GROWING UP UNDER COVID-19

Action research – how are we doing it?

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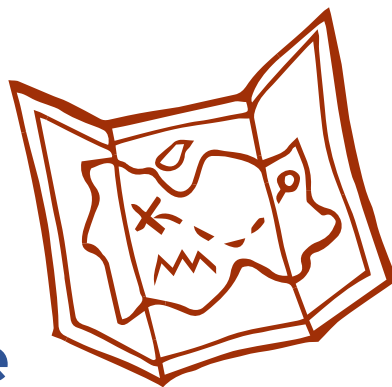
About this guide

Over the coming months, young people from seven countries will be capturing their experiences of what life is like during the COVID-19 crisis, and how it affects them and the people around them.

They will have an opportunity to work as co-researchers, to examine the actions that are taken by politicians, family members and the public in response to the crisis, and to suggest what else is needed to ensure that young people's views are heard and acted upon now and in the future. This will involve the following:

✓ Capturing and sharing their views and experiences, using different methods

✓ Sharing thoughts, experiences and findings on a safe online platform along with nine other young people from diverse backgrounds as part of a small group (we are calling this a 'research panel').

✓ Coming together as a research panel to share, comment on, discuss and analyse each other's experiences and findings.

✓ Working with a professional researcher who will provide ongoing support, and who will interview participants from time to time to understand their situation better.

✓ Hearing from young people from seven different countries in the project on the research topics. These are:

| UK | Italy | Singapore | Lebanon |

UK
England, Wales, Scotland
and Northern Ireland

This guide sets out what's involved with the project, including everything you need to get started with 'action research' (we'll explain what this means, shortly...)

Young people have been provided with a research toolkit, for you to refer to as they go along, with useful information, links, and examples of different types of research methods. This toolkit will be expanded and developed further with young people's contributions.

Participants are also receiving **training and support from an adult researcher** who is working with them and with others in their group, and they can ask them questions at any point during the project.

What is the research about?

The overall aim of the research is:

To understand how young people are experiencing and responding to the COVID-19 public health crisis, and to make suggestions for how to promote young people's wellbeing and rights during and after the pandemic.

In achieving this aim, the researchers will work with young people as co-researchers to understand:

1. How the COVID-19 crisis is affecting young people's everyday lives and those around them and how they are responding to the situation.

2. Young people's perspectives about how the COVID-19 crisis is being managed, how it is talked about in the media, the measures put in place, the extent to which young people's needs and circumstances have been taken account of and the contribution young people can make as active citizens.

3. What young people think about the attitudes, values and behaviours of others and the positive and negative consequences for society (e.g. families spending more time together, reduced travel and carbon emissions, community support, collective responsibility or acts of kindness).

4. What messages young people have for decision makers about managing future crises and safeguarding young people's rights in the future, about priorities for the recovery, rebuilding society and young people's role in the recovery process.

Young people are **equal partners** on this project, and we will work together to decide how best to answer these research questions.

How will we do the research?

The research will involve young people...

Recording thoughts, experiences, situation, observations and questions in whatever way they choose – whether visual, audio or written.

Observing, listening and talking with others (for example family members, friends, community members) about their actions, views and perspectives.

Noting down thoughts or reactions to events, communications, facts, and information (e.g. news reports, TV programmes, online information, COVID-19 infection rates etc.) they see and hear.

Analysing your findings about what is happening, and coming up with their own conclusions and questions.

Using their voice to share and post thoughts, findings and questions in their research panel platform, and comment on other people's experiences.

There will be three complete cycles (or 'waves') of research on this project:

| summer 2020 | → | autumn 2020 | → | spring 2021 |

Each cycle will involve:

- ✓ Young people's individual research (inquiries), documentation & reflection
- ✓ Sharing questions and findings on the project platform
- ✓ Dialogue with other young people on in the research panels
- ✓ Researcher interviews with each young person
- ✓ Learning and sharing within research panels and with young people in other countries

An overarching question to guide the research is

"What story do I want to tell about living through COVID-19?"

What does 'action research' involve?

Action research is a different type of research involving participants actively:
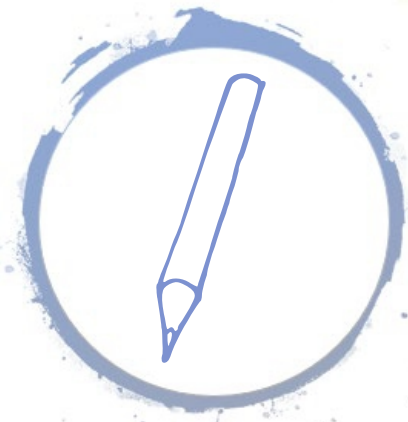
researching and learning from experience as it happens

using different methods and forms of expression

hearing other people's experiences and perspectives in order to develop a better understanding of a situation and the decisions affecting that situation

Reflecting on and making sense of experiences and deciding what is important

using that knowledge to explore possibilities for improving the situation

Here are some key differences between action research and 'traditional' research:

Traditional research	Action research
Researcher is expert	All participants are experts
Agenda driven by researcher	Agenda jointly developed with participants
Researcher decides questions	Questions arise from co-inquiries
Researcher collects responses to questions	Participants document learning themselves
Analysis happens after data collection	Analysis & sense making happens throughout
Researcher analyses data	Analysis undertaken by/with participants
Outcomes validated by researchers/funders	Outcomes have value for participants
Findings reported for external action	Participants identify priorities for change

Normally in research the researcher decides on the focus and questions for participants to simply respond to. In action research, participants are equal and active partners in the research, sharing their knowledge and experience and being involved in analysis and identifying what is significant.

Based on your own experiences and issues that matters to you, and by supporting you to learn from each other's views and experiences, we will develop a better understanding of what COVID-19 means for young people, and how we can respond.

Action research is exploratory and creative – we may not know the 'right' questions to ask, only that there is an issue to respond to. Action research is not only about collecting responses to predefined questions, but also research that seeks to ask new questions.

New issues and questions will emerge from this process to explore further during the next wave of action research.

A few things about Participatory Action Research (PAR)

- PAR is not a method, it is an **approach to learning** to improve a situation
- **People are active participants** in researching and changing their lives on their own terms
- Involves **action and reflection**
- Practice-based - rooted in **everyday lives**
- Involves people **asking critical questions to challenge** thinking & practices
- Action focused - Emphasis on developing new understanding that can **inform change**
- **Creative & Emergent (innovative)** - new thinking arises out of reflection and dialogue about stories from experience

Action research involves cycles of reflection and action. Through research and dialogue (discussion and debate), the researchers will learn more about the topic and will have opportunities to reflect on what they find. This will provide new ideas to explore. And then the cycle will start over, with more discussion and sharing ideas.

There is no set way for doing action research but in this study an action research process might look like this:

Action: share experiences

Action: questions to explore

Action: Do something, find out more

Reflection: What are we learning?

Reflection with others: Develop understanding

Reflection: Learn from experience

How will we know what to research?

The **first strand of the research** asks the question:

'How is the COVID-19 crisis is affecting your everyday life, and the people around you, and how you are responding to the situation?'

The COVID-19 pandemic has sometimes been seen as a series of separate problems, such as *'how should schools and colleges respond?'* Or, *'how can a vaccine be made available?'* But in reality, the pandemic, and the lives of young people living through **is much more complicated**. This is why it is important to hear directly from young people about how COVID -19 is affecting them, and the people around them, and the actions taken.

The research will provide an opportunity to try and make sense of this complexity. As only an individual can experience their life, young people are the experts here and their reflections will help to understand how different aspects of their lives are inter-connected and what kinds of support or services would be the most helpful at times like this.

The diagram over the page explores some of these themes. Young people may be affected in these different areas of their lives in different ways

… and this means that diversity is a big part of the research

The research provides an opportunity to get a **much more detailed understanding of what the crisis has been like for people in different circumstances and from different backgrounds**. So, for example, young people with caring responsibilities, those living with health problems, those living in isolated rural areas, LGBTQ young people, and young people from a minority ethnic background, to name but a few.

The great thing about this project is that there is a really diverse group, and this is one of the things that makes the research so exciting and important.

'The big picture' – how is the crisis affecting you and people you know?

These themes are just a starting point and a guide for the research and there may be other themes or issues that the young people who are taking part consider important and relevant to their particular situation.

The **second strand of the research** relates to:

'How the crisis is being managed by decision makers, and by the general public, and your recommendations for action'

This relates to young people's views about, and satisfaction with, the decisions that are being taken by politicians and other influencers within their country (or wider than this), and then coming up with **recommendations for action**. As with the previous strand, young people will decide what's important. This might include topics like the ones shown in the diagram.

The emergency measures being taken	→	Young people's views on the speed and type of actions taken by the authorities, e.g. school closures, social distancing, restrictions on movement or privacy.
Young people as citizens	→	How fairly young people have been treated, how they are represented in the media, whether some within society are being overlooked
Public attitudes, values and behaviours	→	How the public is behaving during the crisis: where public attitudes have made things worse... or better (e.g. for the environment, acts of kindness).
Looking to the future...getting it right next time	→	The learning for future crises, and what can be done better to ensure that young people have a voice and that their rights aren't compromised.

We include here **a few examples of 'key questions'** guiding the the research process, which participants will keep in mind when exploring their selected theme/s:

Q. What feels important for you, about this topic?

Q. What are we learning about this topic, that we did not know before?

Q. What are the actions taken by government and other public authorities about this theme (e.g. school closures, social distancing, restrictions placed on mobility, contact tracing etc.)? Do you think they are adequate/sufficient?

Q. Are these measures fair? Are they affecting all social groups in the same way? What are the intended or unintended consequences for young people?

Q. What could have been done better, to improve the situation of young people?

Q. What questions does this raise for how well we as a country are managing this crisis?

Q. How reliable is the information provided by the media during the pandemic?

Q. How are young people portrayed by the media? Is this an accurate representation?

Q. Are there any unexpected positive consequences of the crisis (e.g. reduced travel and carbon emissions, community support, collective responsibility, and acts of kindness)?

Q. What could have been done better, to improve the situation of young people?

More questions will emerge from the group discussions, the conversations with the adult researcher, and the research process .

Further information, resources and case studies are available on the website:

www.GUC19.com