



**Scotland's Children's Strategic Recovery Framework
and Summer Work**

**Engagement with Children and Young People
(April-July 2021)**

David Mackay and Dana Vreeswijk

August 2021

Contents

Section	Page
1. Introduction	3
1.1 Aims of the project	
1.2 Policy context	3
2. Methodology	
2.1 Recruitment of participants	4
2.2 Engagement sessions	4
2.3 Analysis and reporting	5
2.4 Limitations	6
3. Participant Data	
4. Findings	
4.1 Key themes identified	9
4.1.1 Summer offer activity	10
4.1.2 Digital technology	12
4.1.3 Learning during the pandemic	14
4.1.4 Information children and young people received during the pandemic	16
4.1.5 Impact of the pandemic on hobbies and interests	19
4.1.6 Mental health, wellbeing and relationships	20
4.1.7 Longer-term vision for recovery from Coronavirus	23
5. Conclusion and recommendations	24
6. Appendices	27

1. Introduction

1.1 Aims of project

The Scottish Government is considering how Scotland's COVID-19 Strategic Framework can best support Scotland's children, young people, and families to navigate and recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. To support this process, they commissioned Children in Scotland (alongside other children's organisations) to engage with children and young people to understand the impact of COVID-19, inform their decision-making, and shape their plans from summer 2021 onwards.

Between April and July 2021, Children in Scotland delivered a short, time-limited project to support children and young people to share their experiences and ideas in relation to COVID-19 restrictions and their easing. The information we gathered was shared with the Scottish Government as the project progressed and fed into the development of the 'Get into Summer' programme. This report brings the findings from across the project together, with a series of recommendations to inform future planning and decision-making.

1.2 Policy context

The Scottish Government is incorporating the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Children (UNCRC) into Scots Law.

Incorporating the UNCRC means that adults who make decisions affecting children's lives need to ensure children's rights are being respected and upheld. This includes ensuring that children and young people have a say about matters that are important to them and these views are considered and acted upon. This is enshrined in Article 12 of the UNCRC.

Children and young people have been significantly impacted by the Coronavirus pandemic and this has been evidenced in a range of research undertaken by children's sector organisations¹. Children and young people's experiences and opinions are an essential aspect of COVID-19 recovery and, with the planned incorporation of the UNCRC, listening to their views may soon become a statutory requirement.

¹ <https://www.togetherscotland.org.uk/about-childrens-rights/coronavirus/childrens-views-and-experiences/>

2. Methodology

2.1 Recruitment of participants

Owing to the limited timeframe, Children in Scotland reached out to children and young people who had previously taken part in different participation and engagement projects, and who had given their permission to be contacted by Children in Scotland about future opportunities. Children in Scotland received positive responses from 13 children and young people. Further details about these participants is given below.

2.2 Engagement sessions

The project was delivered as four online engagement sessions held between May and July. Each session was facilitated by Children in Scotland staff and took place on Zoom. Children in Scotland usually works with children and young people in person, as we believe this is the best way to make sure everyone feels comfortable to take part. This has not been possible because of the ongoing Coronavirus restrictions.

In March 2020, all our engagement work moved on to digital platforms, with an emphasis on virtual meetings. Throughout this period, we have applied our [principles and guidelines \(click here to view\)](#) for participation to ensure all participants were able to take part, share their opinions and have fun.

This project was designed to be delivered online and a range of digital tools, including Zoom polls, Mentimeter and Jamboard, were used to deliver a high degree of interactivity and engagement.

Session 1

The first online meeting took place on Saturday 15 May 2021 (10.30am-12pm). The main focus of the meeting was introducing the group to the project and creating a welcoming and open environment. The group took part in a characterisation activity to explore the key areas where children and young people's lives have been affected by Coronavirus. This helped us to identify themes and discussion topics for sessions two, three and four. Session one also included a group discussion around the Scottish Government's plans around summer holiday activities for children and young people.

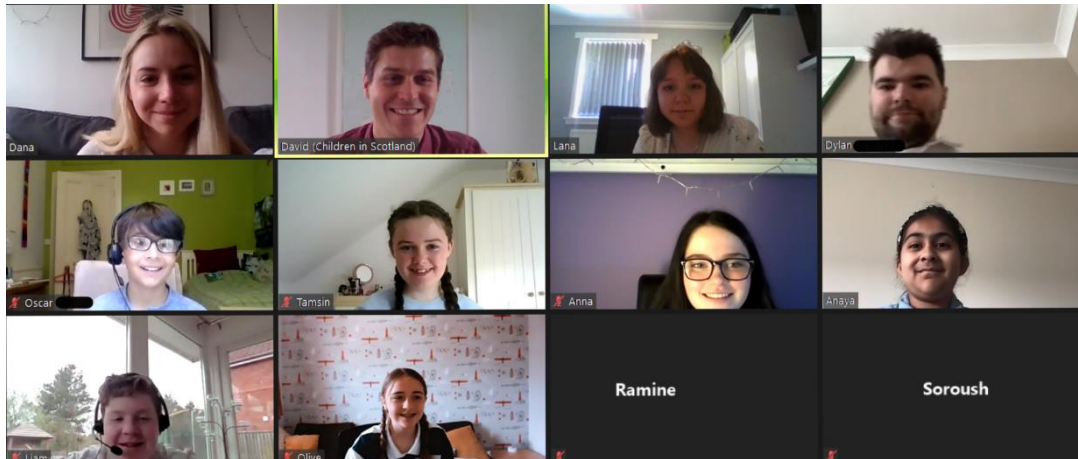


Figure 1: Screenshot showing some of the participants at the end of the online session

Session 2

The second online meeting took place on Wednesday 2 June 2021 (5-6.30pm). The topics discussed at this session were young people's relationship with digital technology and learning experiences during the pandemic.

Session 3

The third online meeting took place on Saturday 19 June 2021 (10.30am-12pm) and focused on the type of information children and young people received about the pandemic and the sources of that information. We also explored the impact of the pandemic on young people's hobbies, interests and free time.

Session 4

The fourth and final online meeting took place on Saturday 10 July 2021 (10.30am-12pm). Carolyn Wilson, from the Supporting Maternal and Child Wellbeing Unit at the Scottish Government joined us at the beginning of the session to give us an overview of the Scottish Government's COVID-19 recovery strategy and how the group's input had helped to shape its development. After her presentation, the focus shifted to discussing mental health, wellbeing and relationships, and what supports had helped young people during the pandemic. The session concluded with the young people discussing their longer-term vision for the future of Scotland after COVID, and what they would like to see in the next 12 months, three years, and 10 years and beyond.

2.3 Analysis and reporting

Children in Scotland produced three interim reports (one following each of the first three sessions), that were submitted to the Scottish Government. The

first report directly influenced the development of the Scottish Government's 'Get into Summer' programme. This final report highlights the findings from all four sessions and provides recommendations for next steps.

2.4 Limitations

The project was time-limited and ran over just four sessions. While we were able to gain valuable insight into children and young people's experiences and views on COVID recovery, the project's short duration limited the depth of discussion and the number of topics that could be covered.

Thirteen children and young people signed up to take part in the project. The majority of participants, barring one, had all taken part in previous Children in Scotland projects. This limited the diversity of opinions, and meant some 'seldom heard' voices were not represented. The project would have benefitted from additional time and resource to reach a broader group of children and young people (including younger age groups, those living in more rural areas, children and young people with additional support needs and children with experience of poverty).

3. Participant Data

Thirteen young people from across eight local authorities took part. Ages ranged from 10 to 22 years old, with an average age of 13. Most of the young people taking part came from the least deprived households by SIMD, with nine out of 13 living in SIMD deciles 8-10.

Young people were able to complete a voluntary equalities monitoring form. Twelve participants completed the form, however, some only provided partial responses. Two young people identified as having a disability and two as being care-experienced.

Meeting Attendance	
<i>Session number</i>	<i>Number of participants</i>
Session 1	12
Session 2	8
Session 3	8
Session 4	11

Table 1: Meeting Attendance

Location of Participants	
<i>Local Authority</i>	<i>Number of participants</i>
Edinburgh	4
Glasgow City	2
Falkirk	2
West Lothian	1
Fife	1
Renfrewshire	1
South Lanarkshire	1
East Ayrshire	1

Table 2: Location of participants by local authority

Age of Participants	
<i>Age</i>	<i>Number of participants</i>
10	2
11	1
12	2
13	4
14	1
15	2
22	1

Table 3: Age of participants

Participants by Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation Decile	
<i>SIMD Decile</i>	<i>Number of participants</i>
1	0
2	0
3	0
4	1
5	0
6	1
7	2
8	3
9	2
10	4

Table 4: Participants by Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation Decile

Equal Opportunities Monitoring Responses				
Question	Responses			
Do you identify as having a disability?	Yes	No	Prefer not to say	Not sure
	2	7	0	1
How would you describe your gender identity?	Male	Female	Prefer not to say	Another way
	4	5	0	0
Please choose one that best describes your sexual orientation	Heterosexual / Straight	Bi/Bisexual	Gay / Lesbian	Prefer not to say
	7	0	1	1
How would you describe your ethnicity?*	White - British	White-Scottish	Asian-Pakistan	Mixed – White & Asian
	1	6	1	1
What best describes your religion?*	Christian	Muslim	No Religion	
	5	1	3	
What languages do you speak with family and friends?*	English	Gaelic	Scots	Punjabi
	9	1	1	1
Lived experiences	Care experienced	Young carer	None of the above	Prefer not to say
	2	0	7	0

*More options were listed on the form; for ease of reporting, only options where young people said 'yes' were included

Table 5: Equal Opportunities Monitoring Responses

Evaluation

Participants were asked to provide feedback at the end of each session using an anonymous Zoom poll. A total of 39 responses were received over the four sessions.

Feedback about the sessions		
Question	Yes	No
Did you enjoy the session?	97%	0%
Did you feel included?	97%	3%
Did you have a chance to share your views?	97%	3%

Table 6: Feedback about the sessions

Children in Scotland also received some positive feedback from the participants and their parents through emails and an end of project survey.

The end of project survey included the following questions:

- Did you enjoy the project?
- Did you feel included?

- Did you have a chance to share your views?
- What did you enjoy?
- What could have been better?
- Would you work with us again?
- Is there anything else you want to tell us?

“I enjoyed the discussions we had and I enjoyed talking to others about their lockdown experiences and it helped to show me that everyone had very different experiences.”

(participant, end of project survey)

“[Child’s name] really enjoyed the session.”

(email from parent after the first session)

“The panel was very organised and there was a lot of inclusion considering we were all online.”

(participant, end of project survey)

4. Findings

4.1 Key themes identified

In session one, Children in Scotland staff led a characterisation activity to explore the different ways a young person might have been impacted by the Coronavirus pandemic.

COVID-19 can be a difficult topic for young people to talk about and by shifting the focus to a ‘gingerbread’ person’s experience, children and young people felt comfortable talking more openly about this. This activity helped us to understand some of the participants’ experiences over the past 15 months and to identify themes that were then explored in subsequent sessions.

Prominent themes that emerged from this discussion were mental health and wellbeing, relationships with family and friends, online and home learning, information about the pandemic and rules, changes to hobbies and activities, the impact of broader societal issues.

Access to outdoor spaces and religion were also brought up, but these were a less prominent part of the discussions. The impact of technology and moving to digital communication was a theme that cut across all the topics and activities. Both directly and indirectly, young people shared the importance and prevalence of technology in their lives over lockdown and how it affects how they learn at school, communicate with friends and family and their mental health.

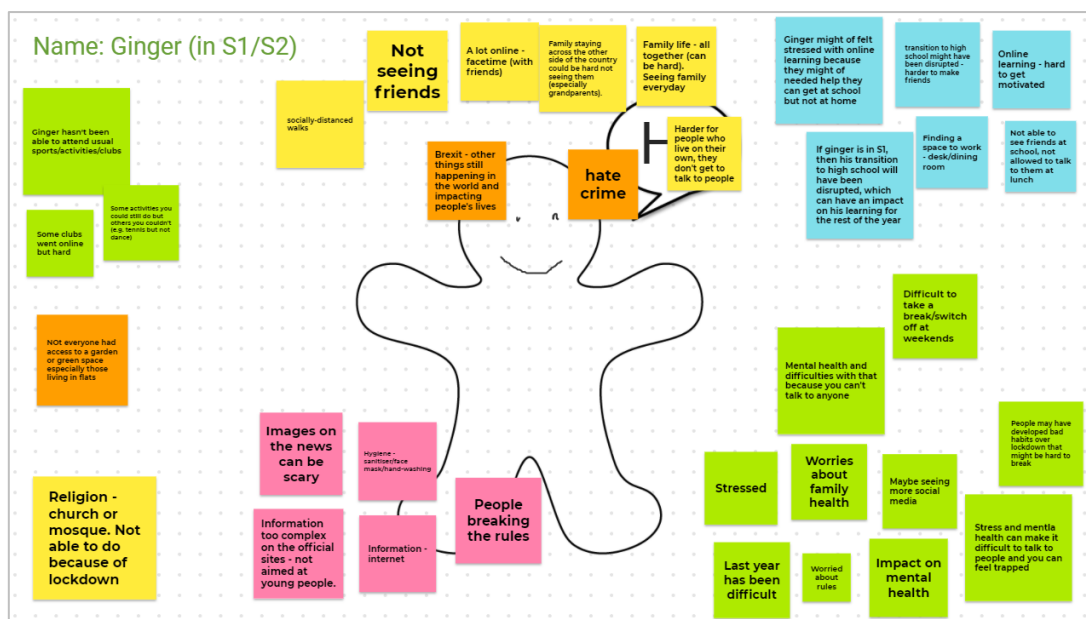


Figure 2: Characterisation activity on Jamboard

The themes chosen for discussion in sessions two, three and four were as follows:

Session Two:

- Digital technology
- Online learning during the pandemic

Session Three:

- Information children and young people received during the pandemic
- Impact of the pandemic on hobbies and interests

Session Four:

- Mental health, wellbeing and relationships
- Longer-term vision for recovery from Coronavirus.

A full list of responses can be found in Appendix 1.

4.1.1 Summer offer activity

During session one, the group discussed how the Scottish Government could support young people's wellbeing through a range of summer holiday activities.

Children in Scotland staff asked the participants to imagine that they were civil servants and they had to decide how to allocate £20 million for this purpose.

The group responded to three questions, and Children in Scotland staff used Jamboard to make visual notes the whole group could see.

The group were asked to consider the following questions:

1. What kind of activities will children and young people want to take part in?
2. What challenges might make it hard for young people to get involved? / How do we make sure all children benefit?
3. How do we let young people know about the programme we've created?

Additional prompt questions were asked to explore some of the responses in more detail.

The group identified many different ways the Scottish Government could support young people over the summer. Broadly, their feedback can be arranged into five themes:

- access to nature and space for unstructured activities
- connecting with friends at school or in the local community
- clubs and support for hobbies
- structured outings or trips
- mental health support.



Figure 3: Young people's views on the Scottish Government's Summer Programme

The group did not prioritise these themes. The consensus was that all of the activities were important and that offering individual choices would be important in supporting young people's wellbeing.

Interestingly, while access to nature was a major consideration in the first session, it was not brought up again in subsequent meetings. This is possibly because, as the sessions progressed over time from spring to summer, restrictions began to ease and the weather improved. This perhaps increased children and young people's access to the outdoors, making it a less pressing issue.

For the second question, the group identified several barriers that might prevent children and young people from taking part. These can be split into the following themes:

- concerns about mental wellbeing
- geography or transportation barriers
- not enough variety
- financial challenges

Mental wellbeing was the barrier brought up most often by young people. They felt that the Scottish Government should focus on creating safe spaces.

When asked how the Scottish Government can share the news of the new summer offer and promote it, children and young people overwhelmingly argued in favour of promoting via social media, in schools or at other community hubs. While there were a few other suggestions, those were the main methods young people recommended.

Full responses to the summer 'offer' activity can be found in Appendix 2.

4.1.2 Digital technology

In session two, the group took part in a Mentimeter quiz to encourage them to share their thoughts about digital technology and how they have interacted with devices over lockdown. The quiz allowed young people to share their views anonymously, giving them freedom to share more personal experiences without drawing attention to themselves. The group engaged in some discussion after each question.

The quiz asked young people the following questions:

1. What ways have you been using digital technology over the past year and a half?
2. What word sums up your relationship with digital technology over the last year and a half?
3. What are the positive aspects of digital technologies?
4. What are the downsides of digital technologies?
5. Is there anything else you'd like to tell us?

From the quiz answers and resulting discussion, it was clear that digital technology stretched across many areas of young people's lives. Technology became an integral way young people interacted with their friends, learned,

and played. Several young people also used devices to continue with clubs and activities and to learn new skills. In the discussions, young people reported an increase in the time they spent accessing digital devices.

For the second question, we asked young people to describe their relationship with digital technologies using just one word or phrase. The graphic below shows the responses from the children and young people.



Figure 4: Participants' one-word answers to describe their relationship with digital technologies

"No one really wanted to go into lockdown and do all these things online. But then it got alright but wished we didn't have to do it in the first place."

(participant)

"It is useful, and couldn't have gotten along without it, but it was often frustrating when wi-fi went down, and you sometimes wanted to just do things in person."

(participant)

After submitting their answers, the group discussed their responses in more detail. Many shared an ambivalence towards technology. For positives, many highlighted how it was a great way to fill time and helped you connect with people you could not see face-to-face. However, in the negatives, several young people commented about how they felt overly dependent on their devices, which was exacerbated because of the necessity of technology for online learning. This left several members of the group saying they felt "drained". While mental health was not explicitly mentioned, there appeared to be a clear link between their experience of technology and mental wellbeing.

Participants highlighted that having an unreliable internet connection could be a real concern for some young people because so much of life had moved online. However, this was not a problem experienced by those in the group.

For the last question, we gave young people the freedom to share anything about technology that we had not had the chance to cover previously. A number of the group commented about challenges of home learning. There were also comments about feeling dependent on devices and using technology to stay in touch.

More quotes from young people on their experiences with digital technology can be found in Appendix 3.

4.1.3 Learning during the pandemic

The group also explored experiences of online learning during the pandemic during session 2. Participants were asked to consider three questions about online learning, and Children in Scotland staff used Jamboard to record their comments. The three questions were:

1. What has been your experience with online learning?
2. What were the positives and challenges for learning online/at home?
3. What aspects of home learning would you like to hold on to?

Three themes emerged from their answers – flexibility; struggles with motivation; and missing friends.

Several young people commented that learning at home offered them increased flexibility, which they liked. Some commented that they enjoyed the freedom to choose when to complete their work. However, not all young people enjoyed this lack of structure and said it sometimes made it more difficult to find motivation for home learning. A number shared that they were sick of home learning and that it was often very difficult to get up in the morning.

The group discussed the importance of socialising at school and how much they missed seeing their friends during home schooling. They also highlighted that working alongside peers (i.e., normal classroom working) played a big part in providing learning motivation.

“[I] missed the distractions of friends – it helps you do more work.”
(participant)

Children and young people also shared that their experience of learning at home changed quite significantly over the course of the pandemic, with

some people's experiences improving and some deteriorating as time went on.

"My school in the first lockdown didn't do any virtual meetings but we did in the second block of online learning and that was a big improvement."
(participant)

The second question, which focused on the positive and challenging aspects of learning during the pandemic, felt like a natural continuation of the first conversation. Again, the young people highlighted that the flexibility of online learning was a big positive, and some shared that they enjoyed the comfort of working at home. One member of the group also commented that it allowed their parents to become more involved in what they were working on in school. However, some of the challenges to working from home included not having a private, distraction-free space to complete coursework and the difficulties of everyone in the family sharing the wi-fi.

Relationship with peers was a strong theme, with young people saying that they missed being able to interact with their friends at school. One young person shared that online learning made them feel more self-conscious and judged, explaining that classmates posted their work to the same folder, which meant everyone could see what you had written. While only one young person transitioned from primary to secondary school over that period, they commented on how difficult that was and how they felt like they missed out by not getting to say goodbye to their friends or by doing a secondary school visit.

In the last question, we wanted to identify if there were any aspects of learning during the pandemic that the group wanted to hold on to. The only consistent theme that emerged from this discussion was the value of tools like Google Classroom and Teams. Young people liked that all their assignments were posted and completed work could be submitted in one location. Members of the group felt it was easier to stay organised using these tools. They also commented that over the course of the pandemic their teachers had become more engaged in using digital technology, which the group felt was a good thing. Several schools were continuing to use these online platforms to assign homework or tasks or send class updates now that schools had reopened.

The group also briefly discussed the return to full-time, in-person learning and attitudes of the staff and school in relation to wellbeing and educational catch-up. Apart from the new restrictions, the group felt things at school seemed similar to before the pandemic.

More quotes from young people on their experience of online learning can be found in Appendix 4.



Figure 5: Young people described the positives and downsides of online learning

4.1.4 Information children and young people received during the pandemic

In session three, the group discussed the UNCRC and children and young people's rights to accessible, unbiased information to support them to make informed decisions. The group drew their own spider diagrams identifying the different sources of information they received during the pandemic. Children in Scotland staff asked the young people to consider:

- The different sources of information they received
- What type of information they received from different people/sources
- How this information was shared
- How often they received information from these people/sources
- How reliable the information was
- How the information made them feel

Once they had completed their drawings the group discussed their experiences.

The children and young people identified a range of sources of information during the pandemic: parents/carers and family members, teachers/school, friends, television and radio, and social media.

Parents/Carers and family members:

Many members of the group felt that their parents were informed and knew what was happening during the pandemic. They said this *"felt reassuring"*.

One child commented, *"if it wasn't for them [my parents], I would have felt in the dark"*. Another said that their mum would check the news every morning, so she knew what was happening.

The group agreed that parents, carers, and other older family members (such as aunts and uncles) were a trustworthy source of information. One member of the group said information from parents was "*comforting and reliable*" and that parents helped to "*break down the information for you*". Often this information focused on what the restrictions were (e.g., what children and young people could and couldn't do, home-schooling arrangements, etc.).

Parents and carers played an important role in filtering information about the pandemic and sharing important updates with their children. The group stated that information from parents was the most reliable and most important source of information during the pandemic.

This underlines the key role informed and engaged parents and carers can play in supporting children and young people's mental health, helping them to access information and upholding their rights.

Teachers/School:

Several young people spoke about their experiences of hearing about Coronavirus at school. Teachers explained what was happening and how this might affect the way pupils learned. At one school, teachers tackled some of rumours about the virus. One member of the group said, "*the teacher sat us down and told us that it wasn't bat soup*", in an attempt to ease children's minds about the origins of the virus and tackle some of the negative cultural associations.

Receiving information from their teachers was seen as helpful. It made some of the group feel better although, because the big changes were happening very quickly at the start of the pandemic, some young people still felt nervous.

Friends

Because friends were not allowed to meet in the same ways, many shared information by texting or using messaging apps like Snapchat. Members of the group said they shared information about the virus in this way every few months, and often it was linked to changing restrictions, like going back to school or being able to meet up face-to-face with friends. The group commented that sharing information about the positive changes helped them to feel more hopeful.

One young person commented that this information was usually quite reliable, and friends often shared links to relevant news articles online.

Television, radio and internet

Many members of the group found out information about the pandemic through the news. This was mostly news on television and online although one member of the group also mentioned listening to the news on the radio.

Most of the group reported watching BBC News on TV. Sometimes members would watch the news on their own and at other times they would watch it with parents. Watching the news provided a range of information including about the rules at the different stages of lockdown, new strains of COVID, and daily death and infection statistics.

The group identified that the news on television helped them to stay informed although they mentioned that it made them feel quite sad. One young person commented that it could be *"quite graphic, especially the stuff in China"*.

All members of the group had watched the news at some point over the past 15 months, with several young people saying, *"it would just be on at home"*. Several children and young people reported watching the news on most days.

As highlighted above, the group also spoke about online news articles and how these were occasionally shared between friends.

The young people also said that they sometimes watched the briefings or announcements by the Prime Minister or First Minister. One young person commented that these were sometimes *"a bit scary"*. The group said they wanted more concise information with several members saying that the briefings were quite boring, and it took too long for politicians to get to the point. One young person commented *"I didn't watch them frequently. I preferred watching news and shorter news stories"*. Another said that the politicians and experts using *"big words could be annoying"* and that he *"only wanted to know how it would affect me directly – could I go and get a chippy?!"*.

Social media

Some of the group found out information on social media. They recognised that this information was not always true. One young person commented that you *"have to take it with a pinch of salt"* but he felt most of the information he was hearing was accurate. One person commented that social media could *"sometimes be quite depressing and sometimes quite reassuring"*. Another said that social media was full of *"lots of angry people"*.

Children in Scotland staff asked the group to reflect on the information sources that were most useful to them during the pandemic. Parents/carers

and the news were identified as the two most reliable and important sources of information.

Finally, the group were asked what they wanted to tell the Scottish Government about their information needs. The group identified the importance of having *“information produced in a child-friendly way, that makes it more accessible”*. They also said that having *“child-friendly websites with news”* and information *“without a lot of the technical terms”* would help young people to stay informed.



Figure 6: Young people's drawings showing where they received information about the pandemic.

4.1.5 Impact of the pandemic on hobbies and interests

In session three the group discussed the impact of Coronavirus on children and young people's hobbies and interests. We know the pandemic has greatly impacted on children and young people's opportunities to socialise and take part in hobbies, so this exercise was an opportunity to hear young people's personal experiences.

The group were asked to consider three questions about their hobbies and interests:

1. What are some of your favourite hobbies or interests?
2. What are the benefits of these hobbies/interests?
3. How do you think children and young people can be supported to try new activities and benefit from them?

The group first discussed their wide range of interests and hobbies. Prior to lockdown, many of the group took part in sports or organised group activities like dancing and choir. The group also discussed personal interests like reading and art, and several young people said they just enjoyed spending time “hanging out” with friends.

The group identified a range of benefits, with many highlighting the mental health and social benefits that their hobbies and interests brought them. At the previous session, the group had discussed accessing hobbies online and attending groups digitally. Several children and young people mentioned how they preferred face-to-face sessions. One young person commented *“online is not as much fun as going out and doing stuff”*.

Interestingly, although many members of the group were involved in active hobbies, the group discussion didn't focus on the positive physical health benefits of playing sports and exercising.

The group discussed how children and young people could be supported to try new activities and benefit from them. There were some concerns that the pandemic had limited young people's opportunities to try out new hobbies – some activity groups in schools had stopped completely and certain sports group in school were only being offered to young people who were playing competitively, rather than being made available more widely.

The group wanted to see more opportunities to try new activities in their local areas to make it easier and more convenient for children and young people do access them. They felt that offering taster sessions would help young people try out new activities and that promoting these opportunities at school would be a good way to make sure that everyone knew about them.

Several young people highlighted that they missed spending their free time with friends. The group said they were looking forward to restrictions easing further so that hanging out with friends could return to normal. One young person said, *“everything has to be more planned now”*.

More quotes from children and young people about hobbies and interests can be found in Appendix 5.

4.1.6 Mental health, wellbeing and relationships

In session four the group focused on mental health, wellbeing and relationships. Coping with changing restrictions and challenges to mental wellbeing were a strong theme throughout the project and had been mentioned at various points in earlier sessions.

Children in Scotland staff asked the participants to choose up to three emojis to describe their experience of lockdown. After selecting their emojis, the

group discussed their choices and why they had picked them. This exercise offered the participants a chance to explore how they had been feeling over the course of the pandemic in a fun and non-threatening way, and discuss what supports, activities or techniques had helped their wellbeing.



Figure 7: Emojis activity to help young people discuss mental wellbeing and the pandemic.

A few themes emerged from the group discussions. Many young people shared that boredom was one of their most persistent feelings of lockdown. One person stated, "Lockdown was really boring, nothing to do, stuck in the house. But sometimes it could be pretty comfy during lockdown". While another added, "you weren't able to do anything, you didn't have the best attitude because you were so bored. And it's been a crazy year with all the ups and down. Because there wasn't much to do, I slept most of the time."

"There were a lot of times where you couldn't do anything, so you found new things to do. I was often bored, but also sometimes it was overwhelming with the new restrictions, rules and schoolwork"
(participant)

Despite the boredom, many found positives in lockdowns, including the ability to try new things. Participants shared that they tried to remain positive, even when they were confused about the regulations or just wanted things to return to normality.

“It's not been the best, not the worst, in the middle. With the new restrictions, I think a lot of people were feeling fed up and just wanting things to go back to normal.”
(participant)

“[I've] been feeling confused but trying to keep positive.”
(participant)

The group discussed what habits or activities supported their wellbeing during the pandemic. Participants shared that spending time outside, learning new skills or taking part in hobbies, and talking with friends and family were helpful for improving their mental wellbeing. More feedback from young people on this topic can be found in Appendix 6.

The group was asked if there was anything else that could be done to support children and young people's mental wellbeing and most indicated that returning to normality would be the most beneficial thing to support children and young people.

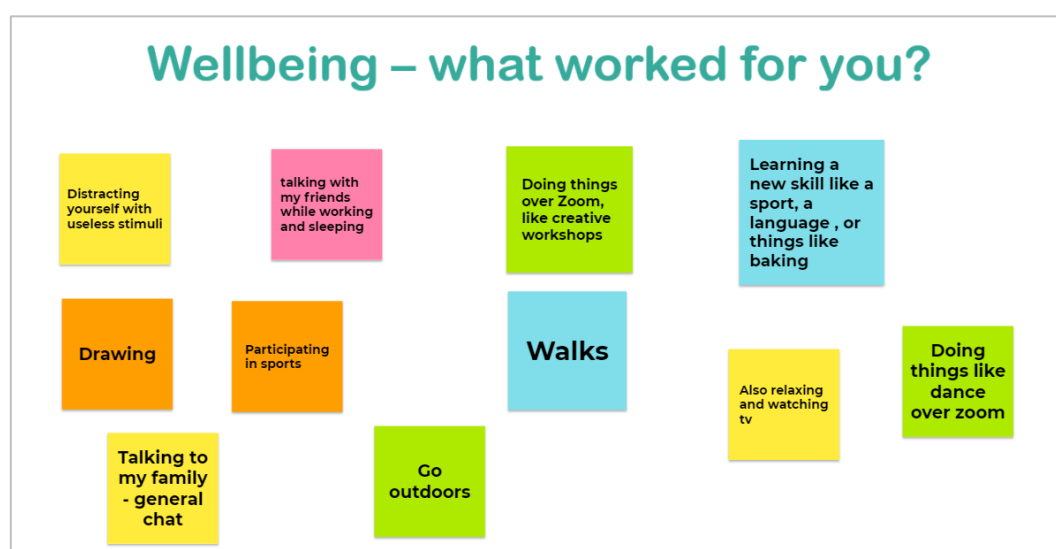


Figure 8: Techniques young people used to improve their mental wellbeing

Mental health, wellbeing and relationships were also discussed at various points during the other sessions. Many of the discussions focused on the challenges since the start of the pandemic.

“Last year has been difficult.”
(participant)

“Stress and mental health can make it difficult to talk to people and you can feel trapped.”
(participant)

Relationships were clearly key to maintaining young people's wellbeing. Often the group discussed reaching out to family members or friends for support if they were feeling low, and this was referenced across multiple sessions. As highlighted in section 4.1.4, family members were able to provide both emotional support and practical information and advice.

Some young people mentioned the challenges of staying in touch with friends and family.

“Not seeing friends has been difficult.”
(participant)

“Family staying across the country could be hard not seeing them, especially grandparents.”
(participant)

The group also highlighted the difficulties of family relationships and spending more time than normal with each other.

“Family life – it can be hard to being together/on top of each other all the time”
(participant)

4.1.7 Longer-term vision for recovery from Coronavirus

In the last activity, young people were asked to imagine the future of Scotland after COVID-19 and what they would want recovery to look like. They were asked to think about the next 12 months, 3 years and then 10 years and beyond.

In the short term, young people shared that the biggest change they would like to see is the reduction of Coronavirus restrictions and life going back to normal. This included getting rid of masks and removing number limits on visiting people's homes. At previous sessions, the group had discussed the stress returning to everyday life would involve for some young people as they deal with health and social anxiety concerns.

When thinking about the medium term, young people shared their hopes that COVID would no longer be part of their day-to-day lives and also brought up other concerns, including politics and the world economy. Some young people recognised that COVID-19 may be a part of our society for some time and that we need to adapt and learn to live with the virus.

Interestingly, none of the children and young people mentioned COVID vaccinations during the sessions. Children and young people's awareness and views and opinions about the vaccination programme may change as

the Scottish Government extends its vaccination programme to 16-and-17 year-olds.

Looking ahead 10 years and beyond, the group shared their hopes for a fairer, more equal world and highlighted their concerns for climate change. One young person shared that they hoped that as a society we would learn from the pandemic and create more resilient systems. In discussions, several members of the group highlighted the challenges of getting 'back to normality' for children and young people with low immune systems.

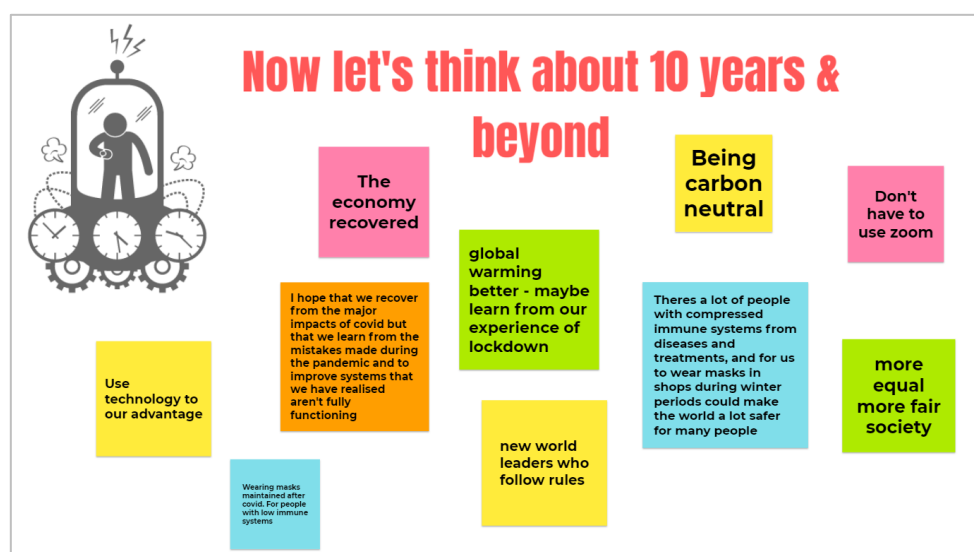


Figure 9: Young people's vision for recovery from Coronavirus (10 years and beyond)

5. Conclusion and recommendations

These engagement sessions with children and young people have been effective in capturing their views around how they experienced the Coronavirus pandemic.

The planned incorporation of the UNCRC into Scots Law will place additional requirements on the Scottish Government to take children and young people's views into account as they make plans for short- and longer-term recovery from COVID-19.

Children in Scotland has produced a series of recommendations for the Scottish Government to consider, based on our findings.

Recommendation 1:

The Scottish Government should continue to seek children and young people's experiences of the pandemic over a longer time period to ensure

their views and needs continue to be included in recovery plans.

Over the course of our engagement work, we have heard how young people's feelings and experiences have changed as they have adapted to different stages of the pandemic. The pandemic continues to affect children and young people's lives, including their schooling, leisure time, relationships and mental wellbeing. Children and young people should continue to be consulted on recovery decisions and actions and their views should feed into evaluation of the success of these programmes.

Recommendation 2:

The Scottish Government should engage with a wider group of children and young people to ensure a broader range of views and experiences are captured.

As highlighted in the limitations section of this report, our engagement work has been conducted with a relatively small group of children and young people. The Scottish Government should consider how to engage with more children and young people and ensure a diverse range of backgrounds and age groups are represented. This should include children and young people with experience of poverty, from rural or island households, children with care experience, young carers, young people with experience of the criminal justice system and children and young people from households where English is not the first language. This engagement work must be properly resourced.

Recommendation 3:

The Scottish Government should ensure children and young people's views are captured as part of 'Get into Summer' evaluation activity.

Children and young people's views have helped to shape the 'Get into Summer' programme and their opinions must be central to measuring the success of funded activity. The views of parents and carers should also be sought as part of this evaluation work.

Recommendation 4:

The Scottish Government should explore how important information is shared with children and young people to ensure they have access to accurate, age-appropriate information.

Children have the right to media and diverse information, as outlined in article 17 of the UNCRC, and this information should be accessible.

Many young people shared that they received news about the pandemic from BBC News on television or via their parents, who filtered the information they received. Not all children and young people have a trusted adult who can help filter and explain the news, which might make it more difficult for them to understand what is going on and how regulations might affect them.

A number of young people raised concern that the information about the pandemic was often long, difficult to understand and included distressing images or videos.

The Young Scot website includes a range of information about the Coronavirus pandemic. The Scottish Government should consider awareness-raising activity to ensure that children and young people know about this resource. The Scottish Government should also consider whether this information meets the needs of younger children under the age of 11.

Recommendation 5:

The Scottish Government must continue to invest in support to ensure all children and young people have the equipment, reliable internet access and skills to engagement with online learning.

Recommendation 6:

Vital online learning digital tools, including Google Classroom and Teams, should become standard in education even after the return to school-based learning

Recommendation 7:

All teachers should receive adequate training for using digital technologies to create a common, nationwide approach

Access to digital devices (laptops and tablets) and reliable wi-fi was essential to supporting children and young people to learn and stay connected with their peers and teachers during the pandemic.

Our group highlighted the positive aspects of online learning tools and hoped to continue to use these in the future. However, our engagement work identified a lack of consistency in education professionals' knowledge, confidence, and approach to using digital technologies across different schools and local authorities. To ensure all children and young people receive appropriate support and a high-quality education, teachers should receive consistent digital training to maintain some of the positive aspects of online learning, even when returning to face-to-face teaching.

Recommendation 8:

The Scottish Government should explore opportunities to support young

people to try new experiences, sports and hobbies. These should be located in sites young people already use and feel comfortable in, including community centres, youth groups, and schools.

Recommendation 9:

The Scottish Government must continue to prioritise children and young people's mental health and wellbeing in the recovery plans. Mental health support should be integrated into the delivery of recovery activities.

Young people overwhelmingly expressed the desire to try out new activities and experiences, in person, in their local community as part of the recovery process. Children and young people shared that participation in hobbies and activities had been disrupted by Coronavirus restrictions and they wanted the opportunity to explore new interests so they could have fun, spend time with their peers and support their mental wellbeing.

Mental wellbeing touched and influenced many aspects of young people's experiences and was a major concern when they considered the return to 'normal' life. The group highlighted the importance of supporting children and young people's mental health and wellbeing in all aspects of the recovery process.

Recommendation 10:

The Scottish Government must commit to closing the feedback loop with children and young people, and indicate how their views have informed decision making.

We recognise that the Scottish Government is not always in a position to act on everything it hears from children and young people. However, children and young people who have volunteered their time and opinions (such as those who took part in this project) should receive information about how their views have informed decision making, and any specific changes that have happened as a result. This helps to make children and young people feel noticed, valued and engaged, and more likely to contribute again in the future.

6. Appendices

Appendix 1: Session 1 Characterisation Activity – Gingerbread Figure	
Themes	Feedback
Mental health and wellbeing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• “Last year has been difficult.”• “Stressed”

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Coronavirus has had a big impact on mental health." • "Stress and mental health can make it difficult to talk to people and you can feel trapped." • "It is difficult to switch off and take a break at the weekends" • "Mental health and difficulties with that because you can't talk to friends." • "Worried about rules" • "Worries about family health" • "Maybe seeing more social media"
Relationships (family and friends)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Not seeing friends has been difficult" • "Family staying across the country could be hard not seeing them, especially grandparents." • "A lot of time online, facetime with friends instead of seeing people" • "Family life – it can be hard to being together/on top of each other all the time" • "Harder for people who live on their own, they don't get to talk to people" • "Socially distanced walks have helped"
Learning/Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Transition to high school might have been disrupted – it makes it harder to make friends" • "If Ginger [our character] is in S1, then his transition to high school will have been disrupted, which can have an impact on his learning for the rest of the year." • "Online learning – it's hard to get motivated" • "Finding a space to work can be hard – desk/dining room" • "Not able to see friends at school, not allowed to talk to them at lunch" • "Ginger [our character] might have felt stressed with online learning because they might of needed help they can get at school but not at home."
Information and rules	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Information is too complex on official sites – it's not aimed at young people." • "Ginger [our character] might know about people breaking the rules." • "Information – getting it from the internet" • "Thinking about hygiene – sanitiser, face mask, hand-washing." • "Images on the news can be scary"

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Might see reports on Newsround"
Hobbies and activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Ginger [our character] hasn't been able to attend usual sports, activities or clubs he enjoys." • "Some activities you could still do but others you couldn't." • "Some clubs went online but it's harder – dance club went online but then had to stop because it didn't work."
Access to outdoor spaces	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Not everyone had access to a garden or green space especially those living in flats."
Religion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "It's affected religion – people were not able to go to church or mosque because of lockdown."
Other world-wide/societal issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Brexit – other things still happening in the world and impacting people's lives." • "Hate crimes have increased" • "People have blamed other cultures for the virus."

Appendix 2: Session 1 Summer Offer Activity	
Question	Feedback
What kind of activities will young people want to take part in?	<p>Access to nature and spaces for unstructured activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Making spaces for children and teens to go and be loud, as its often said in my area that teens disrupt people, so creating spaces for that is important." • "I know that I myself wouldn't want to be doing clubs all summer, but would welcome more spaces to play and enjoy myself without feeling obliged to go to lots and lots of clubs." • "Things that are active" • "Days outside in the sun" • "Camping and mountain biking." • "Open wildlife spaces and trekking" • "Maybe put funding into public places-even accessible seating areas in parks to put Scotland's nature to good use and put people at ease about covid, as it would be outside." • "While people might want to go to big clubs or busy places, making the community a safer place for people to enjoy themselves without constant clubs (parks, maybe something like the national trusts)." <p>Connecting with friends and community:</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "After school programmes with activities to do and talk to your friends." • "Activities at school help with social anxiety" • "In-person activities/group activities with people in your school or community." • "Put schools and community centres to good use so they don't become idle over the summer (fairs, coffee mornings)." • "Social clubs, closed, small groups for people to socialise, to ease people back into socialising." <p>Clubs and support for hobbies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Drop-in clubs which you don't have to always be there at a set date and time each week. Sometimes you might not want to take part." • "Activities like cooking, baking, art crafts." • "Free clubs like sports, music and art." • "Funding into sports clubs and summer day-clubs – especially for those who come from families with lower income." • "Youth clubs that cost little or nothing to join, community centres where you can do different kinds go activities – like cooking." <p>Mental health support:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Counsellors for young people." • "They should create mental health programmes for people so they feel more comfortable and can adjust to ordinary life outside of lockdown easier." • "Mental health programs for people so they feel more comfortable." <p>Structured outings/trips:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Away days to outdoor places like the beach, Go Ape or other adventure things. This is so they can get away from their problems and it can help rebuild bonds." • "Playzone and theme park"
<p>What challenges might make it hard for young people to get involved? How do we make sure all children benefit?</p>	<p>Concerns about mental health:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Social anxiety – people scared or nervous about meeting other people." • "Some people might feel different and find it difficult to socialise." • "Making things easily accessible and safe, by making the club a safe and inclusive space, and encouraging people to express their interests." • "Different groups might feel stigmatised." • "Fear of differences"

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "People might feel nervous about COVID and if things are safe."
	<p>Geography/Transportation barriers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> "Some places might have fewer options." "Difficult for new parents, can't do stuff they normally would. Single and teen parents might find it harder. Parents struggle to be there for mental health." "Where people live, it might be hard to access or get transport."
	<p>Not enough variety:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> "The variety of activities might not suit everyone." "They could put in anonymous polls in schools to find out what people want to do."
	<p>Financial challenges:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> "Money concerns" "People can't afford activities or to get to clubs" "People need to pay for food/lunches"
How do we let young people know about the programme we've created?	<p>Promotion in the community:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> "Schools, there could be leaflets" "Youth groups" "Existing groups or clubs" "Videos about what is happening locally"
	<p>Social media:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> "Social Media" "Twitter" "Facebook – a lot of parents use that" "Tik Tok, Insta, Twitter (especially for parents)." "Snapchat, Instagram, Twitter" "Short videos explaining what's happening."
	<p>Other:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> "Taster sessions" "TV adverts, locally and nationally." "Talking about it, word of mouth is important."

Appendix 3: Session 2 Digital Technology - Mentimeter Quiz and Discussion

Question	Feedback
What ways have you been using digital technologies over the past year and a half?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "Home school" "School work, recreation, day-to-day life." "For school, connecting with other people, general things such as social media and gaming." "School at home, trying out new things."

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "School, dance/exercise classes, calling family members, keeping in contact with friends, entertainment and TV." • "Gaming, staying in touch with friends. Using google classroom for remote learning and I also started my own YouTube channel." • "Playing games." • "Clubs" • "Hobbies" • "Art group" • "Coding" • "Computer coding" • "I learnt how to edit videos"
What word sums up your relationship with digital technology over the last year and a half?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Easier access to hobbies" – "More people were staying inside, more time on technology." • "Love-hate" – "It is useful, and couldn't have gotten along without it, but it was often frustrating when Wi-Fi went down, and you sometimes wanted to just do things in person." • "Unwillingly alright" – "No one really wanted to go into lockdown and do all these things online. But then it got alright, but wished we didn't have to do it in the first place." • "Strange" – "because it was weird to be home school it's really strange." • "Sporadic" • "Addictive" • "Laboured" • "Dependent"
What are the positive aspects of digital technologies?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Learning from home." • "It's a way to connect." • "More things to do." • "For those that have internet, the source is available constantly. It is easy to talk to people who are far away or take part in projects like this from across Scotland. It is also constantly developing to become better." • "Texting your friends that you can't see in person." • "Overall, without it the pandemic would be much more difficult." • "It's convenient" • "Coding, filling in time."
What are the downsides of digital technologies?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Very unreliable." • "Can be reliable but also not so much if the Wi-Fi was to cut out." • "Unpredictable"

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Being addicted to it and having to use it for school can be difficult.” • “Having a dependency on technology can be incredibly annoying.” • “Addictive/ if you use too much you get headaches and sore eyes.” • “For example, during the first lockdown, when doing schooling and extracurricular on the similar devices it can be quite draining and repetitive.” • “Can be used to bully and people act differently online.”
Is there anything else you'd like to tell us?	<p>Learning During the Pandemic</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I didn't like the second lockdown because I didn't get notifications when I get homework so I had a limited time to hand it in.” • “If we were to continue remote or blended learning it would be worthwhile to have teacher and student training on how to use these online services like google classrooms etc.” • “People might be embarrassed about their work being online.” • “I didn't like how you only saw a snapshot of other people's learning, therefore benchmarking yourself against others was difficult.” • “Home-schooling isn't for everyone, same as in person isn't.” • “I liked how I could get up when I liked and laze around when I'm working.” <p>Other</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “People might not have meetings in person because we have Zoom and other apps.” • “It's really difficult having to be dependent on a device and no longer solely yourself to help you learn.” • “Sort of me and my friends did Google meets a lot to help each and talk.” • “[technology can help make events] more inclusive than in-person events but also less exciting.”

Appendix 4: Session 2 - Online Learning During the Pandemic

Question	Feedback
	Flexibility:

<p>What has been your experience with online learning?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “In the first lockdown, I had work to do but it was flexible and I could do it in the morning or afternoon. At first I didn’t enjoy it but then I got used to it and really enjoyed it.” • “It was quite good as we were able to have a flexible school day.” • “My school let me learn when I wanted.” • “Some optional work and some that you had to do.” • “My school in the first lockdown didn’t do any virtual meetings but we did in the second block of online learning and that was a big improvement.” <p>Struggles with Motivation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Hard to get motivated because there are no people halfway across the room to throw rubbers to/chat to!” • “Challenging – drive to get up in the morning.” • “The first lockdown was alright but it was the opposite in the second lockdown, and by the second week I was sick of home-schooling. I was in primary for the first one and high school for the second and I had to do calls and more tests.” • “I also think I got my work done quicker when I’m in classes.” <p>Missing Friends:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Missed the distractions of friends – it helps you do more work.” • “Not just about learning, it’s about seeing friends. No room to hang out with your friends.”
<p>Positives and challenges for learning online / at home</p>	<p>Positives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Comfort.” • “Flexibility” • “Family could see the work you were doing.” • “And a positive would be it gave people a chance to experience home-schooling, and perhaps encouraged people to permanently home-school.” <p>Challenges;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “A challenge working from home with family.” • “Sharing the Wi-Fi was hard.” • “Transition was difficult because I didn’t know much about my new school. I felt we left to get on with it.”

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Difficult to support young people with additional support needs.” • “A negative would be that some people just don't learn well at home.” • “Not mingling with peers.” • “Family members were a distraction.”
What aspects of home learning would you like to hold on to?	<p>Digital tools:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “We also had a whole year group assembly using Google Classroom / Meets when we returned back to school.” • “Easier to use new tools, like Google Classroom and teams.” • “I have homework and it is all on Google Classroom.” <p>Other responses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Tests have probably stayed the same amount for us.” • “Being flexible – if it's a hot day, doing PE etc.”

Appendix 5 – Session 3 Impact of the pandemic on hobbies and interests	
Question	Feedback
What are some of your favourite hobbies or interests?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Playing tennis” • “Rock climbing” • “Reading” • “Art” • “Dancing” • Interest in nature / “nature book” • “Choir” • “Going to friends' houses to watch TV and hang out” • “Running” • “Walking” • “Meeting up with friends” • “Netball” • “Reading my monthly animal action magazine”
What are the benefits of these hobbies/interests?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Good for your mental health” • “To socialise” • “You meet new people” • “I quite like the escapism” • “Learn new things and new skills” • “Doing exercise helps with mental wellbeing and breaks up your day”

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Talking to people – new opportunities" • "You appreciate being home more after being out" • "Impress friends with your knowledge" • "Online is not as much fun as going out and doing stuff"
--	------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Appendix 6: Session 4 – <i>Emojis and Emotions – experiences of lockdown</i>	
Trying to keep positive	"Been feeling confused but trying to keep positive."
	"It was sort of fine, I was trying to reassure myself that things are fine and getting better."
	"It's not been the best, not the worst, in the middle. With the new restrictions, I think a lot of people were feeling fed up and just wanting things to go back to normal."
	"I was either really happy and hyper or I was really tired and just wanted to stay in bed."
Experiences of boredom	"Lockdown was really boring, nothing to do, stuck in the house. But sometimes it could be pretty comfy during lockdown."
	"You weren't able to do anything, you didn't have the best attitude because you were so bored. And it's been a crazy year with all the ups and downs. Because there wasn't much to do, I slept most of the time."
	"There were a lot of times where you couldn't do anything, so you found new things to do. I was often bored, but also sometimes it was overwhelming with the new restrictions, rules and schoolwork."