



Brooke Barr MSYP
c/o Gordon Lamb House
3 Jackson's Entry
Edinburgh
EH8 8JP
T. 0131 557 0452

E. brooke.barr.msyp@sypmail.org.uk

Gordon Lindhurst MSP, Convener of the Economy, Energy and Fair Work Committee
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Dear Gordon Lindhurst MSP and the Economy, Energy and Fair Work Committee,

Letter from the Scottish Youth Parliament regarding the impact of COVID-19 on young people's career prospects

My name is Brooke Barr MSYP, and I am writing to you as Convener of the Scottish Youth Parliament's Jobs, Economy and Fair Work Committee to share young people's views and experiences, in response to your ongoing inquiry into the impact of Covid-19 on Scotland businesses, workers and the economy.

The information in this letter contains information collected by the Scottish Youth Parliament (SYP) on young people's views and experiences in relation to this inquiry through a number of consultations during 2020, including *Lockdown Lowdown*, *From Scotland's Young People* - SYP's 2021-2026 youth manifesto, and through Members' and Committee Motions submitted at SYP Sitings.

For questions related to the impact of Covid-19 on young people's career prospects; the main findings in this area were:

From the *Lockdown Lowdown* survey published in April 2020, we found:

- 36% of young people were moderately or extremely concerned about their employment situation.
- 30% were moderately or extremely concerned about their financial situation.
- 61% were moderately or extremely concerned about the impact of Covid-19 on their future.

In the second phase of the *Lockdown Lowdown* survey, questions asked over 1,000 young people who were in a part-time or full-time job what effect Covid-19 had on their employment.

- 29% disagreed or extremely disagreed when asked if they felt good about their current employment situation.
- For those in part-time employment:
 - 41% had had their hours reduced.
 - 38% were furloughed.
 - 12% lost their job.
- For those in full-time employment:
 - 54% had to alter their working conditions.
 - 38% were furloughed.

- 22% had a reduction in hours; and
- 8% lost their job.

A young person who filled out this survey said in response to a question about future employment, “Everywhere seemed to be cutting jobs like mad before coronavirus and since the start it has gotten worse so getting a job in the near future will probably be incredibly difficult when so many other people are looking are now also looking for jobs”.

Another young person said “I am constantly stressed and worried about my future should I lose my job. I don’t feel the government fully appreciate the impact the pandemic is having on the economy and people’s future. My mental health has never been so poor.”

In the second phase of *Lockdown Lowdown*, focus groups were held to gather information from seldom-heard groups. When asked if there is an increased perception of risk, what impact, if any, does this have on young people’s day-to-day life one young Black woman said “...if you can work from home great, but a lot of people don’t have that option so having to go to work and therefore putting yourself at risk.”

In the ‘*From Scotland’s Young People*’ manifesto, 83.8% respondents agreed with the statement ‘Policies and initiatives should be created to ensure that young people have good employment prospects throughout the recovery from the COVID-19 crisis, such as youth employment schemes, work experience initiatives and skills development programmes.’ In another statement in the manifesto 58.8% agreed ‘The UK Government should take action to ban or reform zero-hour contracts’.

Further information about the impact of the pandemic on young people’s career prospects, and recommendations from existing SYP policy, can be found in the attached policy response.

It is clear that the pandemic will have lasting effects on young peoples’ futures. We appreciate the steps the Economy, Energy, and Fair Work Committee is taking to consult young people, through the focus groups held in November and December 2020, and the opportunity to respond to this inquiry in writing. We encourage the Committee to continue taking a human rights based approach to ensure young people are meaningfully involved in decisions which will affect them now and in the future.

Yours sincerely,

Brooke Barr MSYP

Convener of the Jobs, Economy, and Fair Work Committee

Scottish Parliament Economy, Energy, and Fair Work Committees Inquiry: The impact of COVID-19 on young people's career prospects

Scottish Youth Parliament response - January 2021

How has the Covid-19 pandemic affected young people's career prospects?

Lockdown Lowdown - what young people in Scotland are thinking about COVID-19

In April 2020, SYP, Young Scot, and YouthLink Scotland published *Lockdown Lowdown* - a report showing what young people in Scotland are thinking about COVID-19. This report contains the results of a survey carried out at the start of lockdown, available at <https://bit.ly/3ngzVMv>. The survey received 2,421 completed responses.

- Of those who answered a question about their employment situation, over a third (36%) stated that they were moderately or extremely concerned.
- Of those who answered a question about their financial situation, almost a third (30%) said that they are moderately or extremely concerned.
- Almost two thirds of respondents (61%) stated that they were moderately or extremely concerned about the impact of coronavirus (COVID-19) on their future.

Lockdown Lowdown phase 2 - what young people in Scotland think about their lives as lockdown restrictions change

A further consultation was carried out in November 2020 to find out young people's experiences as lockdown restrictions change. This consultation included a survey of over 6,000 young people from across Scotland (available at <https://bit.ly/2WczhE6>), and a number of focus groups with young people from seldom heard groups (available at <https://bit.ly/3a7U18c>). Key results from both of these consultations are shown below.

When asked if they felt good about their current employment situation, 29% of those in full-time employment and of those in part-time employment disagreed or strongly disagreed.

The most common impact of coronavirus for those in part-time employment was that their hours had been reduced (41%). Almost two fifths (38%) stated that they were furloughed. A quarter (26%) have had to alter their working conditions, and 12% said they have lost their job.

"I finished my degree during lockdown and cannot find a graduate job. Now the bar I work in is closing and i have been made redundant. This wasn't supposed to happen after going to uni."

"Many of my friends across the country have been made redundant or are now unemployed through no fault of their own. The closure or limits upon opening of pubs, bars, etc. (current and/or previous) has impacted many of my friends' employment, lifestyles, financial support or financial independence."

"Although my job is relatively secure, subject to passing exams, a number of my family and friends have been made redundant or had their hours cut. This has placed considerable financial strain on our family unit and I have had to step up in my role, becoming the key breadwinner for my family."

Over half of the respondents in full-time employment had to alter their working conditions (54%). Almost two fifths (38%) stated that they were furloughed. Around a fifth (22%) had experienced a reduction in hours, and 8% said they have lost their job.

When asked if they felt good about their future employment prospects, 39% of those in full-time employment and 38% in part-time employment disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement.

"Everywhere seemed to be cutting jobs like mad before coronavirus and since the start it's gotten worse so getting a job in the near future will probably be incredibly difficult when so many other people are now also looking for jobs."

"If this keeps up for much longer, there won't be any jobs left out there for us."

"It is so hard as a youth trying to get a job at the moment, before lockdown it was already difficult as employers don't want someone with no work experience but now it's even more challenging as thousands of people lost their job and are also looking."

"I am a recent masters graduate and feel like my future employment has been impacted greatly by COVID. There are higher numbers of those looking for employment. If I was in the top 20% of candidates before, I am now probably in the bottom 40%."

When asked if they had any further thoughts on the impact of coronavirus on employment, the most common concerns were around future job prospects, employment levels in the UK and competition against adults for jobs. There were also concerns regarding the link between the impact in education and future employment prospects.

"I am constantly stressed and worried about my future should I lose my job. I don't feel the government fully appreciate the impact the pandemic is having on the economy and people's future. My mental health has never been so poor."

"I struggled to get work at the start of covid. The time spent at home 24/7 did take a toll on my mental health significantly."

"... for many other [Black] people I do know that they haven't been [to work] either. There's two different situations, either they haven't been able to go to work because it's, they don't want to put themselves at risk, they don't want to put their kids at risk, they don't want to put their family at risk, so they haven't been able to go to work which is hurting their finances. Or they are having to work where they are putting themselves into danger which isn't also good enough, which isn't like a good option either." - young Black woman (focus group participant)

"It's impacted me quite negatively. I lost my job in March, I was working for Farmfoods for four years and lost my job. That had a knock-on effect for rent and that sort of stuff. It's been quite a difficult last six months for myself personally my mental health has gone quite downhill because I've not had the chance to socialise with people. I've not had the chance to form an extended household, that sort of stuff." - A young person with experience of the criminal justice system (focus group participant)

"Personally I'm planning on staying on an extra year at school before I decide what to do, because I've never really been certain on what I would like to do at university or college... Covid has delayed what I was planning. By next May I'll be out of school and I don't want to be out of school and still not know what I am doing. I've been to a careers advisor, there's one in my school, I've set up an appointment." - A young disabled person (focus group participant)

How has the Covid-19 pandemic affected young people's rights?

Throughout the pandemic, decisions have been made quickly and as a result, the impact of these decisions on young people's lives has not always been prioritised. Although it can take some time, it is essential that young people are consulted on all matters that will affect them, particularly when something as important as the long-term impact of these decisions on our futures is at stake.

“Every child has the right to express their views, feelings and wishes in all matters affecting them, and to have their views considered and taken seriously. This right applies at all times.” - UNCRC Article 12

Recommendation: ‘Children and young people's rights should be at the forefront of decisions made during the COVID-19 crisis and recovery process.’ (From *Scotland's Young People* manifesto statement - 68.5% agree)

We have heard anecdotally that young people with a disability have been particularly affected by the pandemic. For example, as fewer jobs are available and the job market becomes more competitive, many young people are concerned they will be competing against more skilled or experienced candidates which will impact their ability to find work.

“A child with a disability has the right to live a full and decent life with dignity and, as far as possible, independence and to play an active part in the community. Governments must do all they can to support disabled children and their families.” - UNCRC Article 23

Recommendation: ‘Children and young people from seldom heard groups (such as immigrants and refugees, gypsy traveller communities, single parents, disabled people, Armed Forces, care experienced and justice experienced) must be listened to by policy makers on issues that affect them’ (From *Scotland's Young People* manifesto statement - 80.4% agree)

If young people are worried about their future prospects, this will have an impact on their mental health. Failure to protect young people's futures will be a failure to meet their right to the best possible health.

“Every child has the right to the best possible health. Governments must provide good quality health care, clean water, nutritious food, and a clean environment and education on health and well-being so that children can stay healthy.” - UNCRC Article 24

Recommendation: ‘Public bodies (such as the NHS, the SQA and Police Scotland) should work with young people to ensure that information is made available in a youth-friendly and accessible manner. They should also ensure that young people's views are taken into account when making decisions that affect them.’ (From *Scotland's Young People* manifesto statement - 86.6% agree)

Recommendation: ‘The Scottish Youth Parliament believes that adequate support must be provided to young people making the transition from school to university, college, employment and other positive destinations to mitigate against the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.’ (99% agree) - Committee Motion by Education and Skills Committee (passed 10th July 2020)

The disruption to young people's education throughout lockdown, and the cancellation of exams, has put additional pressure on young people's education. For some young people, lack of access to digital resources or the lack of a suitable learning environment away from school will have a further detrimental impact on their education and their future prospects.

“Every child has the right to an education.” - UNCRC Article 28

“Education must develop every child's personality, talents and abilities to the full.” - UNCRC Article 29

Recommendation: ‘The Scottish Youth Parliament calls on decision makers to apply all available resources to ensure that the attainment gap does not widen due to the COVID-19 pandemic.’ (99% agree) - Committee Motion by Education and Skills Committee (passed 10th July 2020)

Recommendation: ‘Colleges, universities and employers should amend their admissions and recruitment policies to ensure young people whose grades and/or work experience were affected by the COVID-19 crisis are not penalised.’ (*From Scotland's Young People* manifesto statement - 84.3% agree)

Recommendation: ‘State schools should be financially supported by decision-makers to reduce or eliminate the costs of applications for university.’ (*From Scotland's Young People* manifesto statement - 84.3% agree)

Recommendation: ‘State schools should be financially supported by decision-makers to reduce or eliminate the costs of attending work experience.’ (*From Scotland's Young People* manifesto statement - 81.4% agree)

Young people tend to work in sectors such as retail, hospitality, and tourism, and therefore we are one of the groups which has most negatively been impacted by the shutdown of these sectors during lockdown. Many of these jobs are zero-hour contracts, so young people haven't always been eligible for furlough schemes, and there haven't been enough part-time or seasonal jobs, which some young people rely on in order to access further education or to pay for basic living costs. This may have led some young people to seek employment in more hazardous environments, or to take on work which impacts on their ability to attend classes or focus on their education.

“Governments must protect children from economic exploitation and work that is dangerous or might harm their health, development or education. Governments must set a minimum age for children to work and ensure that work conditions are safe and appropriate.” - UNCRC Article 32

Recommendation: ‘Policies and initiatives should be created to ensure that young people have good employment prospects throughout the recovery from the COVID-19 crisis, such as youth employment schemes, work experience initiative and skills development programmes.’ (*From Scotland's Young People* manifesto statement - 83.8% agree)

Recommendation: ‘The Scottish Youth Parliament believes that efficient careers advice services are vital to ensuring young people are well informed about their options, and should cater for all accessibility requirements.’ (94% agree) - Members' Motion by Maya Tams - Gray MSYP (passed 21st March 2020)

From Scotland's Young People - available at <https://bit.ly/38ld5hM>
SYP Policy Log - available at <http://policy.syp.org.uk/>