



ADVISORY GROUP ON ECONOMIC RECOVERY: COVID- 19 IMPACT ON EMPLOYMENT

Hot Report - June 2020



Overview

A variety of young people who are Young Scot volunteers met digitally on Monday 1st June over Zoom to explore the priorities of young people in the medium-term Economic and Employment recovery from the COVID-19 crisis and lockdown in Scotland.

This report summarises the output of various activities the young people took part in as part of the two-hour digital session, as well as an overview of the 22 young people who attended.

This workshop aimed to explore the following key areas of discussion:

- + What are the medium to long-term consequences of the lockdown on: businesses including loss of employees and unemployment; young people's future careers, hopes and aspirations; as well as potential emerging opportunities that might arise from the crisis?
- + What will the implications of the recovery be for different groups and communities of young people, including on unemployment; on the nature of work; and on socio-economic inequality as a whole?
- + How will the COVID-19 crisis impact on young people's employment in Scotland over the next 5 years, with a potentially difficult employment market?
- + What can the Scottish Government learn from the COVID-19 crisis to protect business and the employment market in the future?

Additionally, we spent some time exploring how the young people have been spending their time during their period at home; their approaches to staying positive and motivated; as well as the challenges they have been facing.

Digital Session Approach

Due to the restrictions in place during the time of the session, there were adjustments made to the Young Scot operating model and working practices. To ensure that delivery of engagement through co-design continued with minimal disruption, providing young people with opportunities to participate during this time, the session was delivered remotely using Zoom video conferencing and other digital communication tools, such as Menti, a digital questionnaire platform. This meant that an increased number of Young Scot staff were involved in the delivery of the activities to ensure that the young people taking part were supported and encouraged to share their insights and experiences.

The model for delivery meant that the young people met virtually in a shared space as a full group but then completed each of the activities in small group "breakout spaces" led by Young Scot staff. Additional support measures were offered to all of the participants in order to take part, as well as one other young person who was unable to attend responding to the activities remotely and sharing their thoughts and experiences, ensuring that the model was inclusive and accessible.

Recruitment

The opportunity to take part in the digital co-design session to engage young people widely in the medium to long-term economic recovery planning around the COVID-19 crisis and lockdown was shared with all of our Young Scot volunteers. This included those who have previously or are currently involved in co-design projects, those who have attended events, as well as those who are regular volunteers. Through sharing this opportunity broadly, 34 young people expressed an interest in getting involved. From those that expressed an interest, 22 attended virtually and one young person shared their experiences outwith the session.

Capturing Lockdown Experiences

Before delving into the topic area, the participants were asked to take part in an optional Menti quiz online to help to capture an overview of the participants taking part, as well as a snapshot around how the young people have been experiencing lockdown, the impacts they have felt individually on their employment and how the COVID-19 crisis has affected them.

With 22 young people taking part in the digital session, the age ranged spanned from 16 to 25 years old. The majority of the participants identified as female at 55%, with 45% identifying as male. There were 20 responses declared when asked about health conditions which have lasted, or are expected to last, at least 12 months, including: mobility; learning, understanding or concentrating; mental health conditions; social or behavioural impairment; and others.

When asked about the ethnic group they identify as, the majority of participants at 85% identified as White Scottish/White British, with 10% identifying as BAME. Of the 20 participants that shared their personal postcode, 15% reside in the lower two quintiles locations. 10% of participants identified as having experience of being in care and 15% identified as LGBT.

When asked what activity best describes their current education or employment status,

- + 55% declared they were in some form of education,
- + 20% were currently in school,
- + 10% in college
- + 25% at university.
- + 5% of participants were currently volunteering or interning.

When asked to sum up the past few weeks in three words uncertainty was shared as the main emotion felt. Other feelings identified included:

- + Mental health and anxiety
- + Positive words such as happy, optimistic, thoughtful
- + Loneliness and isolation
- + Missing school or education.

The young people were asked what they were doing to stay positive and anything that was worrying or challenging during this time. The responses included:

- + 65% of respondents mentioning some form of exercise
- + 15% mentioned mindfulness, meditation or prayer
- + Several were staying creative and picking up new skills
- + Several were getting involved in gaming, music and films
- + 20% were staying positive by going outside or being in the garden
- + 20% mentioned continuing with work or volunteering
- + 38% of people were feeling stressed, uncertain and sad
- + 32% were worried about school, university or exam results
- + 42% were concerned about money and their future employment
- + 22% were worried about friendship and family and wanting to see people.

The young people were asked to think about where they had been getting their information around the COVID-19 crisis. The responses included:

- + 68% shared that they were getting their information from mainstream channels such as BBC or Sky News.
- + 26% of people mentioned Scottish Government
- + 37% identified social media
- + 16% mentioning Young Scot.

In order to understand the variety of situations that the young people participating were experiencing, they were asked to complete several questions around their employment. Before lockdown, **75% of the respondents shared that they were in full or part-time work. Only 30% were still working in some way now**, with a drop of 45%, and 15% of those now working from home. **35% of people had been furloughed with 5% having been made redundant.**

Of the participants 47% worked in hospitality either before lockdown or currently. Other jobs included:

- + Retail
- + Administration
- + Tourism

Most people didn't want to continue anything from their current work routine after lockdown, but those that did mentioned enjoying the routines and the ability to work from home, with a few also mentioning the important focus on mental health and physical activity.

Key Issues and Headlines

Having begun to explore the impacts that the COVID-19 crisis and lockdown measures have already had on their employment and working situations, the young people were asked to consider the medium to long-term consequences of the lockdown in small groups.

They considered the impacts on both employment and the economy, as well as how this may affect young people, exploring how businesses may be affected in future, including loss of employees and unemployment; how young people's future careers, hopes and aspirations may be affected; as well as potential emerging opportunities that might arise from the crisis.

The groups were encouraged to distil the issues into a "headline", while exploring what the impacts and consequences may be, creating a newsfeed of the key issues that may arise from the crisis in future.

Local/Small Businesses

"Death of the High Street"

One of the key issues identified by the young people was the struggles that small and local business face, those that make up town centres and high streets. It was also highlighted that many of these businesses do not have an online presence so can't change their operating model easily. With the measures in place around social distancing there was a concern that these small businesses won't be able to reopen and operate as usual. The concern for continued income generation and the lack of opportunities for young people in part-time employment and seasonal work was a key part of this, with many young people relying on seasonal work to sustain them throughout the year.

The tourism that supports local businesses was highlighted as a key concern, with some areas of Scotland relying on the tourist industry and who are currently struggling, with no clear understanding of when this will return to usual trading rates.

Decreasing Opportunities

"Furloughed with no Future"

With certain sectors being forced to cut their employees, such as the hospitality industry which primarily employs young staff, there are a lot of young people who are concerned that they can no longer support themselves. It was also highlighted that many of the young people who have been furloughed throughout the crisis are concerned that they may not have a position to return to, with little stability, reliable hours or income.

Modern apprenticeship programmes were also identified as a concern, with worries about opportunities like these no longer operating to enable young people to gain qualifications whilst also learning on the job.



Financial Security for Young People

"No Financial Security for Young People"

With employment being identified as one of the biggest issues young people are facing, financial security and support was a key concern alongside this. With young people graduating with potentially less opportunities available, both for graduate employment and more broadly, their finances will be hard hit. With the change in priorities and a variety of sector downsizing, there were concerns about their degrees no longer being appropriate for the employment market, with many young people choosing an opportunity not necessarily because it is relevant to them but in order to gain some financial security.

Accessibility of Employment and Education

"Businesses Encourage New Working Future"

With many organisations, businesses and their employees having to work from home, the young people highlighted that this may be an opportunity to continue new working practices. This could potentially benefit young people, through saving money on travel expenses, allowing young people to access opportunities no matter where they live, and opening up new avenues for young people to explore. It was also noted that there would need to be support to ensure online engagement and working practices were inclusive and accessible to all.



Health and Safety Restrictions and Social Distancing

"Slackening of Restrictions – Are People Actually Following the Guidelines"

Several of the groups highlighted the concerns around the social distancing restrictions that are in place and how they will be eased over time. There were expectations around some people deviating from the measures and what this could mean for them in a working environment. Being able to return to work and how this might be managed both by businesses and employees was a key concern, with specific sectors such as social care being highlighted, but broadly how protective equipment will be provided, and guidelines made clear to staff. If guidelines are issued, there was a concern that they might be interpreted differently by each employer or individual if they are not clear.

Community safety concerns were also highlighted, with smaller communities being nervous to welcome newcomers, tourists and business as they felt that isolation offers a degree of safety. The fear of accessing services once they do re-open due to concerns over safety was also considered.



Education

"High School Leavers Effect - Unclear Exam Results"

The disruption to education and with grades being determined on course work, there was concerns around how this will affect young people in the future. The young people discussed if this might impact on their applications to college and university, as well as employers not recognising the grades as being a true reflection of their work, ultimately affecting their employability and access to opportunities in the future.

The Environment Sector

"New Job Openings in Environment Sector as Scotland Commits to Green Innovation and Clean Energy"

The young people were hopeful that the lockdown restriction might positively affect the environment sector, with new job opportunities opening up, new opportunities for young people and projects being developed. Active travel and the aspirations for this to develop was highlighted as something they would like to see continue and built upon, with an expansion of the cycling industry and the expansion of infrastructure such as bike lanes. Low emission zones were explored as a concept, with active travel and the development of the renewable energy sector.

Impact on the Arts

"How Can Arts and Culture Thrive"

Finally, the groups highlighted the need to support the arts and culture sector, with many venues closing, art practices unable to be delivered with the restrictions in place and freelance artists left with no work or income. Many of the young people highlighted creative practices that they have been getting involved with throughout lockdown and the need to continue to value the sector and opportunities for young people.



Communities and Individuals Affected

With the key issues and concerns identified for the future, the young people began to explore who the economic recovery may affect most. This included individuals facing specific barriers or communities, with each of the small groups considering - different communities throughout Scotland; those specifically facing unemployment; as well as those already facing additional barriers.

Each group considered the areas or communities they felt would feel the biggest impacts and explored what the implications might look like. This included both the nature of work and how this might affect young people specifically, as well as the socio-economic impact on inequality as a whole.

Those who are already facing additional barriers to employment were highlighted by several of the group. This covered a wide variety of groups and communities including:

- + Young people experiencing homelessness, or who may be living in insecure accommodation such as hostels, with worries that they will not receive the support they need throughout the crisis as well as in getting into employment after
- + Vulnerable groups, with several mentioning elderly people
- + Young people who may need additional support, that require routine and may not fully understand the current situation and restrictions put in place. This included:
 - o those with long term medical conditions
 - o those with difficult home lives.
- + Migrant workers were also identified with potential loss of opportunities, difficulties in travelling for employment, and potentially increased stigma
- + Low income families
- + Those living in the poorest communities
- + Single parents.

A variety of sectors and organisations were discussed to explore how they may be affected by the economic recovery in Scotland. These included:

- + Small businesses
- + Local organisations and shops
- + Charities
- + Freelance artists
- + Youth clubs no longer able to operate
- + Farmers who may be struggling to meet the change in demand
- + NHS workers dealing with the trauma and recovery from high stress of the crisis.

Many young people will be entering the employment market both as recently graduated students and as first time job seekers, which will provide additional barriers in gaining the appropriate experience and employment. The young people highlighted the struggles that many of them will face, and the concerns around this, with many of the employment opportunities no longer being readily available, including those looking to find seasonal employment to support them through their studies.

Island communities and rural towns were also identified as those who will be intensely affected by the economic recovery, with many communities being cut off with reduced access to services and transport and increased costs being amplified by a loss of income from tourism, as well as many of the young people feeling socially isolated.

Other groups and communities that the young people felt would be somewhat impacted, included:

- + Those who may not have access to the healthcare support that they need
- + Those who may have had appointments postponed or cancelled
- + Those who have been shielding throughout the crisis
- + Those who are experiencing poor mental health and need to access services and support.

The young people also highlighted that there may be those who have been positively affected by the crisis and the economic recovery, those that are now able to work remotely and access services digitally, as well as communities providing support and assistance to those around them.

Five Year Impact

Each of the small groups were asked to build a picture of young people's life in 2025 and show how the COVID-19 crisis may have impacted on young people's employment in Scotland over the next five years with a potentially difficult employment market.

Each group considered young people in five years' time's environment, their employment, their opportunities, as well as how they think and feel.

What do they Think or Feel?

- + **Anxieties and concerns** were felt to be ongoing for young people, around unknown situations, the potential that COVID-19 may be reoccurring, and the long term effects on their mental health.
- + There were concerns highlighted on the **financial strain** they may face, with cuts in funding and the fear of taxes being increased.
- + They did feel however that there would be more appreciation for **friends and family**, relying on those around them for support.

What does their day look like, what environment are they in?

- + In terms of their working environment it was felt that there would be more people **working from home**, frequently or permanently, with accommodation for young people being a key issue to be addressed, whether that is living at home with parents or in supported accommodation.
- + A shift to **the digital environment** for a multitude of sectors was expected, with more online shopping, greater online resources and networking, and many sectors becoming technology orientated.
- + **Health and safety** was expected to increasingly become part of working environment practices, with increased awareness of personal hygiene and personal space, social distancing continuing in some form, and infrastructure such as protective screens being put in place.
- + **Daily exercise** was seen to become a regular form of self-care and travel to workplaces.

What are their goals, what do they want to achieve, where do they want to be?

- + **Job security** was identified as a key aspiration for the future for many of the young people. Finding employment, whether that be as a newly graduated student or returning to work, was a priority.
- + Learning from the experiences of going through education during lockdown and expanding their knowledge with new opportunities, as well as **gaining transferable skills** were seen as potential opportunities.
- + There were aspirations to be **self-sustaining and independent**, with their own place to live or transport.
- + There was a concern that with **fewer opportunities**, there will be young people qualified through their education to enter the employment market but unable to meet their goals due to lack of experience.
- + For many that will be attending university or college in the future, they discussed the **transition to education** being delivered online and the challenges this may create around access and inclusion.

What do they need to hear or get from those around them?

The young people felt that there were a variety of ways that they could be supported during the economic recovery. This included:

- + Support to access employment or training opportunities that might have been disrupted
- + Information around how young people can **access employment** after lockdown
- + **Financial support** while young people are entering into the employment market
- + The need for guidance on how to **manage their money** well.
- + **Mental health support** and counselling, with their wellbeing having been affected throughout and potentially difficult home lives.

What would they share with the Scottish Government?

The young people identified a variety of things they would like to see from the Scottish Government. These included:

- + Having a clear understanding of **the disruption in their education** throughout the crisis and the impact this may have on them in the future, in accessing opportunities and in their working lives.
- + **Learning from other countries** and communities was identified as a priority, making international connections and working closely with others around the economic recovery.
- + Clear information was seen as vital both now and in the future, to ensure that **young people are informed** and can act appropriately in any situation, to keep themselves and others safe both in their working environments and more broadly, and access the support that is available to them.

Learnings to Take Forward

From the previous activities, each group of young people considered what the Scottish Government can learn from to take forward in future. They explored what would help to protect the business and employment market, both following on from the crisis and in case of any future similar events, identifying key building blocks for the Scottish Government to focus on and learn from.

This also included any positive reforms and shifts emerging, both in behaviours and practices in response to the measures put in place, as well as opportunities to continue and harness, and to drive change as a consequence of the crisis.

The young people identified that support for those working in a variety of environments was needed. Although they felt that the furlough scheme was positive in allowing many people to keep their jobs and still be paid a wage, there was more support needed for those not necessarily in stable working situations, both those who are freelance workers and self-employed. Many young people will not have been in employment for very long, or for sustained periods of time, with a variety of different types of contracts, which has meant accessing the appropriate support has been a challenge. Support for the creative sector was specifically highlighted by the young people. **The felt that there needs to be more clarity, advice and support, with information provided around how recovery can take place.**

With sustainable and secure employment as a priority for young people, it was felt that **there needs to be a focus on learning to equip them for the future**, especially as this is increasingly online. With more opportunities for development, combined learning, accessibility for a range of learners there is an opportunity for young people to have access to new styles of learning and the development of transferable skills that will benefit them in the future.

As many businesses and organisations have had to adapt to meet the restrictions put in place around the COVID-19 crisis, there are new opportunities to make use of technology. From connecting with partners, working remotely, reducing travel time, to replacing services with a digital alternative such as doctor's appointments, the young people felt that by using technology and digital access more creatively, businesses can increase their reach and potentially save on overhead costs. **Using digital technology could benefit young people who otherwise may not have access to opportunities, such as young carers, young people that support parents and guardians, and young people with additional support needs.**

The recognition of all key workers was identified as vital going forward, especially for those whose jobs are normally underappreciated. **By valuing the work and supporting these services, young people would be more attracted to these sectors in future**, without the fears of being put in challenging positions, without the appropriate financial benefits and protection required.

The continued focus on climate change and the environment was recognised as a vital focus within the economic recovery. Discussions included providing jobs in the sector to expand on the opportunities available to young people in the future, whilst creating a “new normal” with positive behaviour change from large businesses, across sectors and as individuals. Supporting the development of increased physical activity, both to support wellbeing and health, as well as active travel and reducing carbon emissions.

A focus on mental health support, with a call for employers and the education system to better support young people was identified. With the crisis affecting young people’s mental health generally, they felt there was a need for this to be central to the recovery, with a national approach, and as a thread through all strategies and policies. **By supporting young people’s mental health they felt that there would be increased productivity, increased support for those with additional support needs, and would allow young people to feel strengthened in their return to working environments** with so many feeling anxious about the social impacts of the crisis.

The young people highlighted that **having the opportunity to take part in conversations, to hold people in power to account and access the right information that is clear, is vital throughout the recovery from the COVID-19 crisis.** Young people have key roles to play in driving change and development and want to see how their inputs are making a difference. The young people want to be championed and showcase the indispensable skills and attributes that make them valuable, rather than just the professional experiences that they may not have. Alongside this is the clear messaging needed for all ages, in a language and tone that they can make sense of to allow them to act appropriately. The young people highlighted the need for clarity in the approach both going forward and in preventing any future crisis.

Feedback and Evaluation

Following the small group activities, the young people were asked to complete an evaluation of the session to capture what worked in this style of engagement, what could be improved and their aspirations for next steps.

When asked if they had enjoyed the session on a scale of zero to ten, with ten being absolutely yes and zero representing definitely not, 21 young people responded with an average of 8.3 out of 10. They were then asked if they felt the session was useful on the same scale. From 21 responses there was an average of 8.1 out of 10. When asked if they felt the session was relevant to them, there was an average of 8.5 out of 10.

The young people were asked if they would like to take part in more Co-design sessions like this one. 13 out of 21 respondents said, "definitely yes", while 8 said that any future attendance would depend on the topic area.

The majority of the young people highlighted that they would like to see the Scottish Government actively listening to their feedback and taking action from what they have shared, as well as receiving feedback on how their input has affected changes going forward.

Contact

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