APiC

A Place in Childhood

#ScotYouthandCOVID

Children and young people's participation in crisis: A research report

Jamie Hamilton & Jenny Wood

and Young Consultants from Aberdeen, Edinburgh, Falkirk, Glasgow and Stirlingshire

July 2020

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Foreword

COVID-19 has and continues to be the biggest human rights challenge we have faced in a long time and its impacts will last well beyond the restrictions that we are currently facing.

It has a disproportionate impact on children and young people.

However, a meaningful dialogue with them about their experiences has been largely absent from decision making, nationally and globally.

A notable exception is this powerful report from A Place in Childhood: "#ScotYouthandCOVID: Children and young people's participation in crisis", which puts them front-and-centre of a rights-based review.

Importantly this work has been led by 25 young people representing 4 communities across Scotland, it maps their shared experience of the pandemic at its earliest stage.

More important still, the 5 recommendations they reached by consensus are ones that all decision makers must listen to and act upon.

They are a clear demonstration of the critical importance of meaningful dialogue and coproduction at a time of crisis. They remind us why Article 12 (the right to participate) sits at the heart of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

It is not just a recognition of the universally agreed obligation on decision makers to involve children in decisions that affect them, it's also because genuinely involving young people makes decision making more legitimate and produces better results which bring tangible benefits not just for them, but for broader societal wellbeing.

So, as get to the final stages of the decades long process to incorporate UNCRC into Scots law, we do so during a situation which exemplifies why rights-based participatory methodologies for engaging children and young people are needed now more than ever.

This does not simply mean surveys where themes and outcomes are predetermined by adults. It means an ongoing purposeful dialogue that creates actionable recommendations which emanate directly from the needs and priorities of children and young people.

Writing this foreword at the height of increased COVID-19 related restrictions in early 2021, the young people's recommendations ring truer than ever and seem almost prescient.

In the 6 months since the report was published, a return to a system of remote learning and to the other pressures they highlighted here, continues to impact their lives disproportionately.

The Scottish Government's equity audit makes grim reading and recent survey results from The Princes Trust show that one quarter of young people in the UK report have felt unable to cope across the course of this pandemic.

It is hard to appreciate the scale of the consequences for children and young people of failing to listen and involve them meaningfully.

This report is testament to the will and capability of children and young people to contribute, even in the most difficult of circumstances.

It evidences that virtual coproduction methodologies are well suited to the skills and expertise of young people in Scotland. Looking forward, we need to enter an age where children's human rights are put at the heart of our governance and policy-making.

This report provides a framework for how we may proceed in the remainder of this and in future crises.

Bruce Adamson
Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland

Executive Summary

This report tells the story of a Participatory Action Research project to explore the changes and challenges that children and young people (CYP) across Scotland experienced during the COVID-19 lockdown. In May 2020, APiC initiated this on the basis that CYP have a UN-sanctioned 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 at a time when a range of other human rights had to be temporarily curtailed to slow the transmission of the Coronavirus.

25 young Scots from Edinburgh, Glasgow, Stirlingshire, Falkirk, and Aberdeen formed groups of young consultants who led APiC through their experiences over the course of three youth-led online workshops, and devised a set of small changes that would make a big difference to their lives. The results are 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, in particular, 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, this report shows the value of in-depth qualitative projects with CYP about their experiences and views during a crisis. The young consultants show 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 ends with a set of recommendations for ensuring a better experience for young people during times of crisis in future:

1. Develop a protocol for the early participation of groups of CYP in emergency situations
2. Ensure measures are in place that do not unfairly disadvantage CYP
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 CYP

We emphasise that whilst the initial threat of COVID-19 is abating, future lockdowns are likely and wider existential threats such as climate change remain. CYP 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 for which they are already familiar. Moreover, supporting CYP to develop their capacities for difficult decision-making in uncertain and complex times is paramount to ensuring they have skills needed for the future.
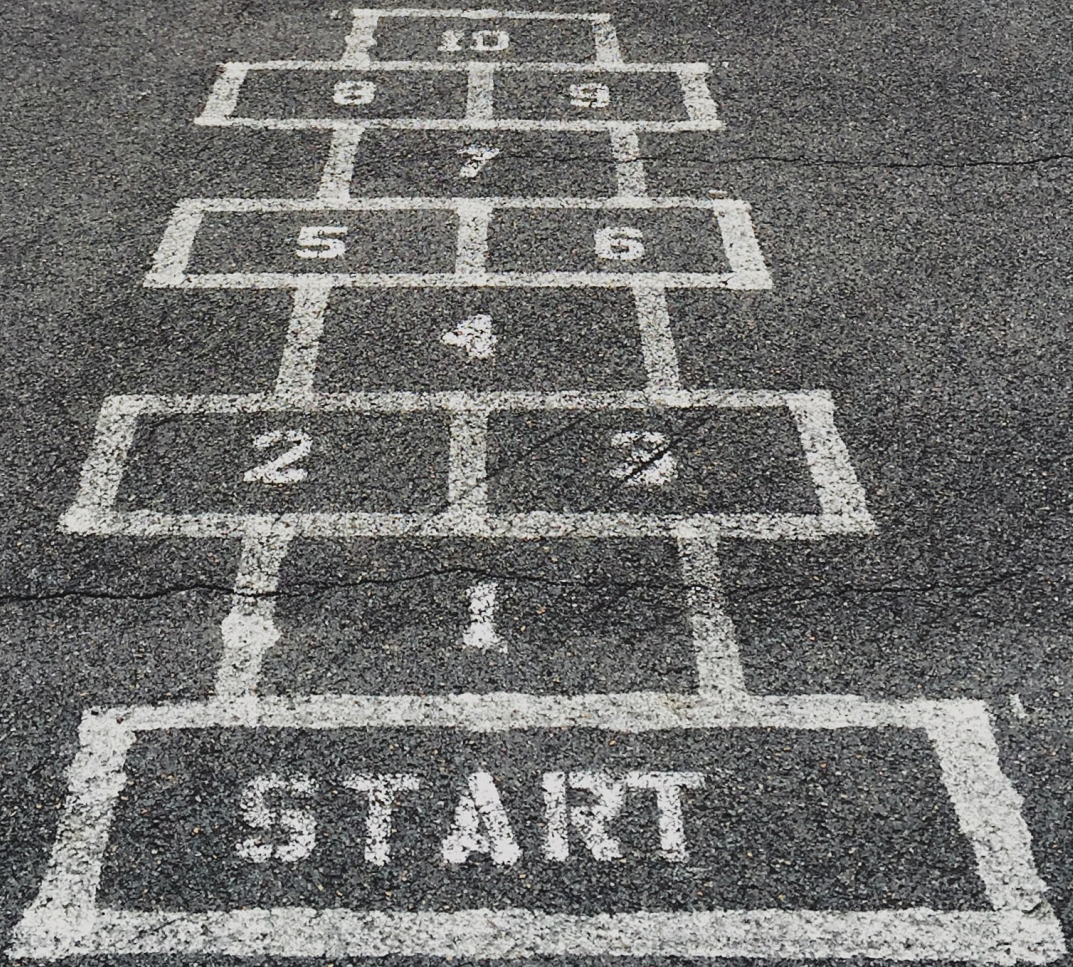
Introduction

The UK Government ordered a nation-wide lockdown on 23rd March 2020 as a response to the COVID-19 crisis. This public health emergency required a strategic response to quickly control the spread of the virus and protect vulnerable people, and led to the rapid closure of face to face services, offices, and most shops. By this point Scottish Government had also already closed all schools and every UK citizen was being advised to stay at home as much as possible. All citizens, no matter their age, also had new guidelines to follow around social distancing and places where they were and were no longer allowed to go.

A robust response to an unprecedented situation necessarily requires difficult, quick, and top-down decisions to ensure safety for all. For children and young people (CYP), this was the most extreme change to their daily lives they are likely to have ever experienced. Although it is clear that a pandemic calls for quick and strategic decisions, it is also clear that this crisis and resulting response have implications on the achievement and sustainment of children's human rights, as enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (UN 1989).

A Place in Childhood (APiC) views the UNCRC as a pivotal framework for guiding policy and practice towards approaches that understand children and promote their wellbeing. Of primary concern to us and many other children's rights organisations (c.f. Observatory of Children's Human Rights Scotland and Children & Young People's Commissioner Scotland 2020) is the impact of the pandemic on Article 12 of the UNCRC, namely the lack of opportunity for many CYP to participate in the matters that affect them. Additionally, a suite of other articles that encompass wider participation in public life have come to an abrupt halt, such as:

- Article 13 – A right to freedom of expression, which allows CYP 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 29 – A right to a broad and varied education that teaches CYP about the world and other people; and
- Article 31 – A right to play, rest, leisure, and access cultural life.

APiC highlights these above rights as they relate most prominently to 'place', but in the spirit of the UNCRC we see all rights as equal, inalienable, and indivisible. Therefore, all other articles such as the remaining two guiding principles in Articles 2 and 3 – non-discrimination and ensuring the best interests of the child - must underlie meaningful work with CYP.

We are further concerned that impacts of this pandemic and lockdown itself fall disproportionately on certain groups in society, including CYP, with challenges most pronounced for those already growing up in disadvantaged communities. Most worrying is that they 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; and

- greater risk of other disadvantages that may be broadly classified as Adverse Childhood Experiences (c.f.Kalmakis and Chandler 2015) (such as witnessing or being a victim of domestic violence, or of parental substance misuse).

We note and very much welcome the increasing proliferation of surveys seeking to understand the impacts of the pandemic on CYP in a range of circumstances (for example, Children's Parliament 2020, Scottish Youth Parliament *et al.* 2020). However, we remain concerned that opportunities for more meaningful dialogue and collaboration dried up as traditional face to face approaches and methods became too unsafe, or strategic level decision-makers as deemed unimportant to the crisis response.

We believe the most potent understandings and priorities for action emerge from in-depth and sustained dialogue with CYP, and that their unique perspective has intrinsic value to any crisis response. In particular, it improves the quality and quantity of information available for policymakers to determine responses in their best interest. We therefore designed a qualitative, participatory action research project (Horelli, 1997) that engaged 25 young people as Young Consultants during May 2020. Our aim was to understand their views and experiences of COVID-19 and related measures by asking Young Consultants 'What would you do if you were in charge?'. This report details what we found and how CYP's views can and should be taken forward as we move forward to a new, still uncertain, normal.

Children's participation as essential

Concerned by the loss of social support, independence, and extreme disruption to CYP's everyday activities, the APiC Board of Trustees took the firm view that it is not acceptable to see unnecessary degradation of children's human rights as a result of this crisis. We believe that CYP must be heard as the experts in their own lives, and even more so as the implications now and in the future fall disproportionately on their shoulders.

We believe that both this pandemic and wider existential threats posed by climate change and increasing political polarisation necessitate a move towards a society that is more comfortable with risk and uncertainty. Given this shift towards increasing uncertainty, we felt it important to engage in early intervention work that could prevent wider and long-lasting consequences such as an intensification of what is already considered an epidemic of deteriorating mental health amongst CYP in the UK.

After unsuccessful attempts to gain external funding, we took the decision that robust action was needed within this phase of lockdown regardless, to truly understand Scottish CYP's needs. We designed and prepared a project that would put young people in the driving seat to determine the topics of discussion and potential changes that they would make if they were in charge. We proposed and trialled an online environment whereby young people could collaborate live and discuss the varying challenges they face. Figure 1 (overleaf) shows the initial drive of our research, which was subsequently led by the Young Consultants themselves.

Figure 1: APiC's Initial Vision for the #ScotYouthandCOVID Project

Taking the action and advocacy elements that underlie APiC's ethos, we also sought every opportunity to give voice to the findings of this work. We integrated live blogging into our approach, used social media to spread the word, and gained media attention for our Young Consultants' views. We have committed to airing the results of this project whenever an opportunity arises that may lead to an improved experience for CYP across Scotland. This report tells the story of our approach and findings. In sharing this, we demonstrate the fundamental necessity of understanding and engaging CYP in meaningful dialogue at a time of crisis.

Project Design

This project was underpinned by the UNCRC and we sought to engage with a range of young people, aged 10-16. 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.

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 proposed including 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.

The project was led by the Young Consultants themselves, in collaboration with each other at each stage. Taking a grounded and iterative process developed in previous APiC projects, we asked our teams what the challenges are and will be for them, and how they would address these if they were in charge. We did this using a collaborative online environment that consisted of two different tools: first, integrated videoconferencing with breakout groups using Zoom; and second, a virtual workspace using Mural, which allowed for the quick, easy and anonymous organisation of ideas, information and photos onto virtual 'whiteboards'. The virtual workspace was sufficiently large to enable all project teams to work on and discuss the same whiteboard simultaneously, but with breakout groups collaborating separately within their own defined 'territories' on particular tasks where necessary.

Over the course of three 90-minute workshops, our project teams collaborated within and across groups to address the following broad questions:

1. What are the biggest changes you've experienced since the start of lockdown?
2. What are the biggest challenges associated with your big changes?
3. What small changes could make a big difference to your experience of lockdown, both now and in the future?

The first workshop focused on explaining and establishing the virtual environment and answering the first question in small breakout groups. The second and third workshops involved initial full group reflections on findings from the previous workshops and answering the two remaining questions in breakout groups. We explain more below about the recruitment of our Young Consultants, the facilitation of the workshops, the online environment, and ethics and data protection.

Our Young Consultants

Due to the difficulties in building group dynamics over remote engagement, we concentrated on finding young people that already knew one another and could therefore work enjoyably, and constructively in a group. Indeed, to the extent possible, we sought groups that APiC had previously worked with to ensure participants were as comfortable as possible in

working with us online. We recruited teams of 4-6 young people of equal split in gender, and similar in age. Across the teams, the ethnic makeup of Scotland was also broadly represented.

Through using existing school and other charity contacts, we convened four project teams of Young Consultants from across Scotland for the first two workshops:

- Team Aberdeen (Northfield) (Our engagement with the Aberdeen team builds on work and relationships formed with children through Children's Parliament Imagining Aberdeen programme).
- Team Edinburgh (Leith) (with warm thanks to Leith Community Crops in Pots for their support with recruitment).
- Team Glasgow (various locations across the City).
- Team Rural Stirlingshire (a range of villages).

In the final workshop, we added an additional team - Team Rural Falkirk (Denny). In total, 25 young people took part across the three sessions, with 14 taking part in all three. Our final set of teams covered areas considered to be some of the most and least deprived in Scotland.

Limitations on engagement were unfortunately experienced by some members of some groups, necessitating some level of additional recruitment. This was primarily due to issues of accessing appropriate ICT; a clear limitation of online methodologies. Nonetheless, engagement remained high across the project. Feedback from participants suggested the key motivation was an opportunity for their views to be heard and to contribute on a critical national issue, and to share their experiences and collaborate with peers from across Scotland. It is heartening 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).

Facilitation

Building on previous work whereby we foreground child and youth leadership in research activities, we worked on the basis that our teams would define their own areas of focus and facilitate their own discussions. At the outset of the first workshop we outlined the concept and role of a group facilitator, and proposed '3 Golden Rules' for ensuring fair, inclusive and effective group discussion. These are in Figure 2 below.

WHEN YOU'RE A FACILITATOR
Your job is to:

• Make sure everyone respects the **3 Golden Rules!**

• 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.

3 GOLDEN RULES!

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! Never remove other peoples stickys.

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. Respect other teams' areas.

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.
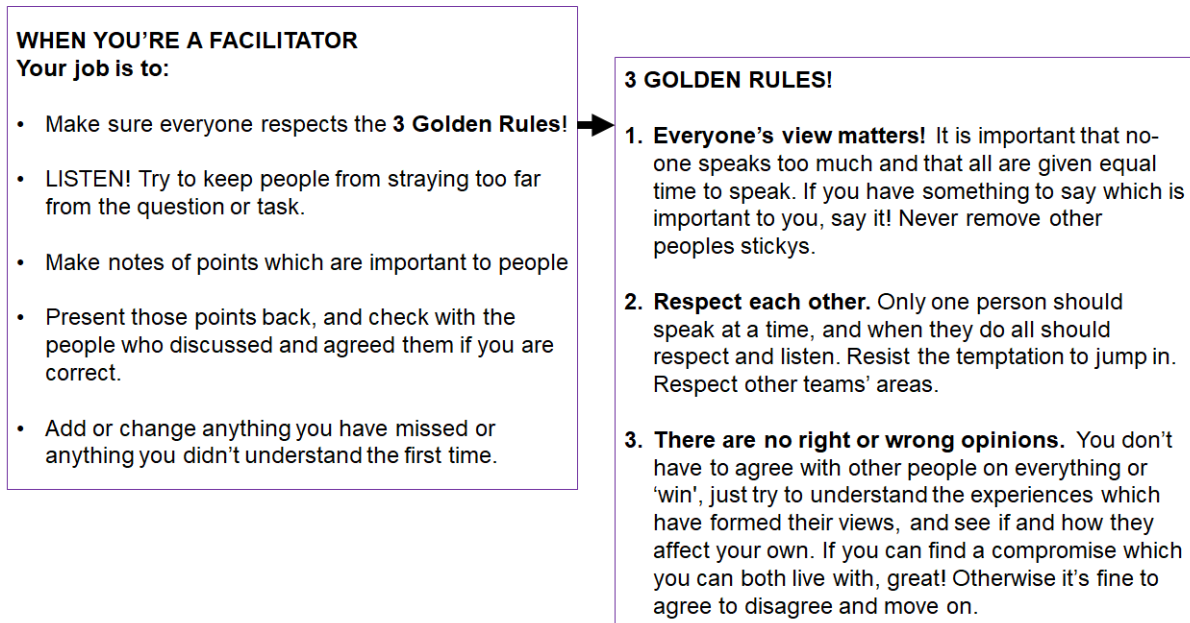
Figure 2: The role of a group facilitator and the 3 golden rules, developed at part of APiC's collaboration with Play Scotland in developing Place Standard Tools for CYP for Scottish Government

Each team determined who would facilitate their group at the outset. They were also given the option for the team facilitator role to be a rotating responsibility, and for feedback at the end of each task to be given by the facilitator alone, or by several team members. The idea was to give teams as much freedom as practicable to self-organise and determine collectively the approach best for them, with minimal intervention from the two APiC (adult) workshop facilitators.

Within this approach, we sought to reach as high a level of Hart's (1992) ladder of CYP's participation as was both achievable and suitable within this online context. We take the diagram below which is based on Wood's (2016) adaptation of this framework, used in the context of child participation in planning. The aim here is to limit adult domination of the process and give participants greater control.
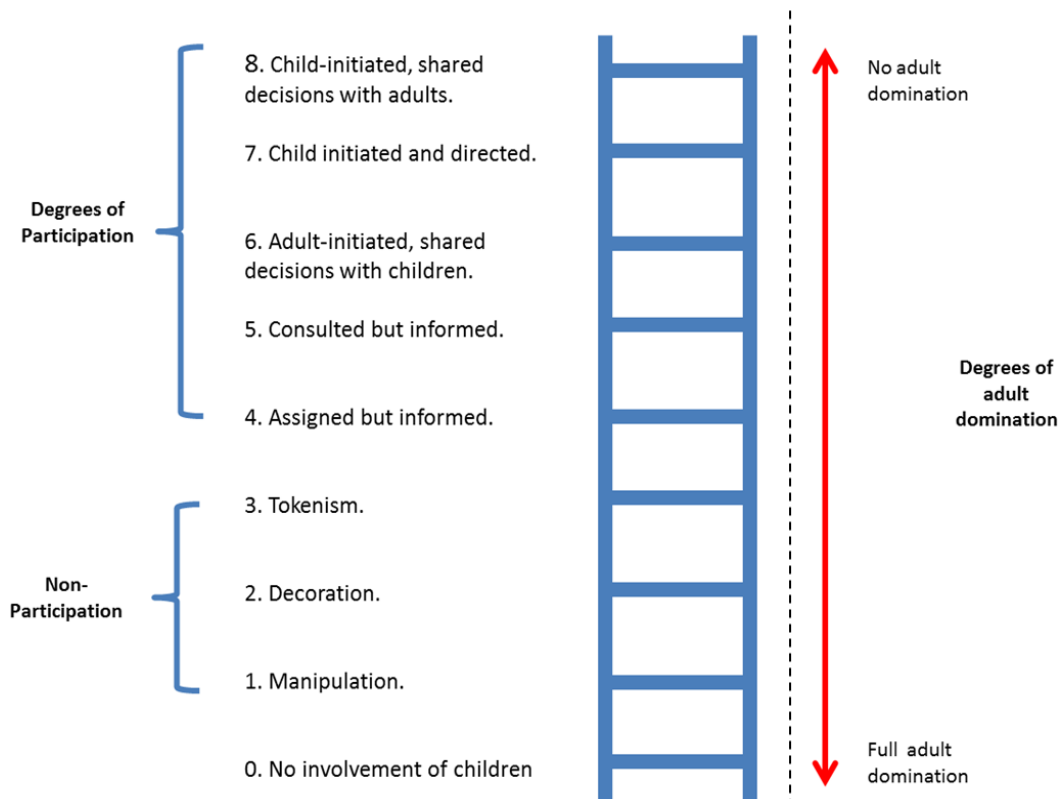
Figure 3: Hart's (1992) ladder of young people's participation, adapted by Wood (2016) to account for relevance to the Scottish planning system

We aimed to attain rung 6 of the ladder as regards the overarching project framework, in that APiC facilitators proposed broad topics of discussion for each workshop (i.e. changes, challenges and solutions). However, in terms of the content and overall project direction, our goal was rung 7, with the Young Consultants determining the overall direction and focus of the conversation. We did our best to achieve this by summarising key points agreed by participants at the end of each workshop, sharing this with the participants for improvement or objection prior to the next workshop, and then using their consensual outcomes at a basis for the discussion therein. In many ways, the online environment allowed for differing power dynamics than those prevalent in face to face interaction. For instance, age differentials, height and personal stylings were less clear, reducing the ability of us and our participants to make snap judgements about one another. Especially notable was that our Young Consultants needed only limited support to understand and take to the online approach we had set up.

The online environment

The online environment used in the project integrated video conferencing (Zoom) and use of a virtual workspace which enabled co-creation (Mural). All teams were initially brought together in every workshop into one online 'room', with tasks, and discussions then happened predominantly between teams conversing via their own breakout groups on Zoom, while collaborating within whiteboard territories defined for their teams within Mural. At the end of each task, all participants reconvened and team facilitator(s) in turn presented the outcomes of their breakout discussion. The two APiC facilitators provided technical support to this process and requested clarification on outcomes in some instances, but as far as possible, left individual group facilitation and presentation to teams themselves.

The first workshop task began with a large whiteboard on Mural from which the teams could collaborate, which asked them to highlight and discuss the main changes to their lives (see Figure 4 overleaf). Through an iterative process, the two APiC facilitators then used the framework determined by the outcomes from each task (following 'sign-off' by participants) as the basis for the whiteboard for the next task.

This process saw the big changes arising from the first workshop task become a framework for discussing challenges in the second workshop, and this in turn provided a focus for small changes that could make a big difference in the third and final workshop. Figures 4-6 below show the initial whiteboards used at the beginning of each session.

After each task, all project teams reconvened to present their whiteboard / discussion outcomes. A consensual decision-making process was then used to confirm current and future priorities for the project. To determine consensus, a mixture of signals was used such as nodding of heads on camera, use of Zoom features such as the 'thumbs up' emoticon or group polls. Agreed priorities were then organised into simple frameworks and presentations, and checked with participants for their improvements, additions, or objections prior to, and at the start of, the subsequent workshop.

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. Informed consent was gained from both young people 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. We compensated each Young Consultant with a £10 shopping voucher per workshop, in recognition of their time, effort and value of their contributions as Young Consultants.
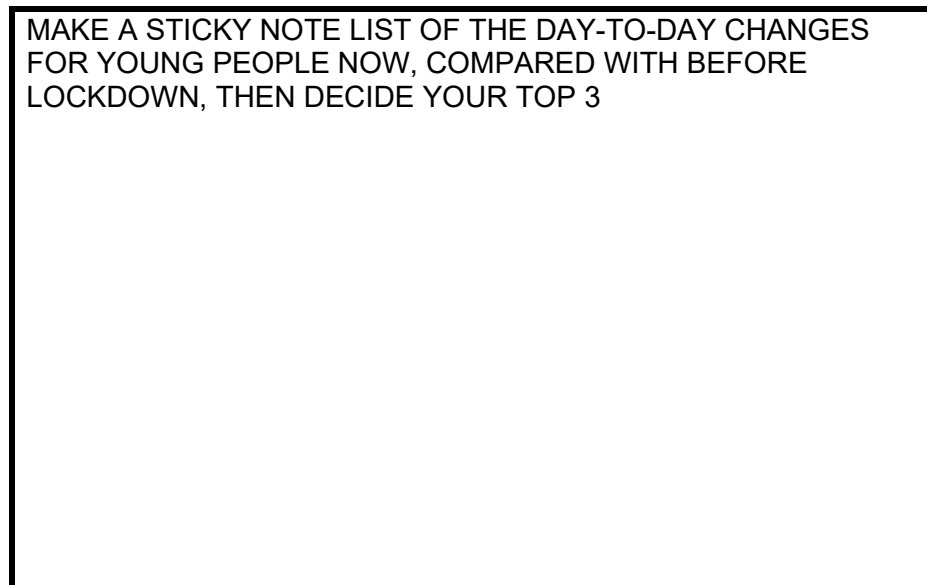
TEAM GLASGOW

MAKE A STICKY NOTE LIST OF THE DAY-TO-DAY CHANGES
FOR YOUNG PEOPLE NOW, COMPARED WITH BEFORE
LOCKDOWN, THEN DECIDE YOUR TOP 3

Figure 4: The blank whiteboard 'territory' on Mural used by each project team in workshop 1

HOME SCHOOLING		MEETING FRIENDS/FAMILY IN PERSON	
Challenges	**Solutions**	**Challenges**	**Solutions**
FREEDOM TO GO OUTSIDE AND TRAVEL		**STUFF I DO AT HOME (TV, GAMING, GET BORED)**	
Challenges	**Solutions**	**Challenges**	**Solutions**
STUFF I DO FOR FUN (SPORT, EATING OUT, HOBBIES)		**COVID REQUIREMENTS (WASHING, QUEUING)**	
Challenges	**Solutions**	**Challenges**	**Solutions**

Figure 5: The blank whiteboard 'territory' on Mural used by each project team in workshop 2

TEAM FALKIRK	TEAM STIRLINGSHIRE	TEAM ABERDEEN (NORTHFIELD)
REMOTE SCHOOLING	REMOTE SCHOOLING	REMOTE SCHOOLING
F2F OUTDOORS / ACTIVITIES	F2F OUTDOORS / ACTIVITIES	F2F OUTDOORS / ACTIVITIES
COVID RULES / OTHER	COVID RULES / OTHER	COVID RULES / OTHER
	TEAM EDINBURGH REMOTE SCHOOLING	TEAM GLASGOW REMOTE SCHOOLING
	F2F OUTDOORS / ACTIVITIES	F2F OUTDOORS / ACTIVITIES
	COVID RULES / OTHER	COVID RULES / OTHER

Figure 6: The entire blank whiteboard on Mural used by all project teams in workshop 3

Workshop Findings

The remainder of this report sets out the outcomes of the three workshops, before drawing together some of the overall learnings and implications.

Workshop 1: Big Changes

The first workshop, on Saturday 16th May, dealt with introductions and getting to grips with the online environment. The main activity revolved around *teams discussing and agreeing the big changes that lockdown had made to young people's lives*. The aim was also to get a general idea of the areas where there may be challenges that could be addressed.

Despite their differing contexts and circumstances, when all project teams convened at the end of the workshop to share outcomes, it was evident that there was strong consensus on the big changes. These were:

- (Remote) schooling
- Seeing and doing things together face-to-face with our friends, and family members who don't live at home
- Freedom to go outdoors and travel
- Activities during free time
- Literal requirements of the COVID-19 response and associated difficulties/weirdness

Figure 7 (overleaf) shows the whiteboard with the notes from all project teams when they were brought together under the 5 big changes. These themes then provided the basis for Workshop 2.

Figure 7: Grouped findings from our young consultants' responses in workshop 1

Workshop 2: Big Challenges

Workshop 2 took place the following day, Sunday 17th May. Taking the big changes as the starting point, the big challenges facing young Scots were agreed as follows (in rough order of priority), and our Young Consultants were clear that there is a clear link between all of them:

Remote Learning

The big challenges:

- More work and less direct help from teachers
- Much more limited opportunities for collaboration with classmates
- An overload of screen time (something we're also struggling with in our free time!)
- Access to technology and materials, including paper
- More distractions at home.

Overall, these issues were leading to reduced motivation for our young consultants and their peers to learn and contributing significantly to stress. They give vital insights into why the attainment gap is likely widening in Scotland (Education Endowment Foundation 2020), and what we might do about it.

COLLABORATION/HELP	We've had no online (video) classes for school	Have to go out of the way and email to get more information or ask questions	Emailing takes time and it can be easy to miss things	Told to not email, 'all questions and comments should be written into google classrooms' - this can be embarassing and uncomfortable	Prerecorded video lessons not the same - no room for questions/active engagement
SCREEN TIME	PE and Sports Development still online - near to no practical work	Told to use virtual jotters instead of real jotters	(Possible solution) For geography: Set tasks if possible to look for different examples of plants/geographical landmarks in local area (potential problem - not for city students)	Possible solution: Sending photos of jotters if work has been done there, but quality is worse and they perhaps couldn't read it. Also no direct feedback	Biology did active learning with families, reduces screen time and engaging
MOTIVATION	Some people doing lots of work. Others none at all. This will impact their learning long term - especially in exams next year	Need some way of checking/enforcing as pupils can tell parents 'I have no work'	Cause: In school there's no avoiding work, at home there are endless distractions - friends, youtube, texting, etc	Some of us leave our phones away while working/set a 'timetable' but this takes a lot of self control	Difficult when others in family not working (older brothers/sisters going out on walks, outside) and we have to stay in and work (sometimes don't)
	At school no choice, at home can choose not to do it - no consequences	Feels like we're stuck in an endless cycle of work and we're never done. No weekend	If teachers don't mark/look at work/set a due date - there's no motivation to prioritise it.	Difficult to view work all in one place/hand it in	Time limits on work because you end up not doing other assignments
OTHER	Unrealistic amounts of work set	Every teacher adding more work than we would do in class	Good flexibilty in work: Some choose longer days, longer breaks. Others shorter days fewer breaks	All of the negative factors discussed can contribute to a sense of being overwhelmed	

Figure 8: One team's views and findings around the difficulties of remote learning

Our freedom to go outdoors and travel

The big challenges:

- 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

Having to find interesting stuff without leaving home (also solutions?)

- playing games or watching movies at home
- YOU HAVE TO FIND THINGS TO DO IN YOUR HOUSE AND GARDEN
- SET UP OBSTACLE COURSES IN THE GARDEN
- watching cooking videos to make food at home
- you apesheat the world more
- help my sister make nice food
- scavenger hunts

No eating out

- you can't go out for dinner
- cant eat out
- cant go to mcdonalds
- not going out to eat
- Can't eatout at all

Solution Ideas:
- Pierinos (a takeaway which is open!)

No outdoor fun

- I want to go on my bike with my parents
- YOU CANT GO TO PLAY PARKS
- I miss beying able to go out on snow days
- not being able to do fun activaties

Not going on holiday / outings

- I can't go on any of my holidays this year
- not going on vacation
- YOU CANT GO CAMPING
- YOU CANT GO ON DAY TRIPS ON WEEKENDS
- THE SUMMER HOLIDAYS ARE NOT AS FUN BECAUSE YOU CANT GO ON HOLIDAY

Solution Ideas:
- CAMP OUT IN THE GARDEN

Not going where I want...

- Many places we cants go to
- you cant travel anywhere you want
- you can't go out for fresh air as often

Solution Ideas:
- GO FOR WALKS
- google maps

and with who I want

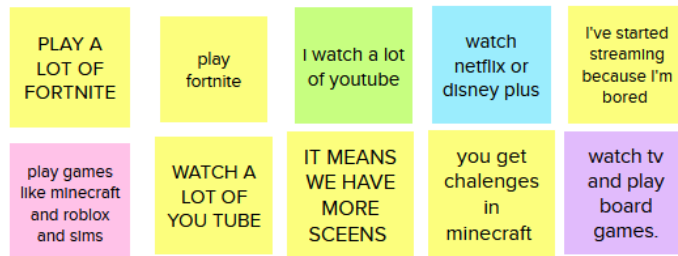- No meeting friends that much
- Its a hazard walking with others

Figure 9: Grouped themes from workshop two around freedom to go outdoors and socialise

What we do (and can't do) in our free time

The big challenges:

- An overload of Screen Time!
- Playing 'social' games with friends
- Watching TV and YouTube
- Video-calling friends
- Not a lot else to do at home other than board games
- And all of this on top of spending all day (and more) online for school!
- Not staying up too late
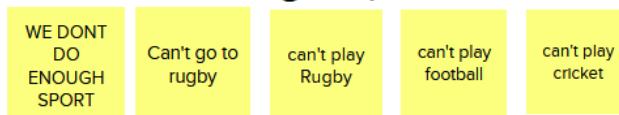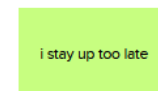- Not enough sport and exercise, and other outdoor activities

Too much Screen Time:

PLAY A LOT OF FORTNITE	play fortnite	I watch a lot of youtube	watch netflix or disney plus	I've started streaming because I'm bored
play games like minecraft and roblox and sims	WATCH A LOT OF YOU TUBE	IT MEANS WE HAVE MORE SCEENS	you get chalenges in minecraft	watch tv and play board games.

Lots of Board Games

play batle ships	play lots of board games
small games with family	

And not enough Sport /Exercise

WE DONT DO ENOUGH SPORT	Can't go to rugby	can't play Rugby	can't play football	can't play cricket

Solution Ideas:

I NOW MAKE VLOGS ABOUT MY DAYS	PLAY BOARD GAMES SO YOU ARE NOT ON SCEENS ALK DAY	BE CREATIVE!	GET FRESH AIR!

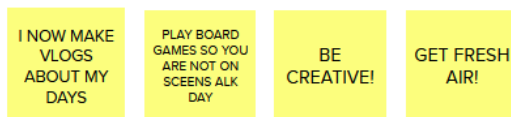## Staying up too late!

i stay up too late

Figure 10: Grouped findings from workshop 2 around things available to do in our young consultants' free time

Seeing and doing things together face-to-face with our friends, and family members who don't live at home

<u>The big challenges:</u>

- 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
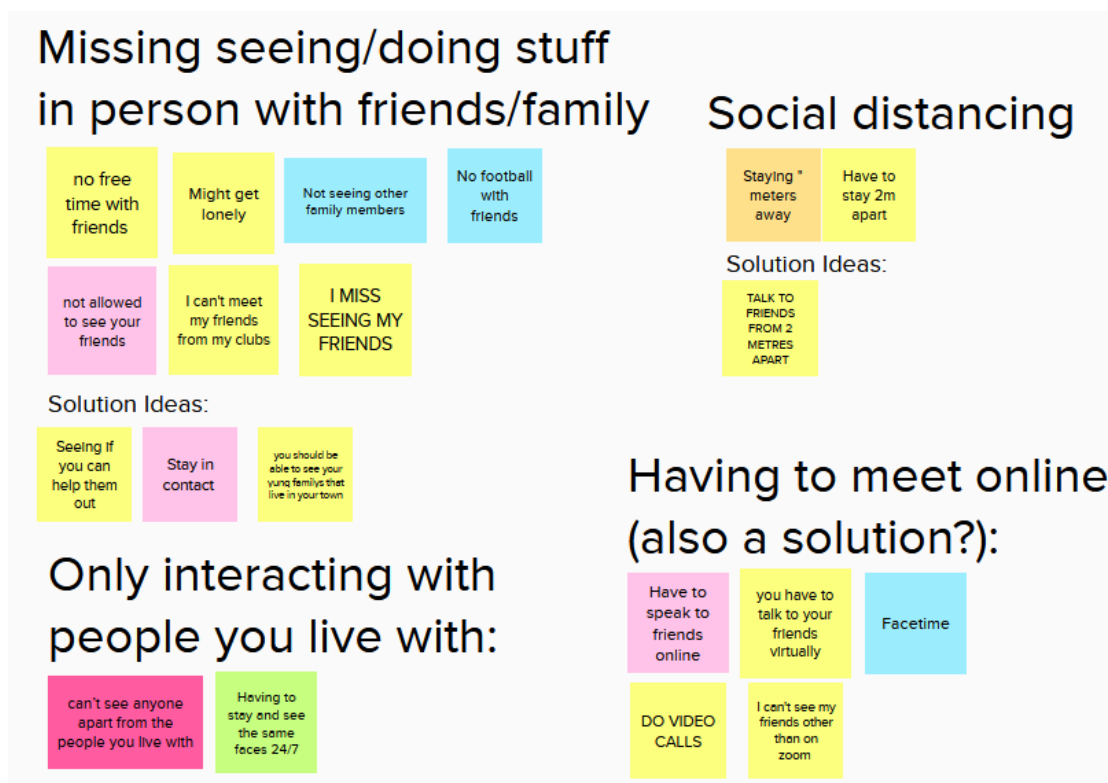- Social distancing rules

Figure 11: Grouped responses from workshop 2 around social interaction and limits on it

Literal requirements of the COVID-19 response and associated difficulties/weirdness

<u>The big challenges:</u>

- Washing my hands (and remembering not to touch my face!)
- Going shopping

Washing my hands (and remembering not to touch my face!)

washing your hands a lot	wash hand every 5 mins
hand sanitizing	not touching your face
doing all the steps in washing your hands	PEOPLE ARE MORE CONTOUS OF WASHING THEIR HANDS REGULARLY
wash hand after the toilet	

Going Shopping

When in a shop you hvae to keep at social distance	only going outside if you need to like to get food	Have to que to get in to everyshop

Solution Ideas:

wearing masks and gloves	certain areas should go out at different times

Figure 1: Grouped responses from workshop 2 around the restrictions and associated difficulties or weirdness

Outdoor Access

A priority agreed to link the above challenges was outdoor access. For many young people, particularly in urban areas, the range of possibilities for their permitted hour of outdoor exercise were extremely limited. It was not enough time to use quality greenspace or enable 'social-distanced' interaction with friends and family members living relatively close. For those with small (or no) garden, and no (or barred) parks nearby, there were negligible options for outdoor play, interaction, and exercise. The absence of these things essential to health and wellbeing was frustrating, depressing and isolating for the Young Consultants.

Workshop 3: Small Changes, Big Difference

In the final workshop, held on Saturday 30th May, the Young Consultants thought about the main everyday challenges they had identified in Workshop Two, and considered what small changes might make a big difference to mitigating these and improving their lockdown experiences. In this, they focused the top two challenges they have been facing – access to outdoor environments that enable recreation and social interaction permitted by Scottish Government guidelines, and remote learning. Figure 13 (below) shows the ideas they came up with, grouped into key themes and ideas.
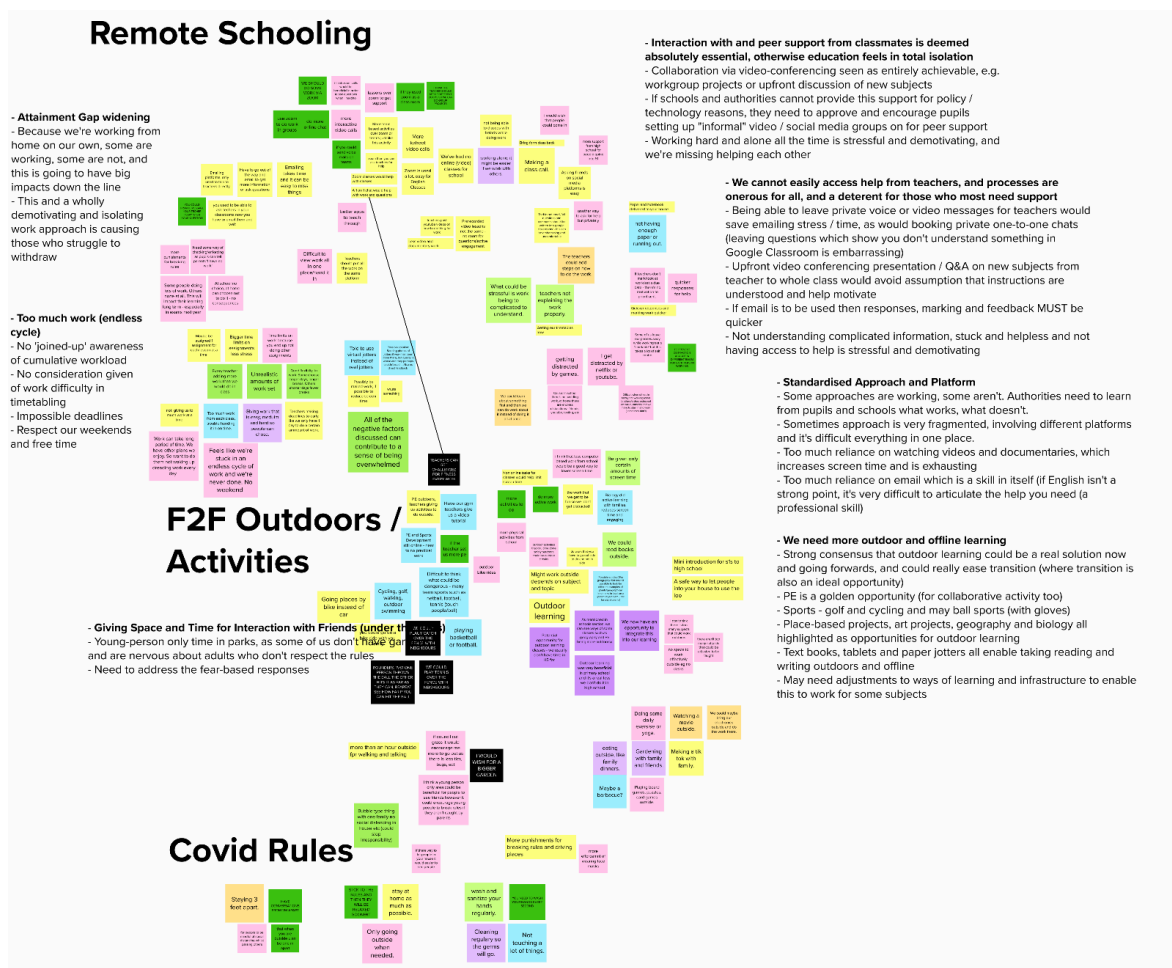
Figure 13: Grouped responses from workshop 3 around the small changes that could make a big difference to our young consultant's lives

Beginning with access to outdoor environments, the small changes to the COVID-19 rules which might hugely benefit young people, included:

- Making allowances to time permitted outside based on how long it took to access quality greenspaces, and / or connect outdoors with important friends and family member in the neighbourhood
- Having days or times where local greenspaces were reserved for young people only, allowing them to meet friends for social-distanced activities, without having to worry about adults and dogs who may not respect the rules.
- One idea was to open golf courses for use by young people on some days (such as the one pictured in Figure 14 below). These are sometimes the only quality greenspace in urban areas, and the one sport which they identified might be played under social distancing
- Enable and support more outdoor learning

Beyond access to outdoor environments, and linking with the final suggestion above, remote schooling was the Young Consultants' top priority to improve. Following this, five changes emerged from discussions that would make a big difference to their learning experiences. We include quotes to highlight their strength of feeling on this issue.

Figure 14: Merchiston Golf Course, Edinburgh. Source: Jenny Wood

Five changes proposed by the Young Consultants

1. Manage our workload - it's too much!

Young Consultants reported receiving more work than they can complete in a school week. They felt teachers have limited awareness of cumulative workload between different subjects, and better communication between them could make a huge difference. In addition, teachers should adapt work and deadlines to consider the technological challenges and stress involved with learning online.

"It feels like we're stuck in an endless cycle of work and we're never done. No weekend"

2. Help us to collaborate with our classmates

Education had become isolating and demotivating, and the young people were missing classmates and the peer support they provide. They felt more workgroup collaboration via video-conferencing would help across all subjects. If authorities struggled to make this happen, the Young Consultants felt strongly that schools should empower young people to setup their own informal video / social media groups.

"We need more team-based activities over zoom or teams just like this project"

3. Help us communicate directly with our teachers

All the young people reported that gaining help from teachers via email was difficult and slow, and that leaving questions on group boards could be embarrassing. This approach, particularly in the absence of peer support, meant that when pupils got stuck they could not progress. They felt being able to leave private voice or video messages for teachers, or book one-to-one chats would help motivate them to continue. They also requested quicker feedback on work, and upfront introductions to new subjects by the teacher to the whole class would help them feel more included.

"You used to be able to ask teachers in your classrooms, now you have to email them and wait."

"We could learn about something first and then we can do work about it instead of doing it all at once."

4. Give us more outdoor and offline learning

With learning, socialising and leisure during lockdown all largely happening online, young people reported feeling exhausted by screen time. They were also struggling with distractions of the home environment, and were clear that COVID-19 provides more opportunity to bring outdoor learning into their curriculum. They highlighted that physical education, geography, biology, history and art were ideal subjects for blending online collaboration with individual place-based or outdoor activities. Another suggestion was greater use of paper jotters and textbooks as this would allow for more reading and writing offline. They argued that adjustments to learning approaches and infrastructure could also make more outdoor classes possible.

"In school there's no avoiding work, at home there are endless distractions - family, friends, YouTube, texting, etc."

"We now have a real opportunity to integrate the outdoors into our learning"

"We can see ways of some classes such as geography, biology, art and PE being more outdoorsy"

Figure 15: Outdoor learning offers greater opportunities for social distancing, whilst still learning and collaborating with classmates. Source: Anna Gaffney

Figure 16: One of the young consultant's outdoor artwork, produced during lockdown. Source: Young Consultant, Team Edinburgh

5. Work together to standardise and support approaches

The Young Consultants spoke about big variation in the quality of service they had received. They felt authorities should be listening more to pupils, teachers, and parents about what was and was not working. Some spoke about wishing to have all their work on one learning platform, and many felt they were watching too many educational videos and not getting enough live video teaching. Pupils without a home computer experienced even greater challenges, with some only able to attend school on their phones. Their families also now needed to access and purchase some of their own materials such as paper, which was an ongoing struggle.

> *"Some people doing lots of work. Others none at all. This will impact their learning long term – especially in exams next year"*
>
> *"All of the negative factors discussed can contribute to a sense of being overwhelmed"*

The Young Consultants were clear that the challenges they faced were creating or exacerbating divides between classmates. While the challenges were causing significant de-motivation and stress for all, the burden was falling most squarely on groups who had been the focus of Scottish Government's attention in closing the attainment gap.

You can read more of what the Young Consultants said about their remote schooling experiences in an article that appeared in the Scotland on Sunday on 14th June 2020 (Bradley 2020).

This playground is temporarily closed.
We apologise for any inconvenience.

Implications

Children and Young People's Changing Experience

The findings of our research show a marked decrease in the independence and choices that our Young Consultants have been able to enjoy during lockdown. Remote schooling and more limited interaction with friends and the activities they enjoyed have been harmful to their general sense of wellbeing. However, they also seemed eager to progress in their social life and studies and had multiple ideas around how this could have been - and could in future be - enabled during lockdown or other crises. The Young Consultants respected the COVID-19 guidelines and were often worried by those who they felt were not abiding by them. Necessary limits on freedom of movement were understood clearly, but the implications on their quality of life were taking a toll.

The findings from this research confirm to us that **the right of CYP to participate can and must be upheld through online methodologies during a time of crisis requiring lockdown.** Other temporary loss of rights *may* be necessary if moving towards a higher aim, however, online environments offer a multitude of choices for continued, in-depth participation and collaboration on the matters that affect them.

The outcomes also **highlight the importance for wider decision-making of engaging CYP meaningfully in a national crisis response**. Here, engaging in a dialogue with a diverse range of young people from across Scotland surfaced a consensual position on challenges faced and simple remedies which could, and still can, inform effective and efficient national intervention. There is perhaps a tendency for the ethical arguments regarding children's rights to obfuscate the value these rights enable by allowing their unique wisdom, perspective and contribution to inform and enrich the dialogue around complex and novel challenges.

Although restrictions in Scotland are now easing, and CYP have been granted greater freedoms than adults for social interaction, **many will remain fearful of catching or passing on COVID-19 or the threat of further lockdowns and school closures.** Moreover, while we may hope otherwise, it unfortunately seems inevitable that local lockdowns (at least) will be inevitable. The stress incurred by lockdown situations will have a range of short, medium, and longer, term impacts that we do not yet understand.

We have shown that continued engagement with CYP is essential both for their own wellbeing, and for understanding where and how we can make decisions that improve their experience now and in the future. We believe that this is fundamental to the overall health of our society and gathering the necessary information to make the right decisions. We continue to believe that the ethical and human-rights informed argument for CYP's participation is vital, but we should also not underestimate the intrinsic value it has to good quality decision-making.

An Uncertain Future

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to a worldwide shock and an increasing feeling amongst all that things will not be the same again. We are entering a time of increasing volatility and uncertainty, some of which is directly linked to COVID-19 and much of which was already an undercurrent to the modern era. We continue to face the unprecedented and existential threat of Climate Change, for which decisive and quick action is required to create a future in which human life can adapt and thrive.

Projects such as this, and an increasing propensity for activism from CYP (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 ability to handle decision-making which involves complexity, systems thinking, and taking responsibility amidst the unknown and the ambiguous. While these are unquestionably essential skills for an uncertain future, they are not those typically associated with formal teaching or schooling.

At APiC we believe that live child and youth led action-oriented projects are the best way to build and embody the skills needed for our new normal, and whatever the longer-term future has in store for us. Exposure to real world problems and contemplation of solutions, with support from adults, will enable them to build the confidence required to move forward and aid adults in the difficult decisions we are increasingly having to make.

Learning in and for Uncertainty

A useful, empirically supported framework that informs our approach is Social Determination Theory (SDT). This proposes three needs are fundamental to a young person's intrinsic motivation to learn: *autonomy*, *perceived self-competence* and *relatedness*, or sense of belonginess to one's workgroup (Deci & Ryan 2002). Within this, *autonomy* is preeminent. SDT predicts that a young person's motivation and natural development will be inhibited by learning approaches and environments that inhibit these three needs. On the one hand, given the impacts of remote schooling on CYP's sense of autonomy, perceived self-competence and relatedness, SDT may provide a useful framework for understanding *why* there have been unprecedented levels of pupil disengagement during lockdown (National Foundation for Educational Research, 2020). On the other, SDT explains why, despite the significant challenges of online collaboration, the Young Consultants committed so wholly to this study which was designed to support the three needs.

Moreover, and contrary to assumptions, theory and research suggests that in a collaborative, purposeful and autonomy-supportive environments, uncertainty is motivating for young people and can significantly enrich educational approaches (Tauritz 2012). This is particularly the case when focused on situations which are concrete, local and personally relevant. Given the unprecedented seriousness of the subject matter, an ethical concern for us prior to the study was the possibility it might surface difficult emotional and personal issues that we would then be unable to provide adequate support for remotely. In fact, participant feedback suggested the opposite, and rather that the opportunity to tackle uncertainty together, under their own leadership, had been a welcome, positive and empowering experience for all.

In Scotland, we have key curricula resources such as Learning for Sustainability, orientation towards project-based learning in the Curriculum for Excellence, and interest in developing more outdoor learning opportunities from government, teachers, parents and children. These offer fruitful catalysts for sustained meaningful and effective participation of CYP in their local and global communities. Informed by the theory and research outlined, they provide the potential to enable rich, holistic and intrinsically motivating learning situations that bring about real positive change and build capacities to deal with and flourish in an uncertain world. These should and must be activated fully and immediately, if we are to properly equip our future generations for the novel challenges that we all face.

Recommendations

Considering the findings and implications of this report, we make the following recommendations regarding what should and must be in place for the remainder of this crisis, and for any that follow:

1. **Develop a protocol for the early participation of groups of CYP in emergency situations**

   This could be enabled through school directives to gain participants for an independent project/s that explores changes, challenges, issues and solutions with CYP that are representative of Scotland's population as a whole.

2. **Ensure measures are in place that do not unfairly disadvantage CYP**

   This is especially vital given the heightened need for social interaction and collaboration for child development and learning. These can be initially drawn from the small changes that would make a big difference, defined in this report by our Young Consultants.

3. **Create a grounded contingency framework and principles for remote and blended learning which is informed by the experiences of lockdown to-date.**

   This should involve the meaningful participation of CYP and teachers. It is essential preparation for future outbreaks and school closures, because 'end-user' participation and feedback are fundamental to developing effective new curricular approaches quickly. The project could also link well with other educational initiatives around outdoor and place-based learning.

4. **Develop appropriate and resonant resources and messaging around COVID-19 and following crises, with children and young people**

   COVID-19 resources were produced for CYP during this crisis, and the First Minister engaged in direct question and answer sessions with young people. However, input of CYP from a range of circumstances would help ensure that these speak in the right language and on the range of issues at the forefront of their concerns.

These recommendations can be viewed as a starting point for wider discussions that directly and meaningfully involve our young citizens in better wiser decision-making. Moreover, they will help ensure more adaptive and future-proof societies and systems.

Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to the most significant changes to our way of life for a generation and the ramifications are likely to be felt for a number of years. Within this, CYP have had to make significant sacrifices, some of which are likely to have medium-and-longer term consequences to their health, wellbeing, and education. In this report, we have highlighted the findings of a participatory action research project with 25 Young Consultants from across Scotland. Despite different ages, background and locations, there is a consensus in much of their experience, and learnings that could make a real difference to the quality of decisions made now and in the future.

In highlighting the Young Consultants' findings, and the reasoning and methodology we undertook in this study, we aim to highlight that the right of CYP to participate in the matters that affect them is necessary and achievable within times of crisis. Moreover, it points the way to better quality decision-making that is not only about them, but with them and gives a fuller and more accurate view of what is happening in their lives.

At APiC, we continue to highlight the necessity of CYP's participation in deep-dive, grounded, qualitative projects. We are keen to support the development of robust methodologies that can enable this within constrained circumstances, and we hope that in future funders will see this as a clear and essential activity in all circumstances. We also recognise the fundamental need to enable and support CYP's capacities to understand and deal with the complex situations, systems and processes that define our present and future.

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About A Place in Childhood

We're A Place in Childhood (or APiC, for short), a young charity based in Edinburgh, Scotland. We're committed to creating inclusive environments for children and young people. We achieve this by combining our expertise in research, advocacy and action.

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 Jamie Hamilton: jamie.hamilton@aplaceinchildhood.org

www.aplaceinchildhood.org

Twitter: @placechildhood

Instagram: apic_aplaceinchildhood

Facebook: aplaceinchildhood