



TO LOCKDOWN AND BACK

Research summary | **November 2020**
Young people's lived experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic

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Introduction

This short report provides an accessible summary of the key messages from the first research report published as part of the Growing up Under COVID-19 (GUC19) research project.

Funded by the Nuffield Foundation, this project is a collaboration between adult researchers and 70 young people aged 14–18 who are living in the UK (England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales), Italy, Lebanon and Singapore. It was set-up to create a platform for young people from diverse backgrounds to share their lived experiences of life during the COVID-19 pandemic, their views about how the crisis is being handled, and their recommendations for adult decision makers.

The project starts with the principle that young people are rights holders and experts in their own lives and involves supporting young people to document their own lives during the pandemic and provide a commentary on public and official responses to the pandemic over 18 months. It combines youth-led Participatory Action Research (PAR) with group discussions, observation notes, interviews and ongoing collaborative analysis with young people.

Over 18 months, young people from each of the countries are working in small groups (panels) to share their experiences from different cultural, political and socio-economic contexts, with each group supported by an adult researcher. The participants are a diverse group, including BAME young people, LGBTQ+ young people, young carers, young people in care or care leavers, and young people experiencing mental health problems. Further information is available on the project website at: www.GUC19.com.

Aims and research questions

The overall aim of the research is:

To understand how young people are experiencing and responding to the COVID-19 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 are working with young people as co-researchers to understand:

- a. How is the COVID-19 crisis affecting young people's everyday lives and those around them, and how are they responding to the situation?
- b. What are young people's perspectives about how the COVID-19 crisis is being managed, how it is talked about in the media, and the measures that are put in place?
- c. To what extent are young people's needs and circumstances being taken into account, and what is the actual and potential contribution of young people as active citizens?
- d. What do young people think about the attitudes, values, and behaviours of others, and the positive and negative consequences of the COVID-19 crisis for society?
- e. What do young people perceive as the priorities for the recovery, for rebuilding society and young people's roles in the recovery process?
- f. What messages do young people have for decision makers about managing future crises, and safeguarding young people's rights in the future?

Overview of key findings

Across the countries within the project, it was apparent that the **pandemic had impacted on young people in profound and contradictory ways**. At one level, there were concerns about a lost period of adolescence, missed education, the potential scarring effects for future education and work as well as deep concerns about political and social injustices unfolding around them. At the same time, young people spoke of unexpected positive changes in their lives concerning their self-care, wellbeing, relationships, and realising new abilities.

The research highlighted the **polarising effects of the COVID-19 crisis**. What, for some, was a period of self-reflection and re-connecting, was for others isolating and traumatic. Lockdown was immensely challenging for young people with pre-existing mental health problems and those experiencing family conflict, and it often exacerbated the issues that they faced. Young people also expressed concerns about their peers whom they considered to be at risk of harm while cut off from their support networks or people experiencing disadvantage, particularly with respect to maintaining a good quality of education given access issues.

More positively, the COVID-19 crisis showcased the **importance of social media and online platforms** as alternative contexts for communication and participation – in maintaining contact with peers and family, in sourcing news and information about the pandemic and global events and supporting wellbeing, in producing content and obtain visibility. Many young people had turned away from mainstream news and were drawing on trusted media outlets – from vloggers to social networks, whilst being mindful of the pitfalls of fake news and misinformation. Some young people had set-up WhatsApp study groups with their peers, and others had participated in youth-led online forums or webinars to discuss educational priorities post-COVID.

The research highlighted **problems with access to services during the pandemic and accountability of public officials in ensuring young people's rights and entitlements** and underlined how far young people's fundamental rights have been marginalised within the public and political responses to the pandemic. This was most visible in the sacrifices to young people's education in the interests of the public health greater good, but also apparent with regard to young people's identities, freedom of expression, wellbeing and civic participation. Across the seven countries, young people understood and valued their right to education and were concerned about the decisions taken on their behalf that stood to influence their futures. Young people experienced mixed responses from professionals, with some responding creatively in maintaining provision, but in other cases where poor communication reflected a reliance on the discretion of individual professionals (including teachers), with no obvious recourse if this fell short of expectations.

Young people expressed a sense of not being heard and **not having their diverse situations, experiences and struggles sufficiently acknowledged** in decision making, whilst at the same time feeling negatively portrayed in the media or marginalised completely. This was in stark contrast to their experiences of participating actively in civic and political life through volunteering and youth groups.

Fundamentally, the research highlighted the **shortcomings of accepted forms of political and social representative democratic participation** during the crisis. Young people expressed deep concerns at the lack of young voices in respect of decisions taken and wanted evidence that their governments had a longer-term plan for recovery involving young people. They called for more sophisticated and diverse modes of engagement, including of vulnerable or marginalised youth, while also mobilising on their own terms through direct social action.

Different traditions and cultures of participation were apparent from the interactions with young people framed by the socio-political backdrop within their country. In Lebanon, participation often had a more immediate 'everyday' resonance, in access to the internet or basic amenities, and longstanding civil rights issues had informed young people's views on political processes. In Italy, civic participation was somewhat muted, lacking the opportunities for youth voice that have been mainstreamed within the UK. While there were many commonalities in the outcomes that young people hoped to see, these cultural differences became apparent in how young people thought change should be achieved. For many, faced with past experience of not seeing results through formal channels, many saw protest movements and youth entrepreneurship as the credible alternatives.

The research points towards the **need for a more holistic, better planned strategy for managing the pandemic** and future public health emergencies of a global nature, and towards the crisis of global governance that young people articulated through the interviews. It suggests an urgent need for political leaders to stop and listen to those they are elected to serve, to engage in dialogue and be open to learning from the lived realities of different groups.

Overall recommendations

In this project, we have drawn on evidence from young people to formulate a set of recommendations for future decision making. These are summarised below, with reference to the intended target audiences.

For governments and public authorities

- To ensure the representation of a diverse group of young people on central decision-making forums and committees overseeing the management of the pandemic at a government level, and engaging young people directly in evidence gathering, analysis, dialogue, planning, and formulation of National Recovery Plans.
- To review the representation of young people on established national or regional youth democratic participatory structures, to ensure that they actively reflect the diversity of the populations that they purport to serve, and to take action to draw a membership from grassroots organisations and groups, including those that work with vulnerable or marginalised young people. Young people should also receive feedback on how their views were incorporated in the decision-making processes and what outcomes this generates.
- To establish national minimum standards, setting out and ensuring effective communication of young people's educational entitlements during the COVID-19 pandemic and minimum requirements for schools; to establish monitoring mechanisms, and to consider instituting new policies or legislative measures where necessary to ensure that standards are met.
- To independently evaluate schools' responses to the COVID-19 crisis, establishing the range of measures taken and their sufficiency; to appraise the relative effectiveness of educational, welfare and safeguarding measures adopted during the crisis, and publish and disseminate the findings. This could include or might be supplemented with a nationally representative survey of young people on their learning and wellbeing.
- To review the availability and access to mental health and wellbeing services for young people in a post-COVID context, to include consideration of the role and capacity of school-based counselling and therapeutic services and support and to share good practices regarding online support for mental health and wellbeing.

For schools, youth organisations and service providers

- To review and strengthen forums for engaging young people in school or organisational planning and decision making during and after the COVID-19 pandemic; ensuring that mechanisms for decision-making are inclusive, and that these forums actively reflect the diversity of the populations that they purport to serve.
- To ensure the full transparency of decisions taken by school or organisational leadership regarding access, quality and inclusion within school education during the COVID-19 pandemic and to set out a service charter, or equivalent, formalising schools' commitments to ensure young people's right to a quality education.
- To facilitate young people to create and oversee peer support and self-help forums with regard to coping and thriving during lockdown, such as study groups, wellbeing support, and service-user forums.
- To create a school environment which values 'everyday' opportunities for dialogue between professionals and students about their needs and rights for their education and wellbeing during the recovery from the COVID-19 crisis, while ensuring that follow-up actions are transparent.

For broadcasters and the media

- To redress imbalances in the portrayal of young people during the pandemic, with more young people in journalistic and reporting roles; greater visibility of young people from diverse ages and backgrounds, and a celebration of young people's civic and social actions during the pandemic through personal stories.

Young people's personal experiences and outcomes from the pandemic

Personal coping and adjustment

- adjustments was psychological. Accepting that the COVID-19 crisis might be long-term gave young people a push to act, and it allowed them to invest their time in a range of social interests.
- Young people quite often **engaged in activities that reflected their values and beliefs at a time of crisis**. Civic responsibilities such as volunteering or taking part in youth parliaments gave a sense of contributing to the public effort, while arts, music and writing gave a means to process their thoughts and feelings and to mark key milestones. It was not uncommon for people to turn to, or rediscover, their faith or spirituality.

Family, friends and peers

- The crisis **impacted tangibly on the amount of time young people spent with family members**. This had both negative aspects, such as limited privacy and reduced contact during social distancing, especially across multiple household families, and more positive ones such as spending more time with loved ones during lockdown. This quite often gave young people insights to their parents and carers or siblings that they had not noticed before.
- The lockdown period also **exposed similarities and differences in values and beliefs within families**. For some, this resulted in healthy debates and discussion between the generations. For others, family life was a source of tension. Examples included LGBTQ+ young people locked down with family members who did not recognise or value their gender identity, and young people who were experiencing abusive relationships.
- As with other social impacts of the pandemic, **young people were concerned for peers whom they considered to be more vulnerable or at risk of exploitation or harm**. Young people did not always know anyone who was affected personally, but were aware of these issues from the news, social media, or their own research. This included the action research activities undertaken as part of the project.
- With schools closed and reduced opportunities to meet in person, **social media and online platforms**

assumed a new significance during lockdown. From gaming to social media, these tools were key to maintaining their support system and helped to consolidate existing friendships and to form new ones. Even young people who were already active on social media described a shift in how their online lives became more fluid and dynamic during lockdown while face to face contact was restricted.

- **Not all young people had positive experiences online during lockdown,** however. Different levels of home internet access and parental permissions affected how or whether they could participate in online gaming or group chats. Arguments were particularly isolating at a time when online friendship groups were such a lifeline, and peer pressures challenged young people's personal views about social distancing.

Wellbeing implications of the crisis

- Despite the anxiety caused by events of the pandemic, **the wellbeing implications were complex.** Traumatic events were offset by positives relating to family time and reduced academic pressures. Often encouraged by friends and family, young people took the chance to re-invest in their wellbeing and their self-care. They developed new routines, exercise and sleep patterns and re-appraised their life goals.
- Many recognised that wellbeing was something they had neglected previously. While they were anxious about missed schoolwork, they also realised the **extent to which they had been affected by academic pressures, before the COVID-19 crisis.** The 'pause' of the lockdown allowed them time to reflect on how this had impacted on their wellbeing, and on their sense of perspective about what was important to them.
- Young people reported periods of **generalised anxiety,** at moments when the situation had caught up with them. Social distancing measures, school closures and more time spent on social media were **especially problematic for those who were already experiencing mental health problems,** with the (re)emergence of self-harming and eating disorders at a time when young people were spending long periods alone and separated from support networks.
- Young people's perceived ability to cope with the pandemic and its effects varied considerably. While some felt resilient and well-supported, others expressed **more serious concerns about the impact of social distancing and isolation over a longer period of time** and identified a need for additional services and support in the event of this scenario.
- Overall, **young people often felt they were no longer the same person as pre-COVID.** The profound nature of the crisis, the reflections and new responsibilities it had generated, had challenged them to become more mature and self-aware. At the same time, they were aware that they had forgone important life experiences such as school graduation, travelling or relationships. This contributed towards a sense of having missed out on part of their adolescence.

Access to education, medical care and other services

- Access to medical care was a widely reported challenge. Young people spoke of cancelled non-urgent medical appointments, **reduced contact with professionals, and a shift to online delivery.** This was managed with varying degrees of success, as services struggled to adapt. Young people sometimes felt that **their needs had been deprioritised,** and that professionals were less accountable than pre-COVID.
- Satisfaction with replacement telephone or video consultations varied considerably. Young people were often **sceptical about the effectiveness of remote support for medical care or therapeutic services,** and some had cancelled appointments as a result. Young people's needs and preferences differed, however, and some were comfortable with remote access, or had taken to self-help via online sources.
- **Access to education ran through young people's experiences of the crisis.** From IT access to online teaching, schools differed considerably in their response. Young people in all countries were troubled that not everyone had access to a quality education during this period, or even to a formal education at

all. There were **wide variations in personal experiences and at a school and country level** in this respect.

- Non-formal educational contexts such as youth work and participatory forums also featured heavily in young people's accounts of lockdown, in the UK especially. This included examples of youth-initiated debates and online networks. Young people also made use of social media and apps to establish informal study groups.

Experiences of home schooling and online learning

- Young people generally had **strong views about the quality of education that they had received and how their school and teachers had adapted**. They generally recognised that schools were having to improvise, and that trial-and-error was to be expected. They were **more positive in cases where schools and teachers had listened and adapted their approach**, in response to young people's needs and circumstances.
- The availability of individual teachers was also important to young people during the lockdown. Many had a **good relationship with particular teachers that had continued during lockdown** online, and through telephone contact to check on their wellbeing. Others found their schools wanting for communication during the crisis and pointed towards **a perceived lack of accountability where teachers had cut contact**.
- Young people reported both advantages and drawbacks from home schooling. Some valued the extra flexibility to vary the pace between subjects that they found more or less difficult; to study at times when they were the most productive, and to wrap their learning around other family tasks and routines. They felt that they had developed self-study skills that were somewhat under-developed prior to the crisis.
- On the downside, young people invariably found that **pausing and reviewing video content was time consuming**, and they missed the interaction with teachers and a more structured schedule. **Motivation was also a challenge**, arising from the distraction of mobile phones, and the emotional impact of wider events surrounding the crisis.
- Although there were individual examples of schools responding creatively and pro-actively to the lockdown situation, there were also many more examples where the crisis had **exposed gaps in teachers' skills and confidence with digital tools and platforms**. Young people felt that this had been something of a wake-up call, and that schools needed to catch-up, given the likelihood that there would be future lockdowns and the advantages that digital technologies might bring to the education system.

Managing the crisis – young people's views on political and public health responses



- Overall, young people had a clear sense of how the pandemic was managed in terms of whether they thought the 'right' things were done and the role of leaders. They commonly perceived that the global response was too slow and lacked coordination, with a general failure of countries to learn from previous experiences, such as SARS, and from countries that already locked down.
- Across all countries in the study, young people consistently noted countries they felt had responded well and countries that had not. it was noted that **countries that seemed to have responded better tended to be more centralised** with higher levels of deference to government decisions, in contrast to more liberal nations where individual rights were privileged over the health of the nation and tougher measures.

National level responses

- At a national level, young people understood that the pandemic presented leaders with an unprecedented situation that many were unfamiliar with. However, whilst **some countries were recognised as responding quickly and decisively**, others were noted as being slow to respond and put actions in place.
- Young people supported clear and simple measures such as lockdown and mask wearing. In many cases, the **release of lockdown was seen to happen too soon and too quickly** and be determined by the imperative of preventing a slump in the economy at the expense of keeping people safe.
- Provision of economic/**financial support measures were seen as essential** but not available in all countries and with a lack of support for particular disadvantaged groups.

Young people feeling marginalised

- **Young people generally felt their needs and concerns were not reflected** in decisions and actions taken in response to the pandemic, and that their views were not taken seriously by public authorities and schools. Some young people, especially in Italy, said they felt they were invisible in political decisions. Singapore was an exception whereby young people felt their situations had been considered in government actions.

- Young people, especially in the UK, felt they had been **negatively portrayed as a problem in the media**, acting irresponsibly and blamed for surges in infection rates. Whilst some noted this did happen in a minority of cases, young people also highlighted many adults acted irresponsibly, giving rise to a sense of generational injustice.
- Where measures had been put in place for young people, this tended to focus on immediate issues concerning **education at the expense of wider issues and concerns such as mental wellbeing**.
- Many **measures were ill conceived** according to young people. This included the inequities of exam grading, which appeared to impact negatively on more disadvantaged students, and provision of online learning without recognising that some families do not have access to the internet or appropriate equipment.

Young people's views on local responses

- Young people's **views about impact of measures taken at a local level was variable**. Generally, young people were more positive where they saw evidence of effective working partnerships and communication between national government and local authorities. Whilst some models of good practice were noted, tensions were seen to exist in many cases with governments failing to provide adequate support. Where measures were acknowledged by young people as being right, there was a **perceived failure to enforce measures in practice**, for example with respect to mask wearing.
- **Cultural inconsistencies** were noted in government decisions, for example in the UK celebrating VE day but cancelling the Muslim Eid celebration.
- Many young people had been involved in different ways in **local community and volunteering initiatives**, which were felt to be a good way for people to make a difference.

Young people's voice and influence

- Overall young people felt there was a **lack of opportunity to speak out and influence decisions**. Even in the UK with a strong culture of youth participation, young people had found it difficult to be involved during the pandemic.
- There were widespread views amongst young people that adults held **negative attitudes towards young people influencing pandemic decisions** and see them as not capable of forming a view because of their age, which affects opportunities and commitment to engage with them.
- **Young people valued opportunities to talk and work with adult decision makers** where these opportunities arose. Some attempts to 'stage' encounters to show politicians were engaging with young people were seen as cynical actions for politicians' own political profile. Young people **called for meaningful and sustained dialogue with young people** and recognition of their potential contribution and their rights.
- Where young people resorted to organising their own social action or lobbying politicians, these efforts largely went unacknowledged. There was a widespread view that **social media offered a more democratic alternative for young people to speak out and exercise their voice and political agency**. Local community action and volunteering had also provided an opportunity for young people to make a positive contribution, and many of the positive examples given were in the context of young people's 'everyday' lives.
- Young people's **interest in politics and social issues had generally increased during the pandemic**, for themselves and in their observations and discussions with their peers. Although they were often critical of political systems, elitism and perceived corruption, this had motivated them to identify solutions to managing the crisis.
- Young people were often driven by a moral stance and commitment to justice, fairness, and working for the common good. There was a shared view among young people from across the different countries about the importance of working with governments and other decision-making authorities to create **better and more meaningful opportunities for dialogue and partnership with adult decision makers** in the future.

Young people's views about public attitudes, behaviours, social issues and the media during the pandemic

Views about public attitudes and behaviours

- Overall young people thought that the **public had been supportive** of the pandemic response in their countries. They were proud of the efforts and liked the sense of unity and community in how the public responded.
- Young people were also aware of people that had **flouted the government guidelines**. This made them angry but was partially **understandable** given the impact of the measures on people's livelihoods and wellbeing, and the lack of clarity in messages from governments.
- Young people thought that the majority their age had tended to **adhere to the governments' guidance**. However, young people were often blamed for being reckless and selfish. This was frustrating because it was often unfounded, but also because it minimised the positive ways young people had contributed, by doing errands, food deliveries and volunteering their time to support those who were older and vulnerable. Overall, young people **disliked generalising behaviours by age**.
- Young people commented on how **public attitudes had changed over time**. At first, the public were driven by fear and panic, but then started to be more relaxed about the rules. Some behaviours though, like hand sanitising, became more embedded in daily lives.
- Some young people thought things going back to normal was a positive, especially for those directly affected by the lockdown. Others were worried that things were reverting too quickly and with it would be an increase in selfish behaviour causing the virus to spread again. Many young people were concerned that the **sense of community was disappearing** as things went back to normal.

Perceptions of media coverage during the crisis

- Young people used a **range of media sources**, each with strengths and limitation. Through **main news platforms**, young people thought that they were able to stay up to date quickly and easily on the developments. However, messages were at times confusing and contradictory, with political biases and distorting views on minority groups.

- **Social media** was useful to receive updates and follow the political debate, learn from less mainstream viewpoints, and especially to express young people's views directly. However, young people were cautious about the risk of misinformation and fake news and fact checked information from multiple sources.
- Young people thought they had been either **excluded completely** from the media coverage; covered just with relation to education; or **misrepresented**, as only involved in reckless behaviour and parties. There was also a view that young people were excluded because their participation was less valued in their country. In general, young people complained about the **lack of an authentic voice** for young people and about media tendency to generalise experiences rather than thinking about different ages and groups.

The significance of wider social issues and young people's social activism

- Lockdown meant young people had time to read more widely on social issues, than they may be would have done otherwise. Two time-sensitive priorities with different responses during the pandemic was the **Black Lives Matters Movement** and the **Climate Emergency**. The timing and debate around the protests following the murder of George Floyd helped to raise awareness about the former, and with people being at home they were able to participate. There was some debate about the risks; but for the most part young people thought the protests were justified and done safely.
- In contrast, young people thought that attention had moved away from initiatives related to the climate emergency. Young people understood why this was happening but were concerned because this social action was urgently needed – and more so – with more disposable plastic being used in measures related to the virus.
- Finally, young people reflected on the **worsening state of many other issues** in their country as a consequence of the lockdowns, including unemployment, mental health, domestic abuse, poverty; as well as rising inequality on lots of other measures. They were concerned partly because the governments were unable to help, but also because it called into question what their future would look like for them.

Future proofing – rights, needs, and aspirations

Hopes and causes for optimism

- While young people continued to worry about the ongoing impact of the pandemic, many were looking forward to a **gradual return to normality** and were optimistic about the possibility of a returning to the way things were before the pandemic. Many young people had been following the news closely and were **hopeful that a vaccine would be developed soon**.
- The main factor that young people across the different groups were most optimistic and excited about was the return to school even despite social distancing and other restrictions. Young people were particularly looking forward to **seeing their friends again**. Young people were also excited about returning to their studies and being able to **progress academically**, especially those who were about to start university.
- Many young people were particularly looking forward to the return of fuller social lives, , and their extra-curricular activities, which represent an important part of their **identity and sense of self-worth**.
- Some young people were hopeful about a **“new normal” to replace the previous status quo**. Many young people were concerned by the deep societal inequalities that the pandemic had exposed and were hopeful that the pandemic would lead **to a fairer society**.

Ongoing causes of worry or concern about the pandemic

- Returning to school following the long period of absence was a source of worry for young people across the different groups. While some young people very concerned that this would **increase their exposure to the virus**, others were more concerned about **readjusting to an academic environment** and making up for lost time. Young people were very concerned that their ability to learn and produce good quality work had deteriorated over the lockdown period and that they had fallen behind their expected levels.
- Young people in the UK were particularly concerned about exam results **and how their grades might impact their university options and future careers**. This was particularly the case for 16-year

olds and 18-year olds who were waiting for public exam results. For some people, this sense of anxiety and frustration about exam results bordered on panic, and there was a sense of **hopelessness and powerlessness** as young people had so little control over their exam grades.

- Young people nearing university age were frustrated that they would not receive the same university experience as previous cohort, in terms of both the **academic and social opportunities** that university life normally entails.
- Many older young people were very concerned about the impact of interrupted schooling on their future job prospects and were concerned that **employers will not take their grades seriously** as they did not take the exams. Young people were very worried by the **government's emphasis on rebuilding the economy in the short-term**, with little consideration of the financial prospects of young people in the long term.
- Some young people were particularly concerned about the **sustainability of the current economic system**, and worried that the pressure to rebuild the economy will result in **further environmental degradation**.

Young people's recommendations for the recovery from the pandemic

- There was a shared view that governments should **adopt and enforce a rights-based approach** inspired by the UNCRC as a way to ensure that children's and young people's rights are safeguarded in the current pandemic, during the recovery, and should similar events occur in the future. This would also ensure their voices are heard and incorporated in any decision that matters to them.
- Young people expressed the need for policy-makers to **listen to a diverse group of young people**, to fully understand their needs, instead of interpreting or assuming them, and to capture the differential impact that the pandemic has had on different groups of young people and find adequate solutions.
- On the education side, young people recommended **improving communication between the government, schools, teachers, and young people** about how to manage the response to the crisis in the education sector. They suggested creating opportunities for clear and regular communication, and collaboratively developing guidelines on online schooling, how and with what frequency schools and teachers need to interact with students, and what is the level of support needed.
- Young people believed it is essential to **ensure good quality education for all**, despite the circumstances, by giving students – especially those facing extra difficulties – opportunities to catch up and by improving the way in which online schooling is delivered. Their suggestions included **widening access to technology and Internet connection** and providing disadvantaged families with IT devices and creating a public, national Wi-Fi network, with local hotspots. There was also an emphasis on training teachers on how to use online platforms and digital technologies and adapting their methodologies to keep students engaged.
- It was widely felt that governments should **plan for crisis management well in advance**, assessing how to deliver classes and exams in an effective way; considering the access and support needs and vulnerabilities of different groups of students; investing more substantially in schools, especially those located in more disadvantaged areas; and funding vaccine development and scientific research.
- Young people had a shared view that **young people's mental health should be prioritised**, by facilitating access to counselling services, increasing funding to youth and mental health services and providing young people and their families with more opportunities to talk about the difficulties they are experiencing. Young people with mental health disabilities would need specific support plans and assistance during and after future crisis. **Clearer government communication** would be needed to reduce the uncertainty surrounding the crisis management and help to protect young people's mental health.
- Other suggestions included that government and other service providers should **encourage young people to take care of their physical health**, for example by setting up social media initiatives helping

young people exercise from home and sending out articles providing ideas on what to do during quarantine. It was suggested that public authorities could subsidise access to sports and leisure equipment.

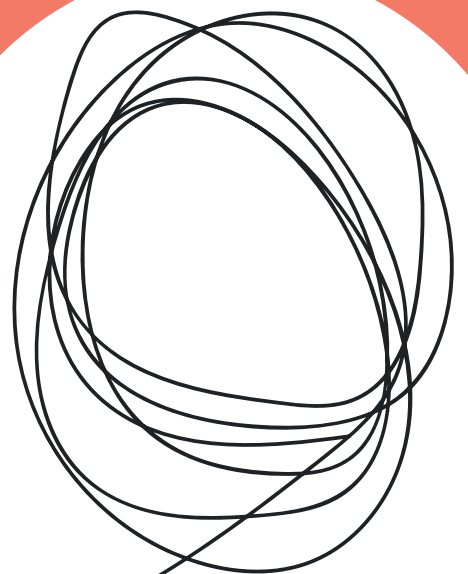
- There was a view that **financial support should also be provided to young people in times of crisis**, to compensate for the increased difficulty in finding a job and to ensure young people who live on their own, like university students, are able to pay rent. Young people felt that governments and service providers should also help students and young graduates to **apply for jobs and to gain work experience**.
- Aside from the pandemic specifically, young people were adamant that **governments should take bold action on climate change**, capitalising on the opportunities offered by the crisis itself to reduce carbon emissions, reduce unnecessary travel and switch investment towards the digital economy.

Young people's recommendations for participation in future decision making

Young people were asked directly about what actions they felt were needed by governments and public authorities to safeguard young people's rights at times of crisis, and to ensure their participation in decision-making.

- There was a widespread view that **young people should be given more exposure to politics and democratic systems and processes**, to gain experience and to better understand decision making processes in order to be aware of how they might contribute. It was noted that schools and local authorities have an important role to play in political education and engaging young people consultatively.
- Young people wanted **more frequent and meaningful opportunities for political participation and representation**, as well as better developed mechanisms to gather young people's views to inform decision-making process. Their suggestions included:
 - a. conducting representative youth surveys and online consultations
 - b. involving younger people in parliamentary processes
 - c. making youth parliament initiatives more diverse, inclusive and politically relevant
 - d. establishing youth advisory boards to advise on specific policy decisions
 - e. improving collaboration and dialogue between government and youth organisations
 - f. holding more open discussions and press conferences between government and young people; and
 - g. using social media more strategically, to encourage open and direct communication between politicians and young people.
- Young identified **educational decision making** as a priority area for young people's participation in policy and practice development surrounding the response to the pandemic. They thought that decision-makers should engage youth advisory boards or engage – even virtually – with a selection of young people from different schools and age groups (especially those facing exams), in order to gather a range of views.
- Within the UK especially, it was also widely thought that **stronger mechanisms were needed to hold schools to account for their response to the pandemic**, such as decisions around school closures or partial closures, social distancing, the use of online or blended learning, and the quality of academic and pastoral support that was available to students during the crisis. Some young people favoured an elected youth representative model for students to consult with schools and governors, alongside consultation exercises with students and their parents or carers, the results of which should be published.
- Alongside this, young people felt that schools should provide **more (informal) opportunities for the student community to discuss** their experiences, opinions, difficulties, and concerns about this challenging and ever-changing situation during the COVID-19 crisis, to keep channels of communication open.

- A consistent theme within young people's recommendations was a need for **improved transparency and feedback**. Whether it was schools, public health services or other authorities, young people wanted to know how or whether their views and needs were being considered, and the outcomes. Simply being consulted was not enough, and young people were often sceptical from previous negative experiences in this regard.
- A final set of recommendations from young people concerned the need for the media to provide **clearer information, in more accessible formats**, and to **see more young people in journalism, news reporting and media roles**. Suggestions included making space within local news channels for a commentary section for young people and reviewing news coverage to ensure that young people from diverse backgrounds and situations have a voice. This was alongside young people taking ownership of news creation and reporting via their own channels, such as radio stations and online forums managed by young people.



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