The Education Recovery Youth Panel

Executive Summary

Insights gathered from the Education Recovery Youth Panel covered the project delivery period from December 2020 to July 2021. The discussion topics varied throughout different stages of the pandemic, encouraging the young people to explore their current experience and impacts to their life and learning.

Sessions delivered during the December period, just before a Christmas lockdown, predominantly focused on school safety, mental health impacts and learning support. For the primary school panel members, a key priority area was school safety, with various safety measures such as wearing masks and regular hand-sanitising causing communication issues between teachers and pupils and general physical discomfort. The older panel members felt the focus on academic work had been prioritised too highly, with wellbeing issues and mental health issues overlooked. Young people told us the lack of social interaction and support was difficult for many, with motivation to learn and study also at a low.

Arriving into the New Year, the January session provided an opportunity to reflect on positive moments and challenges experienced. Young people discussed the enjoyment of spending more time with family, having the flexibility to create their own routine, experience more nature, along with developing skills such as digital confidence, time-management and increased resilience to change. However, struggles were experienced by many of the panel members, ranging from feeling isolated, being distracted, having tech/connectivity issues, experiencing higher levels of anxiety and stress, along with less opportunities on offer to develop their learning.

Sessions delivered throughout March began to look towards education recovery, and young people's priorities for change. The young people identified three key short-medium priority areas as mental health support, digital learning and school safety measures. For longer-term recovery and a future vision focus, young people set out a number of areas with wellbeing and learning support being top priority for many. Active discussions also took place around diversity and inclusion with young people asking schools to be aware of individual circumstances faced along with providing enhanced education and recruiting teachers that represent all groups of the population to ensure young people can see themselves represented in role models. Another active discussion thread amongst older panel members was around clarity over final grades and assessments, with young people asking for more guidance to be provided to ease teacher and learner stress.

Assessments continued to be a highly discussed topic across the April sessions, particularly between those young people impacted by the Alternative Certification Model. Many of the young people acknowledged some sense of clarity provided by the assessment update, however many spoke of concerns around lack of preparation time and gaps in their learning which impacted their confidence in sitting assessments.

Progressing towards the end of the project delivery, the group set out their building blocks for education recovery. There were positive suggestions here, asking for decision makers to communicate clearly and keep pupils informed, and ensure all parties work together with a shared interest. Wellbeing suggestions were made, asking decision makers to think more about the balance of learning and free time and encourage more fitness type activities for learners to get involved in. Many also spoke about achieving a learning experience with more creativity and flexibility, with less importance placed on formal assessments and more flexibility of learning; online and face-to-face. They spoke about it being an exciting turning point and an opportunity to make a significant change in education. Finally, the young people discussed the importance of schools and teachers building confidence and resilience in learners, with sustained mental health support a consistent point raised and ensuring equity to digital technology and resources for all learners.

Background and Overview

The Education Recovery Youth Panel, delivered by Young Scot in partnership with Children in Scotland, was launched in November 2020. It supported the Scottish Government's COVID-19 Education Recovery Group – a follow-on from the Scottish Learner Panel.

The panel helped to embed the voices of young people from a range of backgrounds and experiences in the decision-making around education recovery from COVID-19. They followed our Young Scot Hive #YSHive processes – enabling them to share their experiences, lead conversations, develop their own ideas, and drive change as part of decision-making.

Children and young people aged 9-18-years-old from 15 local council areas across Scotland took part – and several young people declared additional or complex support needs. This diversity ensured those most affected throughout the pandemic were represented in decision-making opportunities.

Alongside the panel, we have worked with the Scottish Youth Parliament to link in with a Member of the Scottish Youth Parliament who sits on the COVID-19 Education Recovery Group (CERG). This ensured the views and insights of the panel were represented as part of the ongoing discussions.

This report provides insight into the panel's work from December 2020 – July 2021. It details learning experiences and shifting priorities for the learners, and suggestions for change in the medium-long term recovery period.

As COVID-19 restrictions started to ease, and the introduction of a new assessment model for many, the sessions focused on learner's current experience. They also offered an increased opportunity for learners to reflect on their vision for the future and essential elements needed to futureproof learning over the coming months and years.

December 2020

This session focused on welcoming the group, setting out expectations, and exploring their initial feelings and thoughts about their current experience. This session was delivered before further lockdown restrictions were implemented in December 2020, and reflects the young people's experience during that time.

Expectations and Aims

The young people set out their expectations of the Scottish Government and decision-makers in relation to the project. Their ask was to be fully listened to, to have their suggestions fully followed through, and to ensure everyone's voice was heard. They also wanted decision-makers to communicate using easy to understand language and providing regular updates.

They young people also set out their aims for the project. These included meeting new people from different schools, working collaboratively, developing new skills such as public speaking, and other future opportunities. They also wanted to help others by making a visible change for children and young people.

Priority Areas

9-11 year olds

A key priority for this group of young people was school safety. Various safety measures implemented due to the pandemic, were mentioned here. The young people noted a few discomfort issues with wearing masks, which impacted communication and concentration levels. In classrooms with open windows, they noted being cold and finding practical tasks like writing difficult. Some had mentioned the increased use of hand sanitiser had left a rash, particularly those who suffer from eczema. Overall, the majority felt safe in school but missed being able to share resources with other learners.

The young people noted a change in the learning support they received, with those who usually get support from Pupil Support Assistants missing out. In relation to coursework and learning methods, the panel members said there were several aspects of the curriculum that had changed during this time, such as not being able to undertake subjects such as PE or music. Because of the lack of school trips on offer, panel members felt they were missing out on valuable opportunities to learn about things outside the classroom. In the classroom, some learners were missing out on group table discussions.

> "Sometimes I would get a PSA. I used to get taken out in wee small groups. All of this is happening less now."

> "Windows open – and really cold hands. Can find it hard to write and can't hold the pencil properly."

12-14 year olds

The theme of school safety continued to present strongly here. The young people noted missing out on learning time due to class finishing early for cleaning. They also spoke about the challenge of wearing masks, with one participant stating it was harder to concentrate with masks on, and noting the extra challenges experienced for young people with disabilities.

Support was also a widely discussed. They felt a focus had often been on older learners in the senior phase, meaning they didn't get as much support as needed. The group also noted that learners with mental health issues such as depression and anxiety are finding lockdown difficult, which has been exacerbated by the lack of support. They had a small discussion around exams and the lack of clarity felt in this area.

> "When self-isolating [need] better support for those suffering mentally, specifically in terms of stress/depression/eating disorders."

14-16 year olds

Older young people spoke less about school safety, only briefly discussing increased use of masks and the environmental concerns around the use of disinfectant wipes.

There were broad discussions around learning support, specifically noting the effects on their mental health and issues arising from self-isolating. The group felt the focus on academic work was priority, with wellbeing issues and mental health issues being overlooked. The lack of social interaction and support has a big impact, with the group suggesting more targeted mental health support is required. Exams proved to be another key topic for this age range. The group reported feeling pressured to gather evidence for assessments in the event exams don't go ahead. They noted a frustration at prelims in small classrooms permitted, yet exams in spacious halls cancelled. Some of the group also worried about missing out on coursework due to self-isolating measures.

A few members felt their education had been affected by the move to online learning. Some suggested improved guidelines on online learning would be useful. The impact of digital exclusion was discussed, with some young people sharing difficulties with wi-fi connections, and thinking about peers who might not have access to the necessary tech.

> "Young people with anxiety and depression finding lockdown hard – less support whilst being at home."

16-18 year olds

For the 16-18 year old group, there was a short discussion around learning support, with a lack of awareness about what is on offer. Many felt there hadn't been enough information relating to mental health support provided by schools.

In relation to exams, the group felt there should be more recognition for young people who struggled with poor internet or inadequate home learning environments. Remote learning was particularly important to this group, as they worried about potential learning that had been missed out on. They found it a constant challenge to catch up with work and worried about the impact it may have on their grades. They echoed a need for guidance to ensure consistency in online/remote learning.

The group spoke about increased tailored and individualised support for young people with disabilities. They also mentioned providing support for teachers, acknowledging the increased workload and challenge faced for them in adapting to digital learning. Finally, some members noted a general lack of motivation to learn when a worldwide pandemic dominates their lives.

> "There's no motivation to learn, feel like there's bigger things going on in the world."

> "We also have a pandemic on mental health...one person in each school available isn't enough."

January 2021

This session took place whilst most young people were learning from home and offered the opportunity to reflect on their remote learning experiences, and the opportunities/challenges that exist within this.

Opportunities/Challenges
The young people were able to reflect thoughtfully on their experience, acknowledging that there were positive moments and opportunities to be had along with challenges to overcome. Many discussed the positives from being in a comfortable environment, having the flexibility to move around, go on walks, see family throughout the day. Along with honing important practical skills such as digital confidence and time-management, they acquired unexpected skills in the form of resilience and independence. However, struggles were experienced by many of the panel members, ranging from feeling isolated, being distracted, having tech/connectivity issues, experiencing higher levels of anxiety and stress, along with less opportunities on offer.

9-11 year olds
The young people spoke a lot about missing out on opportunities to connect with others and not being able to see friends as much. They noted their enjoyment of live classes and how more interaction would be better. Many of the young people missed elements of group working and learning with others. Further challenges related to technology, with one young person unable to connect to certain sites or apps at home when using a school provided device.

> "Want to see friends and classmates more."

> "Developing resilience as nothing feels certain."

> "Enjoy going for a walk in nature throughout the day."

Daily experiences
The young people were categorised into age-range for breakout room discussions and asked to reflect deeper about their current experiences and how they were experiencing learning on a day-to-day level.

> "Would be good to do tasks with a partner."

12-15 year olds

Discussion points between this age-range highlighted the difference in contact time with teachers between schools. Some of the young people had more direct engagement with teachers than others. Some noted they felt less awkward engaging with teachers this way as they could message/email directly and not have to speak out in class. The young people spoke about the workload feeling challenging, and that teachers are sometimes providing a higher volume of work. There was also discussion about the difficulty of learning new topics without hands-on teaching support to guide them through.

Some subject learning has been postponed during this time, with PSE and PE not running for a few learners. However, daily wellbeing challenges and other wellbeing initiative rolled out for some learners. There was mixed feedback on how well these initiatives were working, however the majority felt happy to have less classes to attend. Many of the young people felt like teachers were doing their bit to support learner's mental health by checking-in occasionally and asking how they're getting on. One member noted the positive benefits of having a guidance check-in once a week. The young people spoke briefly about technology, acknowledging the unreliability of wi-fi and the challenge in connecting to school calls when others in the household were using the same internet connection.

15+ year olds

The discussion centred on workload, timetable management and organising time effectively. Most of the young people discussed the challenges of completing all coursework in the time provided. They acknowledged the work had to be done but that it was being covered in too short a time frame. Decisions about exam-grading and coursework playing on many of their minds. This feeling of stress was expressed several times throughout discussions with older panel members.

Flexibility and increased independence was highlighted as a positive to this form of learning, being able to work at own pace and in the evenings if it suits better. However, one young person spoke about the challenge in being "switched on" and available all the time The difficulty in balancing and prioritising workload and wellbeing was discussed. Group members were trying to be proactive by doing different things such as staying active, video calling friends and going for a walk. The young people also spoke about the challenge in being self-motivated and struggling to stay motivated when there is a real feeling of uncertainty.

Finally, the young people were generally positive about learning resources, technology and teaching support. They felt that teachers had adapted well to processes and were organised with resources and assignments. They also spoke about school communication being strong between individual teachers and the wider school community.

"It has been good, to have a level of flexibility but everyone feels like they have to be available and 'on' all the time."

"A lot more independent managing your own time, finding what works for you which has been positive."

Learner Priorities

The older group members had a deeper discussion around what they would like decision-makers to consider as highest-priority for their learning. A thread throughout many of the group discussions was around clarity over final grades and assessments. For the group, lack of clarity linked into a need for stronger mental health support now that normal coping mechanisms such as seeing friends and family are limited.

Another priority raised was to better understand the longer-term impacts of the pandemic on future career development goals. Concerns discussed in this area focused on potential changes to university/college funding and general confusion about what their future will look like, and if previous goals are still realistic.

"What does it [final grading] actually look like?"

"Worried about long-term impacts on future career path."
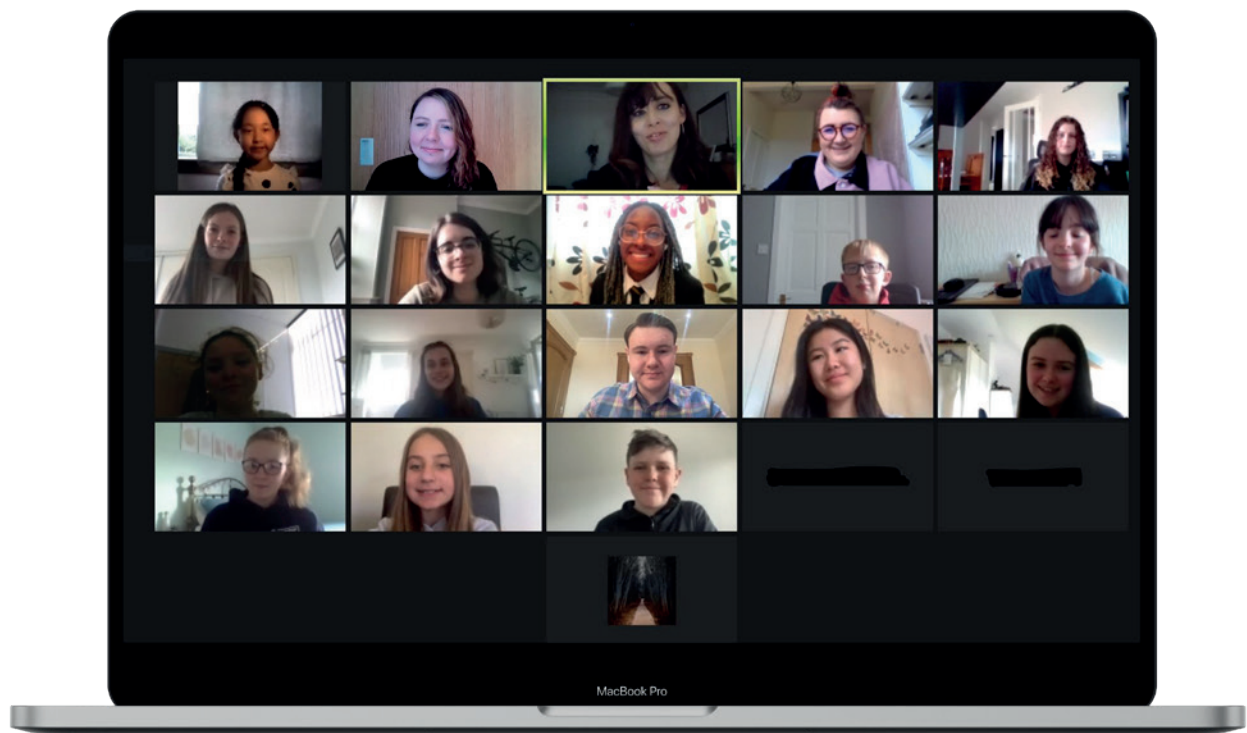
March 2021

Sessions delivered throughout March began to look towards the future of learning environments and the children and young people's vision for what they would like to see being developed, continued and improved upon. This was in the context of moving back to classroom learning for many and a blended learning approach of face to face and online learning for others.

Recovery Priorities

The children and young people identified key priorities in looking forward towards recovery:

- ◎ Mental health support
- ◎ Digital learning, support and equipment
- ◎ School safety measures

"Community spirit and a sense of togetherness/ unity."

"Learning the importance of people around you and appreciating key workers."

"Online workshops with different organisations are more accessible."

Other priorities for focus from the Scottish Government identified included: children's rights; pupil voice; ASN support; vaccinations; supported study; free school meals/inclusion and equality; and learning resources.

Experiences and Opportunities

The young people explored a discussion around potential opportunities and new ways of learning experienced during the pandemic. They spoke about the benefits of spending more time with family members and feeling a sense of community during lockdown. Similarly, they discussed an increased sense of gratitude, more independence and flexibility, having different ways of learning on offer and accessibility of opportunities. They also mentioned the home comforts such as having pets nearby and music playing as a welcome change.

"More fun at home – Lego, pets, food."

"Opportunity for blended learning – not every day has to be in school."

Future Vision

The young people were asked to discuss how recovery could take place over the next year and beyond, in pursuit of their ideal vision for learning. Topic areas were provided as prompts to support discussions.

Primary school panel members

Wellbeing and Support

For the primary aged learners, conversations centred around emotional and wellbeing support. They hoped for an environment of understanding, kindness and communication, highlighting that the support you receive affects the way that you learn.

There was a vision of engagement, inclusivity and variety described by the younger members in learning – highlighting the importance of clubs to suit different learners' interests.

> **"The children/ teachers you spend time with at school can affect how you learn."**

Resources

In terms of resources, the young people had a passionate discussion about access to a variety of high-quality books ensuring access to up-to-date modern books as well as older texts. They also spoke about the increased need for access to digital devices in the classroom to support learners who might not have access at home and to support with learning difficulties such as dyslexia.

> **"More books – up to date, not old"**

> **"Different pupils need different resources."**

Diversity and Inclusivity

Diversity in teaching staff and role models was raised by the young people to ensure all learners feel comfortable and can see someone they relate to. They suggested ensuring all schools had teacher representation from different religions, countries, and ethnicities.

> **"More teachers from different countries to make kids from those countries more comfortable."**

Learning Environment

Thinking about a move back to face-to-face learning, the young people hoped that table arrangements would allow for group working again. They also mentioned some practical aspects of the environment such as toilets could be in better condition and the importance of spending time outdoors.

Secondary school panel members

The secondary aged learners identified a variety of hopes for the future of education, clearly highlighting mental wellbeing and learning support as a priority.

Teaching and Learning support

Secondary aged learners wanted to see an environment created where everyone's opinion matters, with an individual approach rather than one size fits all. Teaching approaches were acknowledged to greatly impact the learning environment, with the group discussing the teacher's role in creating an environment where everyone's opinion matters. Relationships between teachers and learners were pivotal to their experiences, with teacher's having a 'can do' attitude instilling a positive mindset in learners, reflecting that if teachers feel supported and positive this will be passed on to learners. The young people highlighted that mutual respect and honesty was needed.

The young people spoke about the progress that needs to be made with a digital approach, with better integration of digital and in person learning, as well as internal communication. Challenges around spotting learners who may not be receiving enough support via the digital approach, were raised here. The group discussed teachers ensuring a level of comprehension has been reached before moving onto the next topic area.

Wellbeing and Extra-Curricular

Transitions were identified by the young people as pressure points that may not have been fully supported or experienced yet, for example moving into secondary education during this past year. Providing opportunities to re-integrate into the social aspects of school were raised as an important way to transition back to in person learning.

Many of the secondary school leaners spoke about the benefits of peer support, and that schools should be encouraging learners to support one other. They discussed the possibility of a pupil support club initiative, a place where learners would feel less intimidated to ask for help as it can be hard to feel comfortable to fully share with teachers.

"Sometimes adults don't always understand."

"Pupils supporting pupils."

"Every hand up is an idea worth sharing, every thought is of importance."

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Resources and Curriculum

Secondary learners felt that there could be a larger pool of resources on offer for those learners that have felt challenged to keep up with the workload during the pandemic during the pandemic, resuming booster classes, or supported study as a priority upon returning to school. It should be noted that the panel members used the terminology 'fallen behind' a few times to describe how they percieved their ability to keep up with the demands of schoolwork. A suggestion about funding tuition for those who are on lower incomes was also made.

Encouragement to 'break away' more from the standard curriculum and have some freedom to learn about individual interests was another talking point. Learners thought that increased independence and autonomy would provide extra motivation.

> ## "More resources for those that have fallen behind."

Inclusivity and Diversity

There were a variety of discussions around inclusivity, involving thinking about the individual situations and challenges learners may have experienced over the pandemic, and the effect this may continue to have on their learning experience – understanding and a space to communicate these challenges would be required.

They also spoke about lessening stigma for different groups such as those in LGBTQ+ community, through education, support and use of correct terminology.

> ## "Lots of people dealing with loss – it's going to be a really hard year for many."

Learning Environment

The young people expressed the connection felt between a learning space and positive wellbeing. Older panel members liked informality of learning over Zoom and enjoyed having the freedom to listen to music or get into nature whilst working.

They would like to see more focus and awareness of this connection moving forward, thinking about how it could feel more informal and comfortable.

Learner Voice and Participation

They spoke about ensuring opportunities for all ages to contribute to decision-making. Some young people felt that there were less opportunities to get involved and would feel more heard if opportunities were accessible regardless of age.

A few of the young people discussed the presence of a pupil council, and how many of these opportunities had been relatively 'inactive' since the start of the pandemic. The members thought that effort could be made to continue to run this, advising the pupil council should've been consulted on decisions about going back to school and supported decision-making processes.

> ## "Make sure there are opportunities for all ages that continue throughout the year and the pandemic."

Learner Priorities

The young people began to identify medium to longer term priorities they feel will have the biggest impact on them as individuals and on their futures.

A thread throughout many of the group discussions was around clarity over final grades and assessments, providing teachers and students with more guidance to ease the anxiety in this area.

The lack of clarity linked into a need for stronger mental health support now that normal coping mechanisms such as seeing friends were limited. Many mentioned spending more time away from the screen would help, but that they don't feel able to due to workload.

Another priority raised was to better understand the longer-term impacts of the pandemic on future career/development goals. Concerns discussed in this area focused on potential changes to university/college funding and general confusion about what their future will look like, and if previous goals are still realistic.

April 2021

The session explored discussions relating to the young people's current experience of learning, their ideas around summer wellbeing activities and visions for medium-to-long term education recovery.

Learner Priorities
To check-in with their current priorities, we asked the young people to share some of their most recent experiences within education. Responses have been grouped by age-range to highlight the similarities and differences experienced across school years.

9-11 year olds
The practical elements of school safety were an active discussion point for the younger learners. They spoke about the frequency of sanitising/hand washing and how time-consuming the process can be. Outside of the practical discussions, the children spoke about what the school and teachers are doing to support them during this time. Some of the group shared the positive impact of more social time and teachers' support around this.

"Washing hands at sinks – have to share sinks with other classes takes a long time."

"Teachers are trying their best to make our learning fun although it might be difficult."

"People may no longer be friends because of lockdown etc."

12–15 year-olds

A range of topics were highlighted as important by young people in this age category: gaps in learning, quality of teaching provided, adapting to a formal learning environment and social, wellbeing and mental health impacts.

The move back to in-person learning divided opinions from some of the young people in how it should be approached by decision-makers, some thought that normality should resume quickly, whilst others felt that more support is needed to help people adapt. The wellbeing and social impacts discussed here highlighted the different ways learners have been affected. Some young people discussed the impact on friendships, others spoke about the increase in screen time and most of the group mentioned the continued importance on mental health awareness and support, and how some school environments may be contributing to poor mental health for learners.

"Acknowledge that there was lost-learning time."

"Support available for people who are struggling with being back in a social environment."

"Longer break times and more social time."

"Schools can create a lot of mental health issues."

"Continuous assessments in such a short window is a lot to ask students…we've been online learning for so long."

"Not standardised – makes it more confusing when having to sit the exams."

"Seems like we'll be tested on things we might not have learnt."

15+ year olds

Active discussion took place between the older learners who are affected by the introduction of the Alternative Certification model. Many of the young people acknowledged some sense of clarity provided by the recent update around the 2021 assessment process, however the announcement also brought new questions for the group. They also spoke of concerns around lack of preparation time and gaps in their learning which has impacted their confidence and comfortability in sitting assessments.

Education Recovery – moving out of Covid-19

The young people were provided discussion prompts to support their thinking around education recovery. The following outputs have been highlighted under those discussion prompts.

The group were asked: How do the Scottish Government and decision makers support your transition back to learning over the next 1-2 years?

There were positive suggestions here, asking for decision makers to communicate clearly and keep pupils informed, whilst ensuring they also keep in mind the perspective of the learners. Wellbeing suggestions were also made, asking decision makers to think more about the balance of learning and free time and encourage more fitness type activities for learners to get involved in.

Many also spoke about achieving a learning experience more creative and community driven than they'd experienced before lockdown, with less importance placed on formal assessments. The young people also discussed the importance of all parties working together with a shared interest, and how support and flexibility will be vital to adjusting back successfully.

Finally, the young people spoke about the positive work already being done engaging with people, and how this can be built on by having open communication channels. They spoke about flexibility of learning, online and more generally, the importance of support continuing after secondary school is over and providing opportunities outside of the classroom.

"More opportunities to have discussions like this, with different people, to hear lots of different viewpoints."

"Channels to share opinions and have an influence over learning."

"Embrace creativity."

"Knowing what to expect when you [leave school] rather than just working it out when you get there."

"Flexibility of online learning needs to be taken forward."

The young people were prompted to think about specific parts of the journey, what highlights or milestones might there be for them as individuals and for their wider peer group. Further to that, what challenges might there be in implementing their ideal vision for education recovery.

The young people's focus here allowed equal discussion on potential challenges and opportunities on a road to recovery. With regards to challenges they spoke about financial limitations; people resisting change; the difficulties in reframing education without a standard assessment model; and the need for equal opportunities for those in protected characteristic groups. However, they also spoke about it being a turning point and an opportunity to make a significant change in education.

The theme of assessments also continued as an important thread throughout the discussion, with many focusing on the appeals system and uncertainty around how to navigate through an unknown process.

"How do we replace exams? If we are not working towards exams what point does school have?"

"COVID-19 is the turning point so once we overcome it, we need to take action and support the transformation of schools."

"There would be a lot of people who don't want things to change."

"Need independent appeals process – if teacher is giving you the grade it can be difficult to go to them."

"Challenge of bigotry when talking about equality for all especially in relation to neurodivergence and LGBTQ+ groups."

"What is next year going to look like? Start the process of communicating about this now so people can be prepared."

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Finally, the groups looked at ways to support long-term recovery, what can be implemented now and in the future.

The young people spoke about schools and teachers building confidence and resilience in learners to help the adjustment period and to support future learning. They also spoke frequently about decision making processes and how vital it is that young people get the opportunity to contribute, along with the importance over clarity when decisions are made, and decision-makers having first-hand experience of the system. They felt that continued partnership working between everyone is what will lead to real progress.

Sustained mental health support continued to be a consistent point raised, along with ensuring all young people are supported to use digital technology and are provided with the resources to engage digitally.

"Help us understand the course as soon as we are back to allow us to feel at ease and more confident."

"Investing in tech that is up-to-date... and tech funding going to the right places, rather than handing out equally."

"Make sure plans are made by children and teachers, not just the Government."

"Keep mental health a priority... the pandemic only highlighted the problem, not created it."

"Clarity of decisions in advance so we can prepare... quick decisions can have a negative impact on mental health."

"Mental health approach needs to be reviewed – sometimes you just need support that day. Need dedicated mental health support within each school."

May 2021

The penultimate workshop session explored discussions around the young people's current experience of learning, their experience of transitional periods and support provided, and insights into decision making processes for young people at all levels.

Firstly, the young people were asked to think about the different ways that learning can support them to have an enjoyable, varied, and tailored experience. Different prompt questions and words were provided to support discussion.

How can learning make you feel curious and included?
The theme of interaction continued here, with young people speaking about how things can be showcased in different and creative ways, to keep learning as interactive as possible. If learners are interested and engaged, they are more likely to want to keep learning.

They also spoke about ensuring language is inclusive, asking pupils about how they'd like to be addressed or what pronouns they'd like used. Active listening and offering flexible support were also mentioned as ways to ensure learners feel included.

How can learning help you to grow, develop and succeed?
The young people spoke about the need for learning skills outside of academia, attention should be paid to developing life skills such as independence, confidence and making friends. They suggested that it can feel like personal growth happens outside of school. Success for the panel members can be achieved by supporting learners to set goals in line with their ambitions and set out how to do this in the short and long-term.

"The more interested you are the more you'll want to learn."

"Interactive as possible, encourage question asking."

"Now is a good time to make a change and bring in more creative aspects."

"Focus on the issues that were highlighted over lockdown as important - hobbies, making friends outside of school, confidence outside of academia."

Transitions

The young people had the opportunity to think about the different stages of transition around their current education journey. If relevant, they were also invited to explore the transition back into 'normal' ways of learning again.

Panel members aged 9-11

Conversation for young people in upper primary school was dominated by the move to Secondary. They spoke about missing out on the 'normal Primary 7' experience such as going on residential trips due to the pandemic but were excited about going to secondary school. Discussion moved onto addressing fears around the move, such as adapting to new teaching styles and being at "the bottom of school again." When asked what would help ease the change, they spoke about having support to know their way around the school, meeting teachers and time at Secondary school before the final move.

Panel members aged 12+

For the older young people, they spoke about a significant change approaching in leaving school, others highlighted exam and timetable changes that can have a day-to-day impact, as well as a shift in attitude. Their reflections were mostly positive about the impact of the changes, some mentioned feelings of anxiety but mostly excitement about what the transitions might entail. For young people progressing to the next stage of their learning journey, they spoke about the positive opportunities to explore future progression routes and discuss further with trained staff. Another young person, who had recently left school, spoke about not feeling as prepared as they would have liked in making that change. They felt more development took place after the transition, and schools can sometimes lack the ability to provide you with life skills that support learners future development.
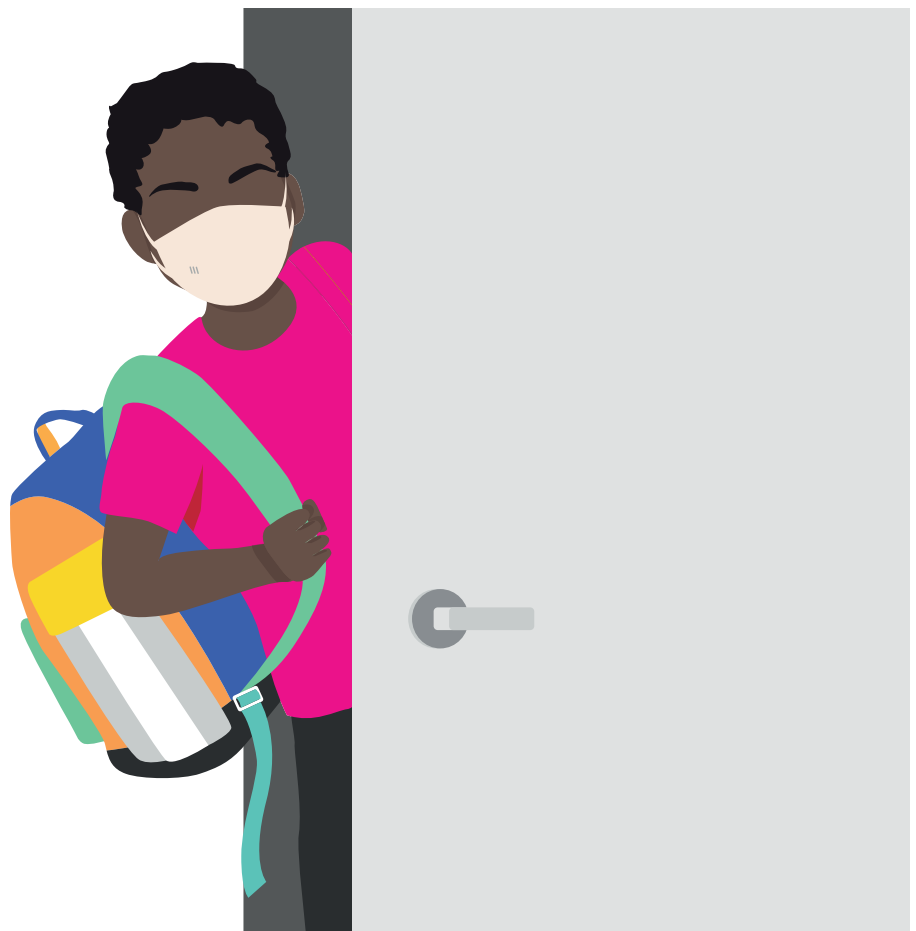
Decision Making Processes

The young people were asked to think wider about the role of young people in decision making processes in Scotland, and the different levels of decision-making processes that exist.

The young people in early secondary school felt like their ability to be involved in decision making was more limited than older members of the group and shared frustrations about not having any real impact. Whilst older secondary school members shared positive experiences of being provided with more opportunities as they progressed throughout school, and felt they had opportunity to input in a range of issues affecting their school lives. Some positive examples of decision making included being asked to shape a school wide health and wellbeing programme and teachers sharing survey results at assemblies to showcase their commitment to learners' opinions.

When asked how they would like to be more involved in decisions in the future some young people had a difference in opinion, some felt that it made sense for the teacher to make most of the decisions, especially in the earlier stages of secondary, whilst others thought that there should be more collaboration between teachers and learners in all classroom environments. Other young people gave specific examples of how a collaboration could take place such as deciding what tools are used to learn in class and having a say in wider school issues such as school spending, subject choice and more opportunities for S1 and S2 to input by offering younger members a chance to join the Pupil Council.

> "As you get older get more flexibility to choose, even with PE now you get to choose exactly the activity."

> "Post-school surveys - assemblies to show taking on results."

> "Health and wellbeing aspect - asking young people what they want to see."

> "Think it can be better that the teacher chooses in the beginning as they know what's best."

"Could be 70/30 of decision making to teachers; mainly teachers' choices but now and then pupils can choose."

"Deciding what kind of way we would like to do our work such as PowerPoints, videos etc."

"S1 and S2 Pupil Council created. It can be a bit of an overload, as so far down in the school. It currently doesn't feel like there's anything at all."
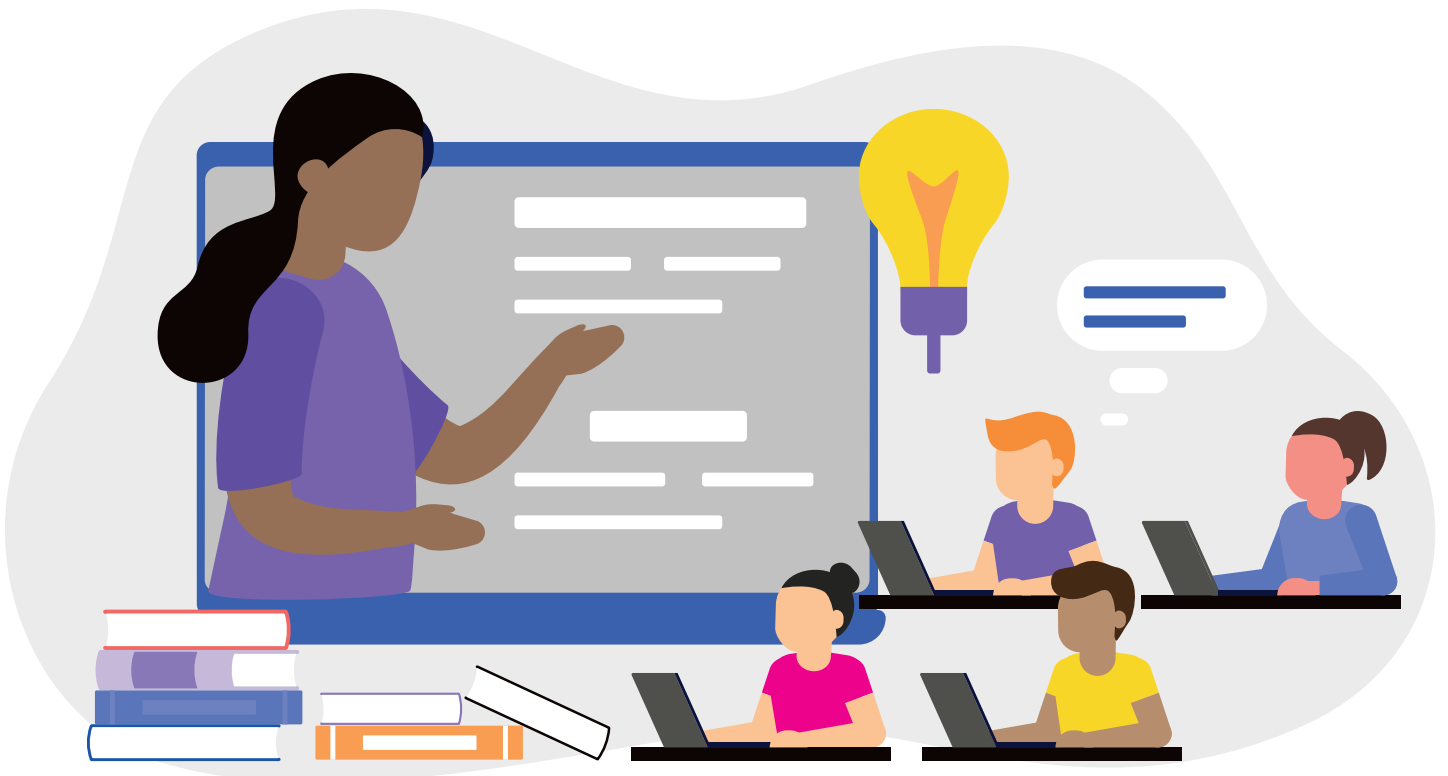
July 2021

The final meeting took place in July, with a focus on young people's experience, their highlights, challenges and reflections. The meeting was also attended by officials from the Scottish Government, as such some discussion points around returning to school and education recovery have also been included below.

Project highlights and challenges
Project highlights discussed by the group ranged from enjoying the social experience to feeling encouraged by having the ability to contribute to wider change and decision-making opportunities.

◎ Influencing the Scottish Government

◎ Meeting decision-makers

◎ Speaking on behalf of young people

◎ Meeting new people

◎ Putting my passion to use

Challenges shared by the group related mostly to the logistical aspect of meeting online and combining being a group member with schoolwork.

◎ Not seeing people face to face

◎ Being able to make it to meetings due to other commitments

"Deaf community feel trapped & isolated – concerns over masks being work which causes inequality."

School Safety Measures Beyond Lockdown
The young people were asked to revisit previous discussions about school safety at the current stage of the pandemic, and to think about what measures they'd like to see upon a return to school. There were some differences in opinions shared between younger and older members, with younger members predominantly in favour of safety measures such as masks and staggered start-times continuing, whereas older members discussed accessibility concerns with use of masks. Most agreed that they were happy to follow the measures if that's what was needed and noted that progress out of the pandemic is the most important element.

"If we're in a situation with restrictions being put back – can senior pupils be made a priority because they have been let down in 2020 as it is?"

"Progress has happened because we've been sticking to the rules."

Plans for Education Recovery

Discussions on this topic have been a central part of the project's delivery. The young people were provided with the opportunity to share some of these discussions with the Scottish Government. The older members spoke passionately about areas relating to health and wellbeing, empowerment, equality and transition periods.

The young people believe nurture and support are essential components to ensure learners can achieve their best. Along with instilling a sense of empowerment and independent thinking, with schools and authority figures providing an outlet for views to be shared and taken on board.

Equality and accessibility remained a focus for the group, with a desire to ensure that all learners are provided with the support needed for their individual situation.

"Everyone still needs nurturing and support despite how old or mature pupils are."

"We need to be able to feel we are being heard and our views are being seriously considered."

"Increasing equality between schools...and between students"
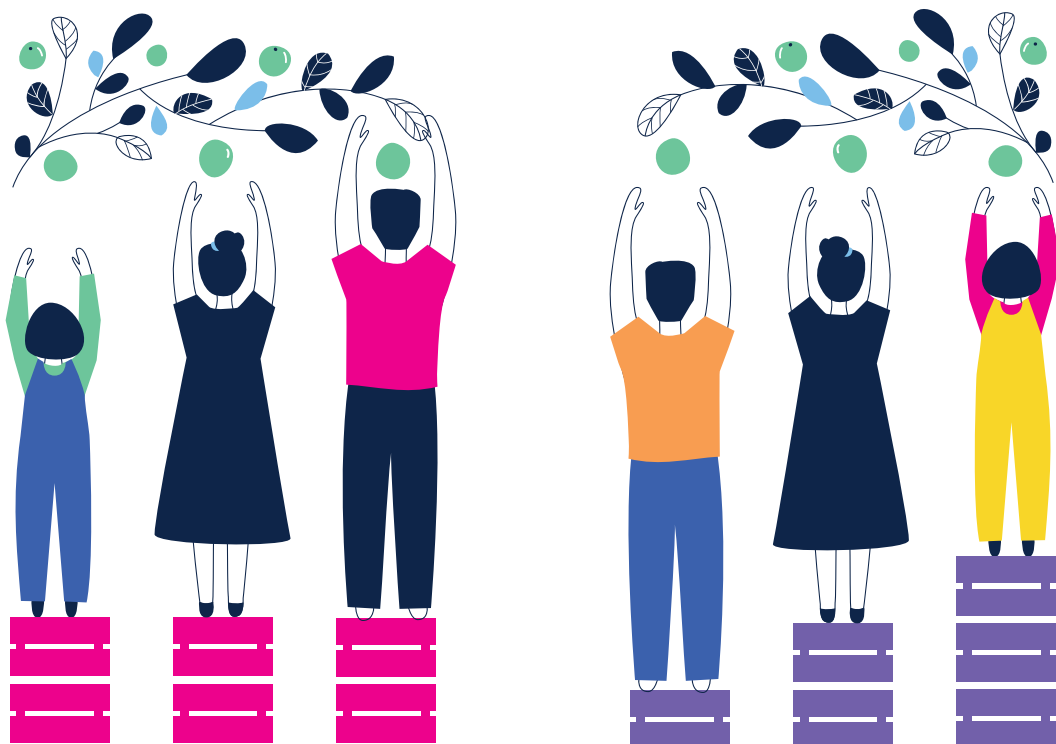
EQUALITY

EQUITY

Capturing questions for decision-makers

The young people had the opportunity to share some questions directed at decision makers moving forward, some questions have been highlighted below:

"How do you make decisions around school safety – using data?"

"What plans do you have in place to support senior pupils - in terms of nurturing especially?"

"Do you plan to provide supported study again? I really struggled without the extra support."

Decision Making Opportunities

Throughout the process, the young people engaged regularly with decision-makers, with panel members meeting the Deputy First Minister in December around potential alternative qualifications models for higher courses, which directly aided in final decision-making around cancelling this year's higher exam diet.

A further session was hosted by the Deputy First Minister in February, allowing the young people to present questions to the Deputy First Minister and share some of their current experiences to highlight what's been most important to their learning. This has been a valuable opportunity for the young people in ensuring they can explore the topic with decision-makers as well as develop their own thinking.

Education Scotland engaged with the young people during the January sessions, which fed directly into their nationwide work around understanding children and young people's experiences of remote learning.

The young people were provided with a couple of final opportunities to share their experiences and present their insights; they attended a CERG meeting in July and welcomed Scottish Government officials directly to the July workshop sessions to hear their ideas around returning to school safety, and longer-term education recovery plans.

The young people also engaged in activity outside of the sessions through an online digital platform, where they could speak with each other, finish tasks and respond to questions and ideas quickly and directly. The regular online sessions and external meeting opportunities provided the young people with an opportunity to reflect on their current experience whilst supporting decision-makers to map out priority areas and identify next steps in future-proofing their learning experience.

Project Legacy and Next Steps

As the project approached the end of its delivery period, the young people took part in a discussion around next steps and what they would like to see happen in future. There was unanimity around ensuring young people continue to have a say in issues affecting their education and, with panel members suggesting different ways to do this.

Some spoke about including more young people with different experiences in the group, and to reach even wider, they could use surveys to engage young people in the conversation. They also spoke about the importance of having teachers involved in some way and creating a collaborative space where different groups – pupils, teachers and others can share together.

From the passion, enthusiasm and thoughtfulness shared by the Panel members throughout the project, they were clear of the need to ensure that young people's voices continue to have a say in matters relating to education recovery.
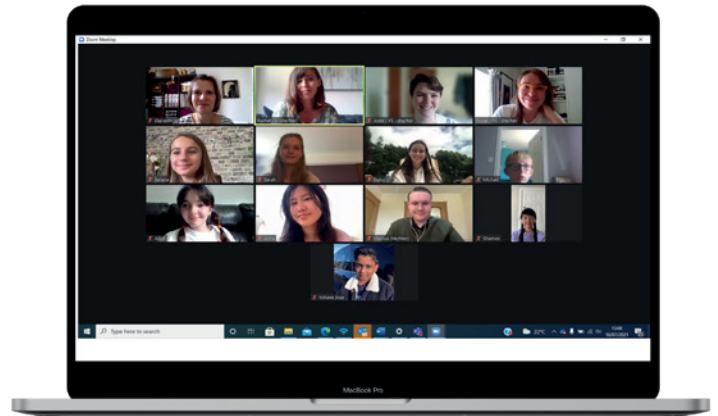
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