

## The Education and Skills Committee

### Young People's Perspectives on the Re-opening of Schools

Submission from the Scottish Youth Parliament, in partnership with Young Scot and YouthLink Scotland

#### Background

The [Scottish Youth Parliament](#) (SYP) is the democratically elected voice of Scotland's young people. Their vision for Scotland is of a nation that actively listens to and values the meaningful participation of its children and young people. SYP is grounded in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, particularly Article 12, which lays out young people's right to be listened to on the issues that affect them, and for their views to be given weight.

**Young Scot** is the national youth information and citizenship charity for 11-26-year-olds in Scotland. They have been updating their dedicated [website](#) and social media channels seven days a week with the latest information for young people on COVID-19. This is helping to ensure that young people have quality-assured information on what's happening, the simple steps to take to help prevent catching COVID-19, and how to avoid spreading it to others.

[YouthLink Scotland](#) is the national agency for youth work. They are a membership organisation representing more than 100 youth organisation members across Scotland, including national voluntary organisations and all 32 local authorities. They champion the value of the youth work sector, challenging government at national and local levels to invest in youth work, which supports over 300,000 young people.

#### Approach

We welcome the opportunity to inform the Education and Skills Committee of young people's views on the SQA 2020 Exam Result Provisions. This response is based on the findings of the main [Lockdown Lowdown survey](#) alongside the views of one of our weekly follow up surveys.

The Scottish Youth Parliament, YouthLink Scotland and Young Scot partnered to deliver **LockdownLowdown** - a survey of young people from across Scotland on their concerns about COVID-19. The survey results give a clear picture of what young people are currently worried about - and the impact it's having on their lives.

The survey received **2,419 responses** from young people aged 11-25 across Scotland, from all 32 local authorities and SYP's 11 national voluntary organisations.

The majority of respondents are at school (75%) and over half are aged 15-18 (52%). 65% of respondents are female, 31% are male, 1% identify as non-binary, and 1% identify in another way. 12.4% of respondents belong to minority ethnic groups. 30% of respondents came from SIMD quintiles 1 and 2.

This main survey has been followed up by **weekly mini-surveys**. These have tracked the level of concern over 4 main areas as well as an additional topic question, designed to respond to new developments or concerns. In the survey which ran **1<sup>st</sup> - 3<sup>rd</sup> May**, we included the following question:

*'What do you think is important for decision makers to keep in mind when they are thinking about re-opening schools?'*

We received **93 responses** to this survey. No demographic data was collected.

### Relevant Lockdown Lowdown Findings

- Over two fifths (42%) stated that they were Extremely or Moderately concerned about school, college and university closures.
- Respondents expressed more concern regarding exams and coursework, with around half (49%) stating that they were Moderately or Extremely concerned.
- Over half of the respondents (58%) stated that they had some concern over their ability to access their rights.
- Almost two thirds of respondents (61%) stated that they were Moderately or Extremely concerned about the impact of coronavirus (COVID-19) on their future.
- Respondents were asked to provide examples of actions that they would like to see decision makers take to tackle issues surrounding coronavirus, 10% of respondents noted they'd like to see improvements to the current impact on education.

### Re-opening Schools

When asked what actions they would like to see decision makers keep in mind when thinking about re-opening schools in our follow up survey, 13 themes came out.

The most common were:

- Concerns around safety of returning to school (37%)
- Impacts of lockdown and social distancing on mental health and wellbeing (24%)
- Long term impacts on education, qualifications and employment (23%)

Other issues raised include:

- Managing expectations of things returning to normal straight away (17%)
- Focus on how to achieve social distancing within schools (17%)
- Risk to the health of others (16%)
- Practicalities of the learning environment (11%)
- Ensuring decisions are suitable for all circumstances (11%)
- Decisions to be clearly communicated with or influenced by young people (10%)
- Ensuring that schools do not open too soon (6%)
- Awareness of changes in family circumstances (3%)
- Decisions to be clearly communicated with or influenced by the medical community (3%)
- Decisions to be clearly communicated with or influenced by teachers (3%)

In our initial Lowdown Lowdown survey, we also asked respondents to provide examples of any other issues that they may be concerned about regarding coronavirus. Several responses raised issues related to school re-openings, which widely correlate with those noted above.

## Concerns around safety of returning to school

*“I’m worried that the government will open schools too soon, causing the virus to circulate again as schools are a perfect place for the corona virus to spread and thrive.”*

*“Young people going back to school and not going by the rule on social distancing...As they go to supermarket for food for snack.”*

## Safety of others

*“That school goes back to quickly & risk of taking COVID19 home to my mum who is in the high risk category”*

## Impacts of lockdown and social distancing on mental health and wellbeing

*“... as someone with mental health issues there is even less support than what there was in school.”*

*“...being someone who has been very suicidal in the past due to just being lonely and now with school being the only way I speak to friends, I fear for my mental health declining again.”*

## Short-term and long-term impacts on education, qualifications and employment

*“I’m unable to do any work that was sent to me by the teachers due to distractions and social media. School provided me with a really good schedule, that I am unable to keep on my own.”*

*“There is far too much course work being set which means some children [whose] parents don’t push them while at home will fall behind creating a larger gap than the one that already exists.”*

*“Schools for me is a big issue as I may not get the grades I need/want for my university which means I may not be able to do what I want in the future and it’s concerning.”*

*“I find it hard to work computers but now all my schoolwork is online and it is very stressful.”*

## Impacts of school closures on physical health and wellbeing for vulnerable groups

*“About how many kids from abusive households or anybody from abusive households who used school or work as an escape but now due to those being shut are having to stay at home all the time with their abuser.”*

*“[S]ome people’s only happy/safe place was school which is now not available to them”*

## The impact on learning and assessment in the next academic year

Several responses to this question also highlighted some of the concerns young people have over the impact postponing this year’s exam diet will have the future including:

General concerns over the future school year.	Concerns over whether curriculums will start on time.	Fears of having to repeat a year due to COVID-19.
Those who struggled to keep up with home working may be disadvantaged going forward.	Impact on wider educational opportunities.	Impact of those transitioning from P7 to S1 without the usual support.

## Contact us:

Should you wish to digitally meet with us or update us on how the findings will feed into your work, please do not hesitate to get in touch with us using the details below.

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