong, like that really helps.' Young Consultant, girl, age 14

7. We often have important and useful views on things outside of school. We would welcome discussion groups in school so we can give the Government information on what is happening for us and we can be involved more in improvements.

Addressing Inequalities

8. Take concerted action on addressing the Gender Pay Gap and school and workplace discrimination and bullying. This currently affects too many people.

9. Commit to better and more meaningful engagement between Government and children and young people, recognising the wide range of issues that affect us and the interests we have in our shared future.

Skills and Employment

10. Ensure safe and secure employment and good work experience opportunities for everyone. We are worried about our futures and want to know that our skills and contributions will be valued when we leave school:

    'And then for people who are like mine and [name of colleague's] ages, like, because with COVID here and like we want to be out of the house more like they could like give the people who want it like all jobs for younger people to like to help out around like the community and all that.' Young Consultant, girl, age 14

11. Ensure children and young people also get a good quality education on genuinely useful life skills such as effective money management, understanding bills and taxes, cooking, and how mortgages and other types of finance work.

Local Issues

12. We want to feel safe and included where we live. Work with us to hear and understand issues in our local areas and improve opportunities for all children and young people.

13. Improve rubbish collection, maintenance of public space, and educate people about protecting the environment and keeping places clean. It affects our well-being.

Exam Years with High Workload and Stress

   'Even though this year, and last year haven't been ideal, the general idea of a continuous assessment model seems a fair method of assessment and one that could work really well, if it was properly organised.' Young Consultant, girl, age 15

14. Redesign assessment processes so that we are judged on the work we've done across the course of a year instead of exams at the end.

15. Provide clear guidance to schools to ensure there is no confusion, changing or

duplication of materials needed to make a fair and accurate assessment of our progress.

16. Work with young people to design an exam assessment system that is fairer and more effective for S4-S6, which learns from the stress and uncertainty during the pandemic.

17. Have a clear national education plan in place for crisis situations, including how assessments will be structured and organised.

Well-being For Us

'If you look at the big picture, I feel for everyone, because everyone has someone telling them what to do. And then that person has someone telling them what to do. And the person that tells everyone what to do, has to think of stuff to tell people what to do. Like, it's so different during COVID like, everyone is having a hard time everyone, like no matter who they are and where they live.' Young Consultant, girl, age 11

18. Set up a helpline for children and young people to ring to discuss our well-being and get information and advice to help improve it.

19. Understand that we've had a really difficult year and we need time and space to recover. Remote schooling has been challenging and it's often not been clear what has been expected of us.

20. Focus on creating opportunities for us to feel young again and be childish.

21. Improve mental health support and services for us. Long waiting lists are bad for the well-being of ourselves, friends and families.

Well-being For All

22. Improve mental health services for everyone and address loneliness. This is about both services for people in current need and making sure people feel included and supported in society to tackle the causes of poor mental health.

23. Take preventative action on drug and alcohol misuse by supporting all young people to have good mental health and make healthy choices.

24. Improve help and support for people of all ages that are suffering the effects of drug and alcohol misuse. The high rate of drug-related deaths worries us and seeing drug and alcohol misuse in our neighbourhoods can make us worried about going outside by ourselves.

Recovery

25. Conduct a thorough and full inquiry of what happened during the COVID-19 pandemic so that we can understand and genuinely learn from experience.

26. Ensure a transition out of the pandemic that allows everyone to get the rest and leisure they have been missing.

Uncertainty

27. Decision-makers need to communicate clearly and effectively. Give us the information we need when we need it, and in a clear form. We want to hear information directly, but we also only need to know what is relevant to us so keep it concise, tailored and in clear language.

28. As far as possible, wait until you can give information that you are 100% clear is accurate and won't change. If a decision is uncertain then tell us why and inform us about the decision-making process. Sudden and unclear changes in decisions affect our well-being:

'So I'd give going back to school as an example, with them saying 'you might be going back to school, oh wait you might be going back on this date, oh no maybe on this date', then 'you may not be going back at all'. That was more confusing. So I think it'd be better if instead of giving you the constant 'this might be, this might be' kinda they continued the conversation but they didn't give you a date until they were certain.' Young Consultant, girl, age 14

29. Consider setting up and/or supporting young people to set up a news organisation that delivers clear, accurate, and engaging news that we need to know. This could be like a young person's version of Newsround to help combat fake news and misinformation on social media. We want a feature where we can ask something from social media to be fact-checked, so we don't spread or get worried by misinformation:

'Since we've been exposed to more social media than ever. It's been a bit confusing for everyone.' Young Consultant, girl, age 13

'I've seen a lot of things spread through social media. And you never know if it's actually true or not. And it can be quite worrying. So it would be a while ago, there was something about masked people assaulting people going round, and like plague masks. And nobody knew if it was true or not, they had nothing to back it up. And it was very worrying for a lot of people and it scared everybody. And things like Newsround are a little bit young for kinda our age group. But other news, people don't focus on things that are for our age so we need something that relates to us, that we can get reliable information from and we can ask questions and be like, 'Is this true or not?' And find out what's actually happening. It's just kinda something more reassuring.' Young Consultant, girl, age 14

30. During the remainder of the pandemic, keep high risk activities closed and get everyone vaccinated quickly. Prioritise outdoor activities that improve well-being and be really clear on the schedule and reasons behind it.

The Transition from Primary to Secondary School

31. Transitions are really important to us. Ensure there are good transitions between primary school to secondary school by:
   - Asking us directly about our concerns or worries and working together to find solutions.
   - Making sure everyone has opportunities to meet with new teachers in small groups, even if they can't go to new school buildings.

Climate Change

32. Address the climate emergency by improving our production and use of renewable sources of energy and transitioning to using electric cars only.

33. Protect and enhance nature across the country.

34. More needs to be done to educate people about the causes and impacts of climate change, and practical things we can learn and do to adapt to its effects.

Chapter 8

A Strategy to turn our Asks into a Scotland-wide Manifesto

After finalising our 34 Asks, in workshop six we also talked about developing a strategy to transform these into a manifesto that speaks to the priorities of as many children and young people across Scotland as possible. In their Taskforce teams, Young Consultants worked to fill out a grid on what the biggest challenges might be in taking the Asks forward into a manifesto, and what strategy we might take to overcome as many of those challenges as possible (see Figure 15). We also asked what kinds of areas they might like to be involved in if additional opportunities arise for their participation in the future.

1) What is the biggest challenge(s) in creating a manifesto for all children and young people in Scotland?	2) How do we overcome the challenge(s)?	3) What Taskforce am I most interested in helping the Children and Young People's Commissioner for Scotland with further?

Figure 15 A Mural grid filled out by Young Consultants in workshop 6 to consider how we might create a strategy for turning their Asks into a manifesto

Below we present analysis of the themes of this strategy-forming exercise and subsequent conversations with Young Consultants. We then present the steps we propose to take. We hope that you and/or organisations you work for or with may be interested in engaging with us as part of this strategy.

Problems to Consider and/or Overcome

Representation is Vital – For Fairness and for Weight of Evidence

Our Young Consultants were very clear that any manifesto development would need to incorporate a wide variety of children and young people's perspectives and experiences over the last year (see Figure 16):

> *'Most of the challenges are genuinely not knowing what other people are going through, because they wouldn't show up on the outside. So it will be harder to make a manifesto for all children and young people in Scotland. Because some people are going through different things to others.'* Young Consultant, girl, age 11

'Everyone's different and everyone needs different things. So no one can really say, 'well, that'll help' because some people might not be able to do that. So it'd be neat to kind of ask people what they need.' Young Consultant, girl, age 14

'Branch out more in Scotland. And so not just seeing like, locally, we could like branch out like more like different places, like up in the Highlands in Scotland and like to see their experience because they don't like live near a city centre.' Young Consultant, girl, age 14'

It is morally right to try to reach and include people who may not yet have had a chance to give their views, ensuring a solid evidence base when advocating for any proposed changes. This finding of common ground will make it more difficult for decision-makers to overlook the views of children and young people.

Figure 16 Young Consultants highlighted challenges and solutions around representations

We need to Communicate, Collaborate and Cooperate Effectively

Young Consultants emphasised that we need to find ways to effectively communicate with children and young people and other stakeholders (see Figure 17). They also made it clear communication needed to account for their first priority of wide representation and that there may be limitations on how easy this is to do because of current restrictions on face-to-face interaction (especially for children and young people in Glasgow at the time). Therefore, we should try a variety of ways to get the word out. This includes engaging journalists and working with other organisations that have suitable platforms for having live conversations with children and young people:

"Putting out like a questionnaire or something, out to schools? To try and get them to do it through classes to see, 'what do you need?' Like, how can we help you get that? And like, find out what people in Scotland need… some people may not be able to access these kind of things [online workshops] …Some people that want to get their voice heard may not be able to.' Young Consultant, girl, age 14

'Talking to children from across Scotland and asking them like whether they agree or not, and like seeing how their circumstances are different. And then using like politicians and things to like spread our message.' Young Consultant, girl, age 13

Figure 17 Young Consultants highlighted challenges and solutions around communication, cooperation and collaboration

Getting Heard by the Right People

Many Young Consultants were concerned that they will not be heard by the people that can make a difference:

> *'We were mainly just talking about how difficult it would be to get the word of what we talked about, and influential people to actually listen, because all of our group are really proud of what we've come up with, and really kind of enthusiastic about seeing these changes happen. It's quite hard to imagine a future where these changes have actually taken place…. talking about how do we overcome this we're kind of thinking about how we can make sure we can keep the momentum going and find a way to show the people in power that young people are wanting this change, we want to see it happen. And then we're just talking about lobbying politicians, finding a way to show like the scale of young people because I think although we're a very small group, if you put this out wider across Scotland, I think you'd probably find a lot of people think the same.'* Young Consultant, girl, age 15

> *'We want like younger people to get like their voices hard. Because like, most like people, especially in [name of city], like, they seem to like think the kids like don't want to have an opinion… Or they like, when kids voice their opinion they think it's a load o' rubbish.'* Young Consultant, girl, age 14

They want to identify and collaborate with influential adults who genuinely care about the Young Consultants experiences and recognise the quality of their proposals for building a Scotland that respects their human rights (see Figure 18). They also recognised that individual priorities and perspectives on the details of the right action might vary, and therefore it was important to try to discuss and incorporate differences of opinion.

They expected things reached by agreement by children and young people may elicit some opposition by adults, but felt that would be missing the point of their manifesto. A core solution to this is to focus on the priorities shared most strongly by them and by the Government as the basis for discussion and next steps, with the unifying goal being ultimately to create change for the better.

> *'Equal everyone out by improving mental health and physical health, education, food, activities, nature access etc.'* Quote from Mural board (Figure 18)

Being Heard by the right people

1) What is the biggest challenge(s) in creating a manifesto for all children and young people in Scotland?

people disagreeing	Difficult to get majority of people on board with the idea - no change might happen as it's radical	getting people to understand the issues	To get our opinion heard and voiced over	Getting people to listen (esp. those in power)
IF WE ARE FEELING SAD OR ANGRY WE SHOULD TALK TO AN ADULT OR SOMEONE WE TRUST ABOUT OUR FEELINGS	children not being heard or ignored	solving the main issues	getting people more aware of the challenges	

2) How do we overcome the challenge(s)?

discuss the issues instead	try and work together co-operatively	try to equal everyone out by improving mental and physical health, education, food, activities, nature access etc	using politicians and big figures to spread our messages	Lobbying politicians on mass
calmly discussing the issues and explaining the veiws	make sure people listen to kids in scotland	For the people in charge to listen to the children of Scotland	clearly noting them down and taking action	teaching people about the issues

Figure 18 Young Consultants highlighted challenges and solutions around being heard by the rights people

Timelines

Young Consultants acknowledged that children and young people may find it hard to think about the future whilst still experiencing the difficulties of the pandemic – especially children in primary school (see Figure 19). They also felt it vital to note that children and young people participating need to be made aware that they might not see the changes they propose, or see them within timeframes where they might personally benefit most:

> *'I think we kind of accept that it won't probably affect us. It'd be great if it did, but we're kind of seeing how it's difficult to see that.'* Young Consultant, girl, age 15

There may even be arguments from some stakeholders that change is already on the horizon and so their views are not needed on subjects such as this year's SQA assessments procedure.
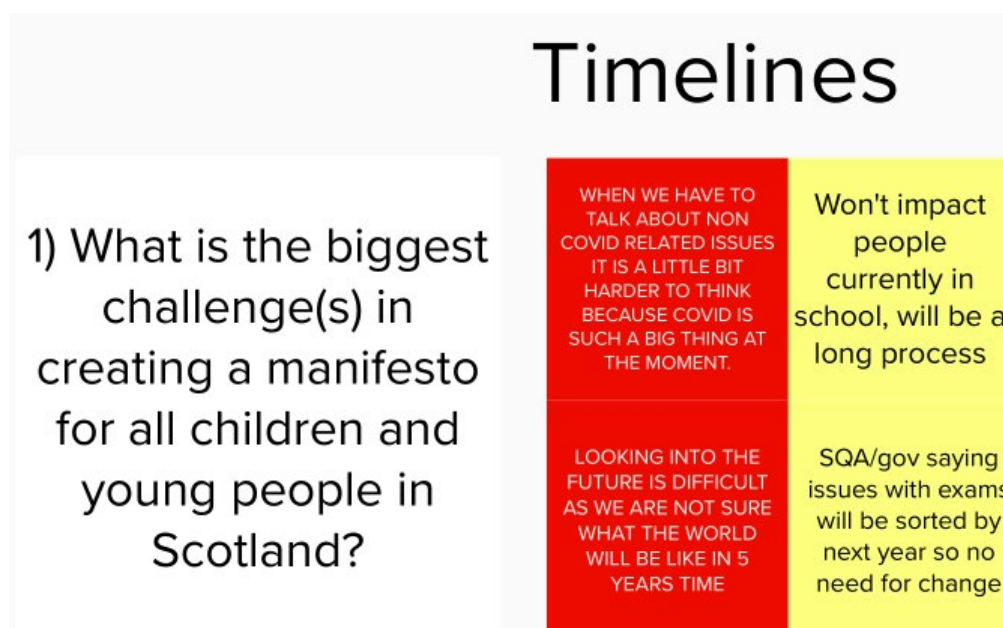
Figure 19 Young Consultants highlighted challenges around Timelines

Our Proposed Strategy

Taking into account the problems highlighted above, and proposed solutions, we present the Young Consultants' Strategy to transform the Asks into a Scotland-wide manifesto for children and young people:

1. **Give as many children and young people across Scotland as possible opportunity to object and contribute to these Asks based on their own specific experiences.** This involves a survey, leveraging schools, organisations, their own informal networks and multiple channels. We must make an effort to reach out and be inclusive, especially to those whose rights are most at risk. We think it is important to engage with teachers around our educational Asks, to understand their perspective, and to ensure they know that young people appreciate the challenges they have faced this last year too. Young Consultants see these Asks as supporting teachers to support them.

2. **Identify and seek support for the Asks from changemakers who care deeply about children and young people's experiences and future, or about improving the areas which they address in a broader sense.** Find safe and sensible ways of engaging with them, hopefully face-to-face if the pandemic recovery allows, and ask for their help in spreading knowledge and sharing opportunities for building the conversation and support.

3. **Frame debate and purposeful action around the priorities where we have strongest agreement amongst children and young people and Scottish Government.** Make it clear that all our Asks are underpinned by the need to progress children's rights, to attend to core concerns, and to work towards a level playing field of opportunity for all. Although, our Asks seek a better Scotland for all, we agree that in the first instance a special focus should be given to children and young people who are having the toughest time. Some may disagree with our Asks, but they cannot deny the very difficult experiences from which they emerged, and the need to improve these experiences moving forward.

4. **Acknowledge and work within the context of COVID-19**. A strategy must take into consideration that change takes time, and the potential challenge for some children and young people to engage in thinking about their future, while they are still embroiled in the

experience of the pandemic. Any communications and dialogue about change and recovery needs to be clear and sensitive to these circumstances, and to continue beyond the process of discussing the Asks. We also need to remember that these Asks were put together during a crisis. They therefore bring into sharp focus general problems and improvements, but some aspects relate specifically to the pandemic. These may inform a kinder, more effective, response to future crises.

What's Next?

We will begin implementing this strategy across the next few months, releasing a survey, and helping to draw together key stakeholders that might help the manifesto be realised. We aim to align the presentation of these Asks to the passage of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation) (Scotland) Bill which will see children's rights fully incorporated into Scots law. If you would like to be a part of this, please contact Jenny Wood for more information and further discussions: jenny.wood@aplaceinchildhood.org

Chapter 9

Implications

As with the first round of this research, the findings confirm to us that the right of children and young people to participate can and must be upheld, especially in a time of crisis. The COVID-19 pandemic has led to a world-wide shock and an increasing feeling amongst all that things will not be the same again. Projects such as this, and an increasing propensity for activism from children and young people (such as the school strikes for climate) show that they already have the will to be involved in creating a better world. In order to facilitate their effective participation in these decisions, we must recognise their capabilities to take part and work to develop their skills in handling decisions that involve complexity, systems thinking and taking responsibility amidst uncertainty.

This project has demonstrated children and young people's capacity to deliver high-quality practical and actionable recommendations under stressful circumstances, as the result of discussing and making sense of a highly-charged and complex situation. Notwithstanding ethical considerations, the clarity, intelligence and maturity of the work produced by the 10/11-year-olds has left us in no doubt that we could have involved younger children effectively in similar discussions. It has also shown that digital tools can enable engagement and collaboration with children and young people in times of crisis, and in developing an effective response strategy.

Over a year of restricted freedoms and severe disruption to education, relationships, socialisation and leisure have been very difficult for children and young people to cope with. Nonetheless, their resilience shines through in this project and their understanding of what has and has not worked for them is invaluable information for us and for policy makers to take into consideration. Above all, the need for some level of certainty for children and young people during crisis situations is evident. A resounding theme from all our conversations with Young Consultants is that a more stable environment through which to learn would have improved their overall well-being through the pandemic. It may have been that such an environment would require a consistent, but possibly over-cautious, approach at times. However, knowing what would be happening from one week to the next could have assisted their ability to cope with such ongoing difficulty. Instead, the ever-shifting framework has exacerbated impacts on well-being and, through weariness and apathy, levels of risk.

As we now progress through the pandemic and into a period of recovery, we must consider the experiences children and young people have been through and think about how we help them navigate an increasingly unpredictable future. Skills such as adaptability, collaboration, and creativity seem more important now than ever, and we have the opportunity to think about how we robustly build these into approaches and systems going forward. Children and young people have now experienced the volatility and consequences of the rigidity of some of the systems (such as education) we have built our society upon and have never been more able to help policy makers understand where the solutions lie. Through a sharpened understanding of their weaknesses, it has also resulted in a deeply sceptical view of these systems. Even among the youngest of the Young Consultants, systems which purport to care for their well-being and their futures, have come to seem more machine-like, and this has sparked a desire to improve them for others, with sensible ideas for doing so. It will benefit Scotland to listen very closely to the views of the Young Consultants and other children and young people and understand where they are coming from and integrate these findings as we seek sustainable solutions beyond the pandemic, and in preparing for the possibility of further outbreaks.

Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to the biggest change in our way of life for a generation. As an age group, children and young people have been disproportionately affected by COVID-19 restrictions. They have been through, and continue to suffer, unprecedented changes, challenges and sacrifices. Some of these will have medium- and longer-term consequences to their health, well-being, education, view of the world and confidence in those that run it. In the response, their voice and the realisation of their human rights has been largely overlooked and deprioritised, and this must now be corrected.

In this report, we have highlighted the findings of a Virtual Participatory Action Research project with 25 Young Consultants from across Scotland, that builds upon findings collected during and after both nation-wide lockdowns in 2020 and 2021. This research approach involves participants in defining, describing, and challenging the problems they face, with resultant action a core part of the methodology. Despite different ages, backgrounds and locations, their degree of consensus on their experiences, and how to improve them, implies there may be external validity to these findings for children and young people nationwide, thereby providing an evidence base for quality decisions on their behalf, now and in the future.

In highlighting our Young Consultants' findings and taking a next step in our action research approach of building their Asks into a Scotland-wide manifesto for children and young people, we seek to understand as fully as possible the core and common themes and test the extent to which the Asks are representative. We want to hear more diverse views and opinions that will help us reach the broadest understanding of what we can do in future to bring about necessary and inclusive change.

At APiC we will continue to highlight the necessity of children and young people's participation in grounded, qualitative projects. We are keen to support the development of robust methodologies that can enable this within constrained circumstances, and support work around implementing the incorporation of the UNCRC into Scots law. Moreover, there is a continued and ongoing necessity to support children and young people's capacity to understand the wider world and the complex systems and processes that define our future.

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