



Young people's views and experiences of Learning for Sustainability in Scotland

Scottish Youth Parliament
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- Bonny Pop Up, Niddrie, Edinburgh.
- Edinburgh Youth Action group, Sighthill, Edinburgh
- Girlguiding Scotland, Guides group in Portobello.
- Scotland's UK Youth Parliament representatives.
- Beath High School, Cowdenbeath.
- YouthSpace, Linlithgow.
- The Nicolson Institute, Stornoway, the Isle of Lewis.
- Monifieth Friday Afternoon Group, Angus.
- Lomond High School, Helensburgh.
- Elgin Academy, Moray.

The Learning for Sustainability Youth Leadership Group members - young people involved in the design, delivery, and evaluation of this piece of work - are:

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Recommendations

Through their engagement with young people across Scotland, the Learning for Sustainability Youth Leadership Group has identified the following six recommendations for action to improve Learning for Sustainability in Scotland:

Learning for Sustainability in the context of education reform

1. Learning for Sustainability should be incorporated across the Scottish education curriculum and embedded into all areas of young people's learning experience. Learning for Sustainability should not add extra pressure on young people's time and should promote their wellbeing.

“I think young people don't have a full understanding of LfS because it is not central to the education system as it currently stands. If we want to move towards a more sustainable Scotland, LfS needs to live up to its promise and aim, and be integrated into ALL aspects of the Scottish curriculum.” - *Learning for Sustainability Youth Leadership Group member*

Promotion of Learning for Sustainability

2. There should be a clearer definition of Learning for Sustainability and sustainable learning, which is easy for everyone to understand.

“I think young people are incredibly passionate about LfS but there is a huge gap between passion and understanding and there should be a huge moral and ethical imperative to close this gap in the years that are to come.” - *Learning for Sustainability Youth Leadership Group member*

3. The purpose and aims of Learning for Sustainability and sustainable learning should be more clearly communicated to young people, educators, and the community. This should be supported by clear guidance and resources to support educators and young people take part in Learning for Sustainability in a way that is accessible, inclusive, and meaningful.

“There is a clear interest in sustainability, but the message can get lost because some bits in the plan were complex to understand. Also, some young people didn't seem to care as much maybe due to other worries e.g. school pressure.” - *Learning for Sustainability Youth Leadership Group member*

Residential and outdoor learning

4. Residential and outdoor learning opportunities should be available to all young people and should not be contingent on young people's behaviour or academic achievements. The benefits and relevance of residential and outdoor learning opportunities should be more clearly communicated to educators and young people to challenge the perception that these opportunities are only available to certain groups of young people.

“My ideal school would be outside for a lot of the day. Fun activities and happy teachers.” - *young person, Stornoway*

Young people's meaningful participation in design and delivery of Learning for Sustainability

5. The Scottish Government and educators should ensure young people's meaningful participation in decision-making, in the delivery of the recommendations outlined in this report, and in the design and delivery of Learning for Sustainability in schools, to ensure young people's UNCRC Article 12 right to have their voices heard are upheld.

“I think that we have learned a lot, and must now take action with the suggestions made by young people. I appreciate that Scottish Government have incorporated young people's opinions, but feel that the best way to achieve the goals of LfS is to have consistent engagement and co-design with young people throughout. This project is for young people, and so they should be the ones to design how it looks, feels, etc.”
- *Learning for Sustainability Youth Leadership Group member*

6. The Scottish Government should respond to this report to close the feedback loop and to outline how young people's views outlined in this research have informed their work on Learning for Sustainability.

“I would like to see Scottish Government provide a response to our report of course, but beyond that I think we should keep the conversation going on this topic. My reflection from being involved in this project is that LfS still has a mountain to climb to reach the 2030 goals and I think MSYPs have proved through this project that we have the skills and insight to support this work on an ongoing basis but also the connections to deliver it due to our unique democratic mandate.”
- *Learning for Sustainability Youth Leadership Group member*

Introduction

‘Learning for Sustainability (LfS) is an approach to life and learning which enables learners, educators, schools and their wider communities to build a fair, sustainable and equitable society. An effective whole school and community approach to LfS weaves together global citizenship, sustainable development, education and outdoor learning to create coherent, rewarding and transformative learning experiences.’ (Education Scotland, 2024, p.3)

Education Scotland (2024) ‘Whole school and community approach to learning for sustainability (LfS) Self-evaluation and improvement framework’.

Available at: <https://education.gov.scot/media/usdd0j0b/frwk11-lfs-framework.pdf>

The Scottish Youth Parliament (SYP) has worked closely with the Learning for Sustainability team from Scottish Government since 2022, delivering a consultation workshop in 2022 and the Learning for Sustainability Youth Leadership Group since 2023. SYP has also helped refresh the Learning for Sustainability: Action Plan 2023 to 2030.

This partnership has continued into 2024-25. This year, the Learning for Sustainability Youth Leadership Group (YLG) has focused on carrying out research with diverse groups of young people across Scotland, to gather their views to inform the Scottish Government Learning for Sustainability Advisory Group.

The YLG was made up of five young people from across Scotland who co-designed every aspect of this work. The research topics were agreed with the Scottish Government Learning for Sustainability team and SYP’s Youth Leadership Group. The focus was agreed to be education reform, promotion of Learning for Sustainability in curriculum and community, and outdoor learning and residential. The research was broken down into three research rounds, with three workshops to be carried out in each round.

In total, fifteen workshops took place across Scotland. This included six sessions in one secondary school in the Isle of Lewis. The full list of workshops can be found in the approach section of this report.

This report details the full approach for this project and the results from the research carried out.

Between August 2024 and March 2025, the project focussed on three outcomes:

1. The Scottish Government will understand young people's experiences and views about learning for sustainability which will inform delivery of Scotland's Learning for Sustainability Action Plan 2023-30.
2. Young people involved in the Youth Leadership Group report that they feel supported and able to meaningfully participate in this project, and will be able to demonstrate an improvement in key skills, such as teamwork, communication, organisation and planning, and confidence, in line with the National Youth Work Outcomes and Skills Framework [1].
3. Young people who take part in focus groups will be able to meaningfully express their views and ideas which will support the Scottish Government to develop policies and resources which address young people's views. Young people will understand how their views have influenced delivery of Scotland's Learning for Sustainability Action Plan 2023-30 through a feedback process agreed with the Scottish Government during the planning process.

[1] YouthLink Scotland (2025) 'National Youth Work Outcomes & Skills Framework'. Available at: <https://www.youthlink.scot/education-skills/youth-work-outcomes-skills/>.

Our approach

Learning for Sustainability Youth Leadership Group

The Youth Leadership Group model supports Action 17 of Scotland's Target 2030 Learning for Sustainability action plan 2023-2030:

Action 17 - Collaborative partnership for LfS

'In support of "Target 2030" and specifically to ensure continued meaningful engagement of learner voice in this plan, Scottish Government will convene national LfS Children and Young People Leadership Groups. The groups will be invited to codesign key deliverables in this plan including the new LfS online portal and development of Key LfS indicators.'

Scottish Government (2023) Learning for sustainability: action plan 2023 to 2030 (p.17). Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/target-2030-movement-people-planet-prosperity/>

In line with the Scottish Youth Parliament's youth-led co-design approach, this project was planned and delivered by the Learning for Sustainability Youth Leadership Group (YLG / youth leaders). The 2024-25 YLG was made up of five Members of the Scottish Youth Parliament (MSYPs), who applied through an open recruitment process in August 2024.

The YLG focus this year was to plan and carry out engagement workshops with a diverse range of young people in different demographic and geographical communities across Scotland, to understand their views and experiences of Learning for Sustainability. This built on the 2023-24 approach, in which ten young people formed the YLG and were directly consulted on their views and experiences. Feedback from the 2023-24 project suggested that a smaller YLG would give young people in the group more opportunity to take responsibility and develop their leadership skills, and to increase engagement with young people outside the YLG.

This year, the programme for the youth leaders consisted of a mixture of in person meetings and opportunities, and online meetings on Teams.

The YLG first met online in September 2024, where they received an introduction to Learning for Sustainability and the project's aims, an in-depth discussion about the 2023-30 Action Plan, and an initial discussion about the research approach.

An online training day took place on 21st September, where the youth leaders received training on staying safe when working with children and young people; inclusive facilitation; an introduction to developing an engaging and effective focus group; and a deep-dive into different ways of gathering young people's views in a fun and interactive way.

Following their initial training day, the YLG met regularly on Teams to plan and prepare for carrying out the first round of focus groups, which took place in October and November 2025.

The YLG met in person again on Saturday 16th November, where they reviewed their findings from the first round of focus groups, analysed the session feedback from participants, and used their findings to inform development of the second round of focus groups.

Following the second round of focus groups, the YLG met on Teams in January 2025 to repeat the review and analysis process, and to plan the third round of focus groups.

After the three research rounds were completed, the youth leaders met online where they received training on data analysis, reviewed all their findings, and identified the key information they wanted to include in this report. During this session, the group also reflected on their experience of the project and celebrated their successes.

Research Development

During the project proposal and inception phase, it was agreed that three rounds of research would be carried out with young people across Scotland.

With guidance from the Learning for Sustainability team in the Scottish Government, the research rounds focused on:

- Round 1: Learning for Sustainability in the context of education reform.
- Round 2: Education reform and promotion of Learning for Sustainability.
- Round 3: Promotion of Learning for Sustainability and outdoor learning.

Each round of research was planned by the Youth Leadership Group, as described in the following sections. During their planning stages, the YLG agreed that the focus groups should take place in person where possible, to enable a broader range of interactive activities and to ensure young people were able to fully participate in a way that met their needs.

Where possible, members of the YLG facilitated the focus groups, although some of the sessions were facilitated by members of SYP staff due to YLG members' availability and the location of some of the sessions.

Overall, 220 young people aged between 11 and 18 took part in this research. This includes young people from urban, rural, and island communities, areas of deprivation, and more affluent areas. Engagement was carried out with community-based youth groups, national voluntary organisation groups, state schools, and an independent school. 114 young men (52% of all participants), 102 young women (46% of all participants), and four young people who did not want to disclose their gender (2% of all participants) took part in this research.

This results from this research are mainly presented as qualitative summaries from group discussions. However, quantitative data was also gathered in rounds 2 and 3.

Research Round 1: Learning for Sustainability in the context of education reform

This round of research focused on Learning for Sustainability in the context of education reform.

During the planning process, the youth leaders reviewed the LfS Target 2023 action plan and the report from the 2023-24 Learning for Sustainability Youth Leadership Group, and they noted that young people may not be fully aware of Learning for Sustainability. With this in mind, for the first round of research they decided to focus on:

- What young people know about Learning for Sustainability.
- What young people enjoy about sustainability education.
- What young people think could be improved in school in relation to Learning for Sustainability.

These questions align with two of the four pillars of Learning for Sustainability - Curriculum and Community.

Each session started with an introduction to the project and to LfS, and an icebreaker to help young people feel comfortable with each other and the facilitators.

Following the icebreaker, participants took part in a quiz. This quiz was designed to get the participants thinking about LfS and also to start the session off with energy as the YLG felt this was important.

After researching methods to gather data in participatory research, the YLG designed a 'tree activity'. This activity used the imagery of a tree to enable participants to explore their experiences of Learning for Sustainability considering their past (roots), present (trunk), future (leaves), and empowerment (sky). Participants were asked to work in groups to create the learning for sustainability tree and fill in each section. After each section of the tree was completed, there was a discussion break, then time for participants to add anything to the tree as individuals.



YLG members and SYP staff facilitating sessions moved around the groups, using prompts developed from the LfS Action Plan if participants were stuck. Different prompts were given depending on the age and stage of each group, considering topics such as curriculum, community, extracurricular activities, clubs and so on. Participants were encouraged to think about the tree prompts in relation to their experience within their education, including at primary and secondary school.

For the empowerment section of the tree activity, the 'blue sky thinking' asked participants to think about who should champion and amplify Learning for Sustainability to help meet the 2030 targets. They were asked to think about themselves and other learners, practitioners, Government, and any other people.

The final activity in this session was a discussion on the question: 'what is one thing about sustainable learning that interests you?' The YLG designed this activity to include a Q&A discussion, with the aim of participants leaving with a better understanding of learning for sustainability or feeling more confident in their understanding.



Most of the workshops ended with this group discussion. However, at the end of the workshop with Girlguiding, which was longer and with a younger age group, participants also designed logos using icing and biscuits to symbolise the message they would want to spread about 'being more sustainable'. The end of session discussions took place whilst they were creating their designs.

Following the first two workshops, the youth leaders reflected that participants' lack of understanding about Learning for Sustainability resulted in the tree activity taking longer than anticipated, and therefore there was less time for the other activities. To overcome this, the YLG created what they felt was a more accessible introduction to Learning for Sustainability, using the LfS Action Plan and adapting it. They also made the quiz more focused to help participants get a better grasp of the topic.

Four workshops took place during round one - two sessions were facilitated by Shannon Donoghue, SYP's Participation and Programmes Officer, due to a risk assessment surrounding bonfire night in Edinburgh. The other two sessions were facilitated by at least one member of the Youth Leadership Group:

- **Workshop 1** - Bonny Pop Up, Niddrie, Edinburgh. 10 young people aged 12-17 attended with a mix of genders. All participants lived in the local area.
- **Workshop 2** - Edinburgh Youth Action group, Sighthill, Edinburgh. 6 young people aged 13-16 attended, with a mix of genders. All participants lived in the local area.
- **Workshop 3** - Girlguiding Scotland, Guides group in Portobello. 19 young women aged 12-14 attended. All participants lived in the local area.
- **Workshop 4** - Scotland's UK Youth Parliament representatives (MSYPs who are also UK Youth Parliament members). Nine young people aged 16-18 attended, with a mix of genders. Participants have been elected to SYP and UKYP to represent seven of Scotland's eight Parliamentary regions (Lothian, North East Scotland, Central Scotland, Highlands and Islands, Lothian, Glasgow, Mid Scotland and Fife).

The introduction to Learning for Sustainability developed by the Youth Leadership Group (using the Scottish Government Action Plan) for the purposes of this research is:

Learning for Sustainability (LfS) is an approach to life and learning which enables learners, educators, schools and their wider communities to build a fair, sustainable and equitable society. An effective whole school and community approach to LfS weaves together global citizenship, sustainable development, education and outdoor learning to create coherent, rewarding and transformative learning experiences.

It's not always just putting recycling bins into playgrounds or dealing with litter. LfS includes other issues such as active travel, fast fashion, clean and accessible water. Anything that affects the environment, and the possibility for a community to be sustainable, is LfS. This includes food access, life skills, the environment, the list goes on!

All young people in Scotland are entitled to LfS through the school curriculum.

The government has made an action plan to place sustainability at the centre of the Scottish education system by 2030. The new plan includes an ambitious commitment to ensure that every school and early learning setting in Scotland will be sustainable by 2030.

This plan is always being updated by the government so they can find out what's working well and what needs improved.

This is where you come in!

This session will focus on what LfS might lack, what it might need in the future, and how we can promote it.

The government wants to hear from you about your experiences with learning for sustainability and what you think they could do in the future.

The main reason for LfS and the renewed action plan is to give a voice to our educators and our young people who are demanding - rightly - that we need to empower them to create more sustainable future. The future is yours to shape; you deserve a say in how that future looks to ensure it is one in which we all want to live.

Research Round 2: Education reform and promotion of Learning for Sustainability

In addition to Learning for Sustainability in the context of education reform, round two also considered promotion of Learning for Sustainability.

The youth leaders took on feedback from the workshops in round one and decided to add an activity to gather both quantitative and qualitative data.

The youth leaders developed the 'stand on the line' activity for this purpose. This activity starts with all group members standing in a line along the room. The facilitator reads out a statement. If participants agree they take a step forward, if they disagree they take a step back, and if they are unsure, they stay on the line. This was then repeated with everyone back in a line for each statement. A small discussion took place after each statement was answered, and notes from this were written down.

The youth leaders also designed a 'sustainability street' activity which was a follow on from the data collected in the round one tree activity. This focused more on promotion of LfS while still giving participants the opportunity to discuss their experiences. The participants were instructed through each section of the street.

The first part of the Sustainability Street activity used prompts from the sustainability tree activity in research round one to enable participants to discuss and get more base knowledge of the subject. Following this, participants were encouraged to think about LfS promotion. Participants could choose how they wanted to display this on their street with shops or signs or posters and so on.

These prompts connected the promotion of LfS with community and curriculum, and this was to be included within the street. The intention of this activity was to show how young people view Learning for Sustainability visually.

Following feedback from the first session of round two at Beath High School, the youth leaders decided to change the 'sustainability street' activity as although the concept was creative, carrying it out practically took a lot of time due to young people's lack of understanding of LfS, and the youth leaders did not feel it would gather enough detailed information to inform the Scottish Government. As such, the youth leaders changed the activity for the rest of the workshops to the 'shield activity'. This activity focused on the same aspects as the 'sustainability street' activity but in a simpler format.

The shield activity asked young people to imagine we were in 2030 and the targets had been met for LfS. They were asked to consider: what would this look like, feel like, and sound like. These prompts were filled out over the shield with the last section in the shield being used for empowerment and practical examples. On considering the results from this activity, the YLG members felt they were clearer than those from the 'sustainability street' activity.

Six workshops took place during round two - three were facilitated by at least one member of the Youth Leadership Group. The sessions in Stornoway were facilitated by Shannon Donoghue, SYP's Participation and Programmes Officer:

- **Workshop 5:** Beath High School in Cowdenbeath. 15 young people aged 14 - 16 attended, with a mix genders. All based around local area.
- **Workshop 6:** YouthSpace, Linlithgow. 9 young people aged 15 - 18 attended with mix genders. All based around the local area.
- **Workshop 7:** The Nicolson Institute, Stornoway the Isle of Lewis. S3 class, 21 young people aged 14 - 16 attended, with mix genders. All Island based.
- **Workshop 8:** The Nicolson Institute, Stornoway the Isle of Lewis. S4 class, 7 young people aged 15 - 16 attended, with mix genders. All Island based.
- **Workshop 9:** The Nicolson Institute, Stornoway the Isle of Lewis. S1 class, 23 young people aged 11 - 12 attended, with mix genders. All Island based.
- **Workshop 10:** Monifieth Friday Afternoon Group, Angus, 9 young people aged 12 - 16 attended, with mix genders. All based in local area.

Research Round 3: Promotion of Learning for Sustainability and outdoor learning

For this research round, the focus was originally promotion of Learning for Sustainability. However, after an SYP staff meeting with the Scottish Government Learning for Sustainability team in December 2024, 'outdoor learning and residential' were added to this research round. This addition was due to the introduction of the Schools (Residential Outdoor Education) (Scotland) Bill to the Scottish Parliament in 2024, and ongoing discussions within Scottish Government about the links between Learning for Sustainability and outdoor learning and residential.

During research round one, young people highlighted that they enjoyed outdoor learning and residential, so the youth leaders had already added questions about this topic into round two. As such, they decided to keep the existing questions to expand their findings in relation to this topic.

The YLG decided to keep the 'stand in the line' activity with the same statements used in round two, as these already included questions on outdoor learning and residential. They also felt this approach would give the Scottish Government a wider data set to work with.

The YLG also decided to keep the 'shield activity' as it had positive feedback in round two and gave a large amount of detail. However, they made small changes to the task description and discussion prompts to better fit the focus of this research round. They decided to keep with the prompts of 'looks like, sounds like, feels like', as this seemed to help break down LfS to a more digestible form for participants. The focus was still on promotion, using the prompt of imagining 2030 to see how young people view the direction for LfS. Additional prompts were added in this round to expand the focus on outdoor learning and residential. In these prompts, the YLG wanted to navigate how participants felt about outdoor learning residential, and what opportunities were available in different parts of the country.

The session ended with a discussion around outdoor opportunities, for young people to express their experiences with outdoor learning and residential. This discussion was a conversational style whole group discussion, which used the previous activity to prompt. Participants shared the answers on their shield and gave more explanation to what they had written.

Five workshops took place during round three - the session in Helensburgh was facilitated by a member of the Youth Leadership Group. The sessions in Stornoway and Moray were facilitated by Shannon Donoghue or Lucie Paradis, SYP's Participation and Programmes Officers:

- **Workshop 11:** The Nicolson Institute, Stornoway, Isle of Lewis. S3 class, 15 young people aged 14-16, with mix of genders. All Island based.
- **Workshop 12:** The Nicolson Institute, Stornoway, Isle of Lewis. S1 class, 24 young people aged 11 - 12, with mix of genders. All island based
- **Workshop 13:** The Nicolson Institute, Stornoway, Isle of Lewis. S2 class, 13 young people aged 12 - 14, with mix of genders. All Island based.
- **Workshop 14:** Lomond High School, Helensburgh. S2 class, 25 young people aged 13 - 15, with mix of genders. Based in 'West of Scotland'. This school hosts pupils from deployed military families, so has an offer of boarding.
- **Workshop 15:** Elgin Academy, Moray. 15 young people aged 13 - 17, with a mix of genders. All based in local area.

Working with the Scottish Government

This project was funded by the Scottish Government's Learning for Sustainability team. SYP staff met regularly with this team to report on project progress.

In addition to SYP staff meetings with the Scottish Government, the original intention for this project was that members of the Youth Leadership Group would attend the Scottish Government's Learning for Sustainability Leadership Group meetings to report on their progress and share learning from their engagement with young people. However, after the Leadership Group meeting at the start of this project in September, no further meetings have happened since the YLG was established and carried out research rounds. The meeting in February was cancelled and moved to May 2025, when our project will have ended and YLG members will be sitting exams. After a discussion between Scottish Government team and SYP staff we aim to set up a meeting in summer 2025 for the YLG to present their work to the Scottish Government's LfS Leadership Group.

Further to the ongoing engagement with Scottish Government colleagues, SYP was invited to attend 'Harnessing the Power of Partnerships in Learning for Sustainability' hosted by YouthLink Scotland and Learning for Sustainability Scotland in September 2024. This event was attended by Marcus, a member of the youth leadership group and Shannon, SYP staff member. This event was attended partners from all over the sector and external partners, including colleagues from the Scottish Government. The event focussed on the power of partnerships for LfS and how this could help Scotland meet the 2030 target whilst providing a better experience for young people and practitioners. During the event, Marcus shared his experiences of the youth leadership group and the first round of research.

“I actually do feel differently about LfS since becoming a youth leader. I've learnt loads about it since joining the youth leadership group and have become much more passionate about LfS as a result. However, in all honesty, this has given me a sense of frustration too. Because I now care more I also find it frustrating that there is still a mountain to climb to reach the 2030 vision. That being said, I am excited to be part of the solution to help climb that mountain.”

Marcus, Learning for Sustainability Youth Leader, mid project check in.



Results

Key findings

Through each round of research, the Youth Leadership Group identified the following key findings:

- The majority of young people who took part in our research don't know what Learning for Sustainability is or what sustainable learning means.
- As young people did not appear to have a basic understanding of Learning for Sustainability, it was difficult to explore this topic in the wider context of education reform. When discussing education reform, young people focused on how education is taught and how it could be more sustainable overall.
- Young people's concern about the environment appears to be relatively low, but discussion during our research highlighted this may be because of other more immediate concerns young people were facing, including exams, caring responsibilities, and the cost of living.
- All the young people who took part in our research have done some outdoor learning, primarily in primary school, but there does not seem to be many opportunities in secondary school. This appears to have changed since the Covid-19 pandemic, and has not been picked up again by some schools.
- There appears to be a trend where outdoor learning is used as an alternative for young people who don't fit into a classroom setting, tainting young people's attitudes towards outdoor learning and potentially increasing stigma towards outdoor learning opportunities.
- Young people would like more practical and outdoor learning, but they don't want this to be added on top of their current workloads.
- Young people think everyone should be empowered to take forward learning for sustainability to meet the 2030 targets. Young people want to see more resources for peer-to-peer support; training and resources for teachers/practitioners; and the Government to support the implementation of learning for sustainability in schools in a way that is worthwhile and not a strain on the already packed curriculum.

Young people's experiences of Learning for Sustainability

When discussing the topic of Learning for Sustainability, it was clear from the first round of research that young people were not aware of the concept. To help young people understand what Learning for Sustainability and sustainable learning are, the YLG came up with a list of examples to explain ways of being sustainable and what learning about sustainability could include. This enabled them to undertake the research to understand how Learning for Sustainability is being conducted in schools.

As young people did not appear to have a basic understanding of Learning for Sustainability, it was difficult to explore this topic in the wider context of education reform. However, the findings outlined in this section may be used to inform future engagement with young people on the role Learning for Sustainability may play in education reviews and reform processes.

Young people's past experience of Learning for Sustainability

The following discussion has been informed by young people's responses to the 'roots' section of the tree activity carried out in research round 1. It highlights the key themes that came up when young people were thinking about their experiences of Learning for Sustainability in the past. The majority of young people's responses focused on their past experiences of outdoor learning or residential opportunities.

Outdoor learning - There was a clear indication that almost all participants had some experience of outdoor learning. The majority of these experiences were through class teaching taking place outside, day trips, outdoor activities, or other overnight residential. The consensus was that most young people enjoyed this type of learning and wished they had more opportunities to do it throughout their curriculum.

Groups - A lot of young people had also taken part in groups which focused on learning outdoors or themes relating to Learning for Sustainability, such as eco groups or bike-ability. Most said they enjoyed these opportunities. However, some said they didn't always feel listened to if the group's aim was to make decisions, such as in eco groups, or they didn't fully understand what they had been part of. Most participants who had taken part in these types of groups said they felt the skills-based activities, such as bike-ability, happened as a one-off, and there was no follow-up or learning progression.

Primary schools - Young people highlighted that most opportunities for sustainable learning, especially those that took place outside the classroom such as bike-ability and outdoor or residential trips, were available in primary schools. The groups indicated they had no or hardly any opportunities in secondary school, where their focus had been classroom-based learning, regardless of whether this style of learning suited them.

Secondary schools - Some young people mentioned they did have opportunities available in secondary in the past but could not afford to go. Others suggested their school didn't provide opportunities because they couldn't fund them and wouldn't ask students to pay.

Purpose of sustainable learning - When talking about examples of sustainable learning, the majority of participants felt they had participated in this kind of learning at some point in their education but did not understand or hadn't been told why they were carrying out these activities or learning styles.

Young people's present experience of Learning for Sustainability

The following discussion has been informed by young people's responses to the 'trunk' section of the tree activity carried out in research round 1. It highlights the key themes that came up when young people were thinking about their experiences of Learning for Sustainability in the present. Most young people's responses focused on their experience of, access to, and attitudes towards outdoor learning. Young people also highlighted other pressures that impact their wellbeing, Learning for Sustainability in the curriculum, and facilities in schools.

Physical Education (PE) - All groups indicated that PE was the subject they would be outside for most. This added into the discussion about whether people enjoyed outdoor learning, as they related it to PE. If someone wasn't keen on PE, they felt outdoor learning wasn't for them. Some participants expressed they used to go outside to do their work more in primary school, and sometimes in secondary school, but suggested this was usually only the case if it was a nice day and the teacher wanted to teach outside. Lessons outdoors rarely related specifically to Learning for Sustainability.

Young people's wellbeing - In every group, there was a lot of discussion about young people feeling disconnected from their education, feeling stressed about the workload they already have, or about other things happening in their lives (such as caring responsibilities). As a result, some felt they weren't always able to focus or prioritise their education.

Learning for Sustainability in the curriculum - Young people felt the current curriculum already feels overwhelming. Discussion about young people's wellbeing and priorities, as mentioned above, raised the question and concern amongst some that more focus on Learning for Sustainability would add to their workload and cause more stress. Most participants suggested again that they have attended eco clubs or bike-ability, but these weren't currently on offer in their secondary school. However, whilst most young people felt they would like more sustainable learning, including more outdoor learning opportunities, they did not think it could be added into the current curriculum as it currently stands because they felt they wouldn't have time to take part in these opportunities.

Access to outdoor learning - Groups gave mixed responses in terms of why they think they have access to outdoor learning. Some young people attended Forest School as a subject. These young people suggested they only attend this because *'I am not good at school'* or *'teachers don't want me in their classroom'*. Some young people who do take part in outdoor learning said that they don't understand why they do it, or the concept behind outdoor learning, but that they *'learn cool stuff sometimes'*. The young people who did not get to attend outdoor learning as part of their curriculum suggested it was *'because I behave, I don't get any opportunities outside my classes'* and *'I do too many exams, so I can't do it'*.

These experiences made for an interesting discussion in groups around current attitudes towards outdoor learning among their peers, suggesting outdoor learning is seen by young people as an opportunity only offered to those who don't cope well with classroom-based teaching. This suggests outdoor learning is not accessible for all young people.

Facilities in schools - Most participants said they do have facilities such as water fountains and recycling bins around their school community. However, they didn't always know how to use these facilities. Most participants said they don't feel they are asked their opinion on the community and facilities around them.

Young people's vision for the future of Learning for Sustainability

The following discussion has been informed by young people's responses to the 'leaves' and 'blue sky' sections of the tree activity carried out in research round 1. It highlights the key themes that came up when young people were thinking about their vision of Learning for Sustainability in the future, and about who should champion and amplify Learning for Sustainability to help meet the 2030 targets. Most young people's responses focused on outdoor learning and residential opportunities, teacher training and support, and the importance of everyone having a role to play in championing Learning for Sustainability.

Learning for Sustainability overall - Participants suggested they do want to learn how to be more sustainable for their future and they want to develop a deeper understanding of why this is being taken forward in schools and the wider community.

Outdoor learning - Participants suggested they want more outdoor learning and opportunities for outdoor residential, if this was not added on top of an already stressful workload. They suggested Learning for Sustainability should be embedded across the curriculum so it wouldn't put more pressure on them. They also said they do not want to have to take exams on Learning for Sustainability.

Attitudes towards outdoor learning - Participants believed the attitudes towards and access to outdoor learning should be changed so more people can have options to take part in it. They do not want it to only be used as a tool to remove young people from classrooms.

Trips and residential - Participants suggested they don't feel there is currently a lot of opportunity for trips and residential outside of school, but they would like more. Many young people suggested there is a lot of talk in their schools about trips and activities that took place before the COVID-19 pandemic which seemed to never return. They feel these opportunities would be beneficial for Learning for Sustainability. This was particularly strong for those young people who missed out in P7 camp due to the pandemic, as they suggested they haven't had another opportunity through school to do something similar.

Teacher training and support - Some participants suggested teachers already seem stressed with the workload they have. Most groups suggested teachers and practitioners need more training on the subject, and room to allow them to implement it, rather than it being added on to their existing workloads.

Amplification of Learning for Sustainability - In all groups there was consensus that everyone should champion and amplify Learning for Sustainability to help meet the 2030 targets.

Young people would like peer-to-peer opportunities for empowerment, support, and understanding to make Learning for Sustainability meaningful.

Participants felt teachers and youth workers should be provided with adequate training and guidance on this topic to try and make the outreach of Learning for Sustainability more consistent throughout formal and non-formal education institutions.

Young people also felt the Scottish Government plays a big role in providing the guidance and training for teachers and youth workers. They also felt Government should be responsible for making sure there is room for Learning for Sustainability to be embedded into education curriculum and communities without making it an additional activity on top of everything else. Additionally, they suggested local councils and the Scottish Government should make sure the share of opportunities was more equal across all areas of Scotland.

Results from the 'stand on the line' activity

In research rounds 2 and 3, the YLG introduced a 'stand on the line' activity to gather quantitative and qualitative data relating to young people's views and experiences of Learning for Sustainability. 176 participants took part in this activity. The graph on the following page shows young people's responses to each of these statements.

During the 'stand on the line' activity, young people were invited to explain why they chose their response to each statement. Key themes from these explanations were:

Awareness of Learning for Sustainability - A huge majority of young people do not know what the concept of Learning for Sustainability is (92%), and only around one quarter (26%) said they understand what sustainable learning is. When discussing different examples of Learning for Sustainability, young people had taken part in these examples, but suggested they didn't know why they were doing these activities, and didn't understand the sustainability aspect of this. Of those who said they did know what Learning for Sustainability is, they said they had heard of the phrase before and could say that they knew a bit about it, but they had not realised its full extent. When asked to share examples, they all thought it just related to activities such as litter picking or beach cleans. This was similar with the concept of sustainable learning, which all groups struggled to understand. While young people understood the examples of sustainable learning, they did not understand the concepts underpinning the examples.

Experiences of Learning for Sustainability - Even though most young people didn't know what Learning for Sustainability is, they have carried out activities that relate to the concept, such as bike-ability, beach clean ups, or fashion swaps to recycle clothes. Most expressed that they enjoyed these activities, but didn't always know why they were doing them. Most of the time, the activities were a one-off with no follow up. Similarly, those involved in eco-clubs expressed that they didn't fully understand why they took part or were selected by their school to take part.

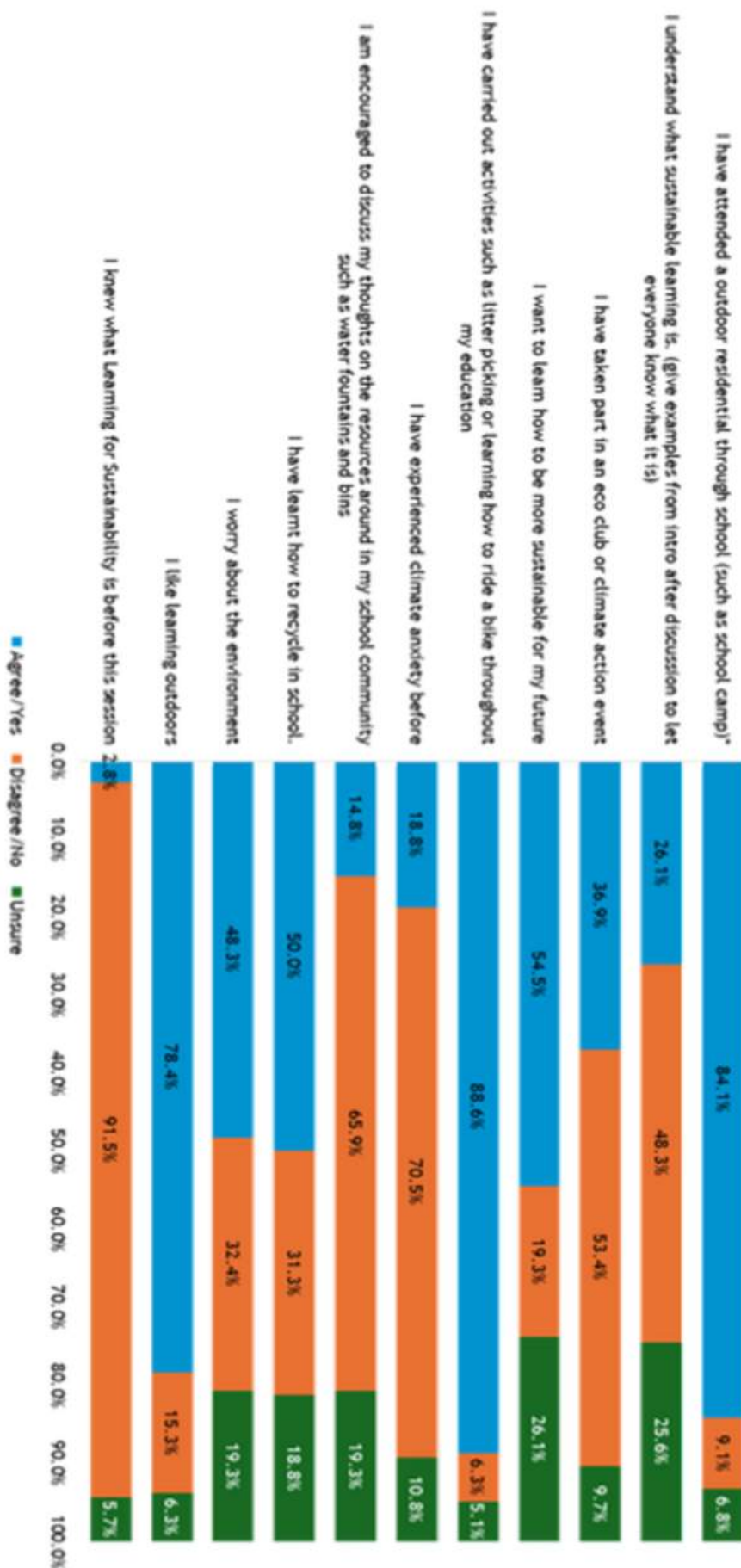
Environmental concern - Less than half of all participants who took part in this activity said they worry about the environment (48%). However, many young people expressed that while they do worry about the environment in some way, other responsibilities such as caring responsibilities and exams cause a lot more worry. These other worries made them feel they couldn't say they worry about the environment as much as some of their peers who experience 'worse' climate anxiety.

Young people's participation - A common theme throughout all rounds of this research is that young people do not feel they are asked or encouraged to have a say about their school community or their education. Some young people commented that they felt things just 'appear' around the place, and they get told to use them. This promoted a discussion in a couple of the groups about the style they are taught in, suggesting that 'classroom' style was outdated and didn't fit their needs.

Learning how to be more sustainable - Nearly half of young people (48%) agreed that they want to learn how to be more sustainable for their future. However, one quarter (26%) were unsure. Young people said they were unsure because they either didn't understand what this would mean, or because they didn't want more classroom-based learning or pressures added to their workload.

Experiences of outdoor learning and residentials - The majority of young people said they had attended an outdoor residential through school (84%). Of these, almost all had experienced an outdoor residential in primary school (95%), but a comparatively small number had experienced this in their secondary education (18%). Young people expressed that there wasn't a lot of outdoor learning in their high school education, and there were not many opportunities to go on outdoor excursions and trips. A few of the youth club and school staff present during the sessions indicated to facilitators after the sessions ended that there used to be more outdoor learning and residentials, but this has not picked back up since the Covid-19 pandemic.

Results from the 'stand on the line' activity



*Of the young people who said they have attended an outdoor residential through school (such as school camp), 95% did this at primary school, and 18% at high school.

Promotion of Learning for Sustainability

Promotion of Learning for Sustainability was one of the focus themes for research rounds two and three.

Sustainability Shields

To describe their vision for Learning for Sustainability in their learning environment, participants were asked to imagine they are in 2030 and the Learning for Sustainability Target 2030 Action Plan aims have been met. Participants designed a shield on which they could draw or write what they thought this would look like, feel like, and sound like. This activity also incorporated discussion about outdoor learning and residential opportunities.

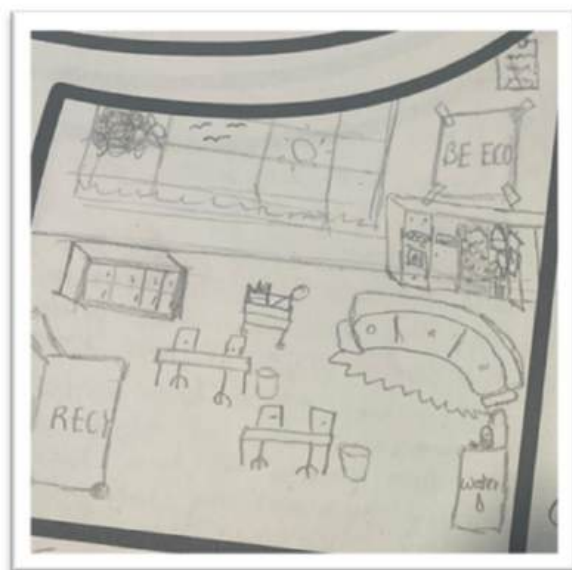
Young people's views on what a sustainable learning environment 'Looks Like'

Quotes from young people's shields are shown in the image below.

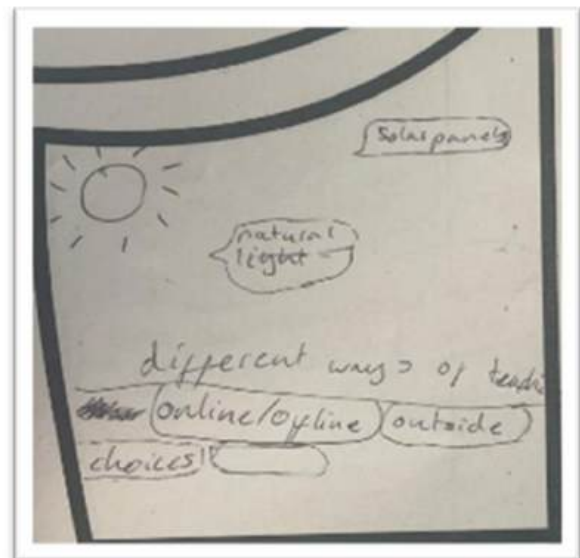


Sustainable learning environment - Most young people said they would envision a sustainable learning environment to look clean, open, airy, functional, fun, interesting, and colourful but not cringy. They would like their learning environments to look like a connected community who are working together for a better future.

Participants expressed they think a sustainable learning environment would look more refreshed than their current school. Most participants expressed wanting the school to look fresh and clean, and for the facilities to be more sustainable, as they think this would help them learn more about sustainability both now and for their futures.

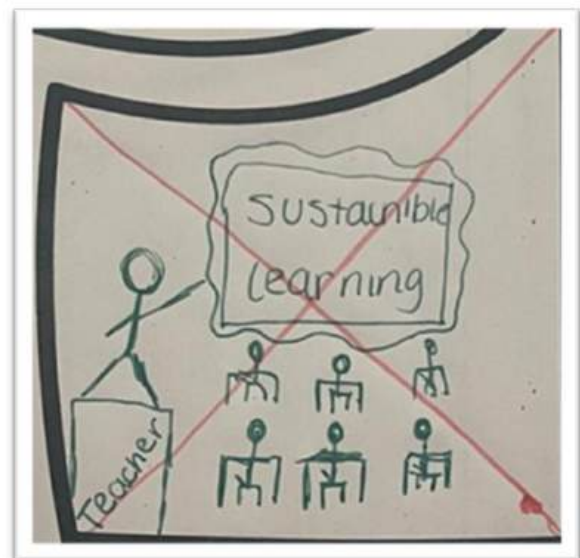


Changes to the curriculum - Participants were interested to imagine what sustainable learning could look outside of the opportunities they had already taken part in. They were particularly interested to see if changes could be made to the current curriculum to make it less stressful and more sustainable. Most suggested if their curriculum was more exciting, and visible changes were made instead of adding more theoretical knowledge, it would make them connect more with Learning for Sustainability.



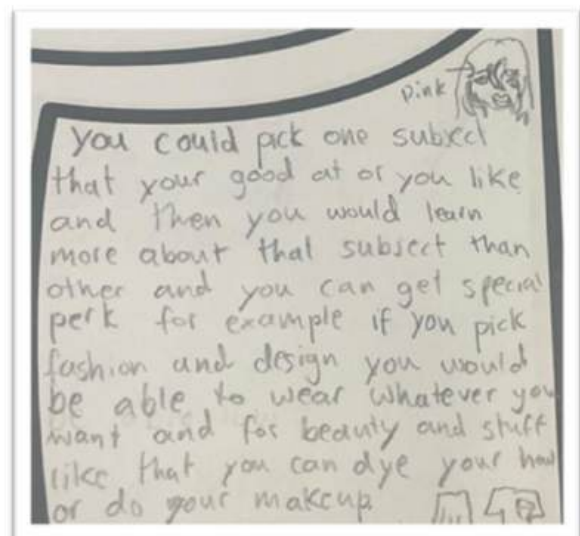
Clarity around opportunities and resources

- Young people want sustainable resources and opportunities to be explained properly, so they understand why these are being offered. They also want all young people to have access to opportunities and sustainable resources. When discussing their shields, participants again highlighted that opportunities are often associated with behaviour, which influences how they feel about getting involved in certain activities. For example, young people believe outdoor learning is currently used to take people out of class who don't fit into this style of teaching, while eco club is only for those who are good at school.



Participation in decision-making

- Participants would like more say about what is on offer to them, and to have more choice in what they learn. Young people expressed they want to have more opportunities to inform decision-making about the school community, their curriculum, and how this is taught. Going back to the stand on the line activity, only 15% felt they had been asked for their opinion on the facilities round their learning environment. Most expressed wanting to move away from the traditional style of teaching and having more practical opportunities available that can be used in their future, but they have not been asked about this in their current education setting.



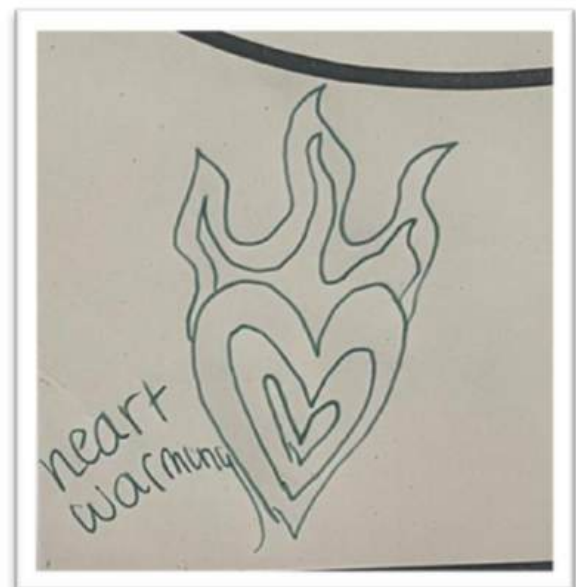
Young people's views on what a sustainable learning environment 'Feels Like'

Quotes from young people's shields are shown in the image below.

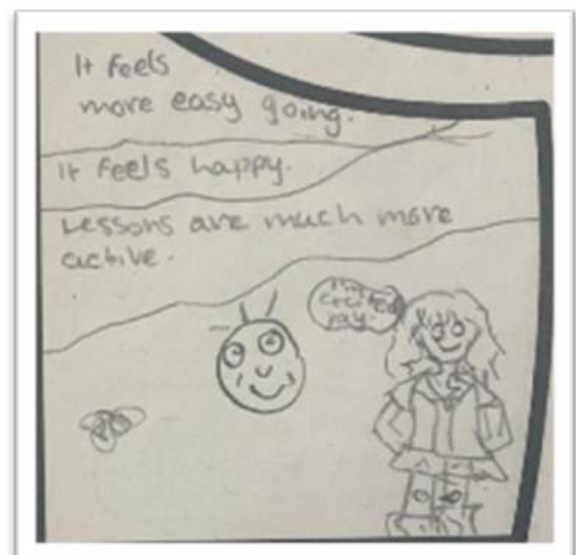


Sustainable learning environment - Young people used words such as calm, breezy, comfy, worthwhile, enjoyable, and practical to describe how a sustainable learning environment should feel. Most young people expressed wanting the environment to feel clean, open and useful.

There was a mixed response between wanting school to feel more exciting and fun or more chilled and calmer. When asked why this was a mixed response, young people expressed this was because people have different needs and feel comfortable in different environments. This reinforces the idea that our education system should not be one size fits all but should offer a varied and targeted approach to learning.

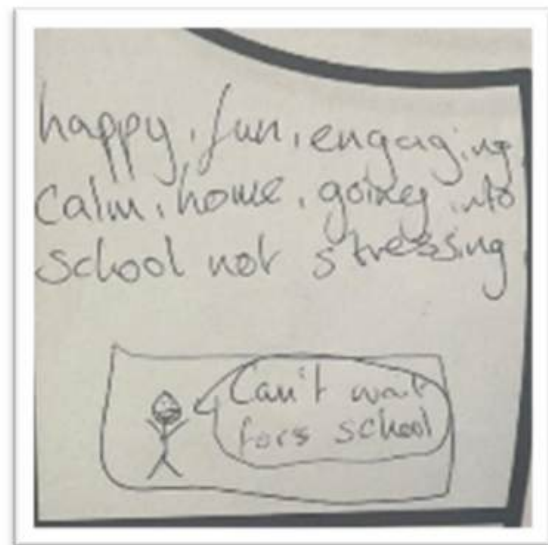


Inclusive learning environment - Most young people expressed they think a sustainable learning would feel like an inclusive environment that fits different learning needs, is a safe place for all, and presents different opportunities that everyone has access to.



Somewhere young people want to be - Most young people expressed they would want their sustainable learning environment to feel like a place they want to go to. While participants recognised there will be times of stress during their learning, they want the learning environment to feel welcoming and enjoyable throughout their school day.

Participants discussed the importance of connection with teachers. There were mixed responses depending on how young people already felt about school or certain subject areas. If they enjoyed the subject or being at school generally, they felt connected in the most part, but if they did not enjoy a subject or being at school, they felt like they didn't belong there.



Connection and identity - The idea of a strong identity came through all discussions. Young people wanted to feel connected to a school community and have a meaningful place within this. They recognised that feeling part of this community would be different for everyone and that's why they want more options for opportunities they can be involved in, and a variety of learning styles so people can do different activities when it suits them best. They don't want opportunities and experiences to be based on behaviour as they felt this impacted the way they feel towards their identity in school.



Young people's views on what a sustainable learning environment 'Sounds Like'

Quotes from young people's shields are shown in the image below.

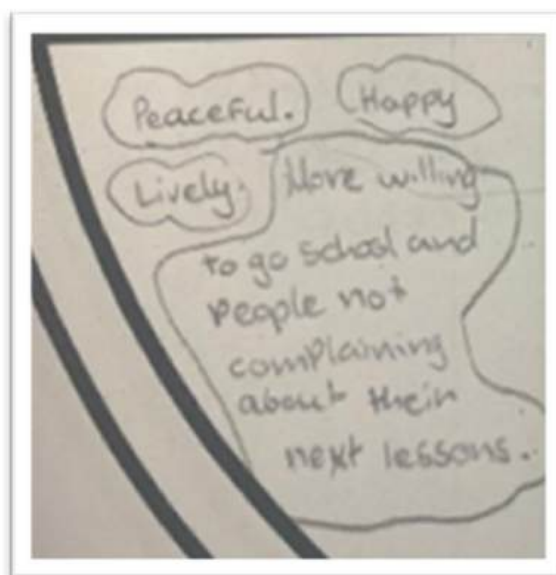


In this part of the activity, young people used one section of the shield to consider what a suitable learning environment sounds like in relation to community and curriculum. They felt it was important to discuss each separately but recognised there is crossover between the two strands. Most young people felt making changes to both the community and the curriculum will lead to a successful learning experience for young people.

The vast majority of responses in this part of the activity focused on young people's views and experiences of being listened to by educators and other adults who make decisions about their learning experiences. Therefore, the findings in this section are grouped by themes relating to youth voice and meaningful participation, rather than by different sounds.

Youth friendly - Most young people felt both community and curriculum in a sustainable learning environment would sound friendly to young people. They suggested this would include having more space for things young people enjoy or can learn life skills from, while still preparing them for their future. Young people also suggested it would include meaningful conversations where young people were asked for their opinions and these were taken on board.

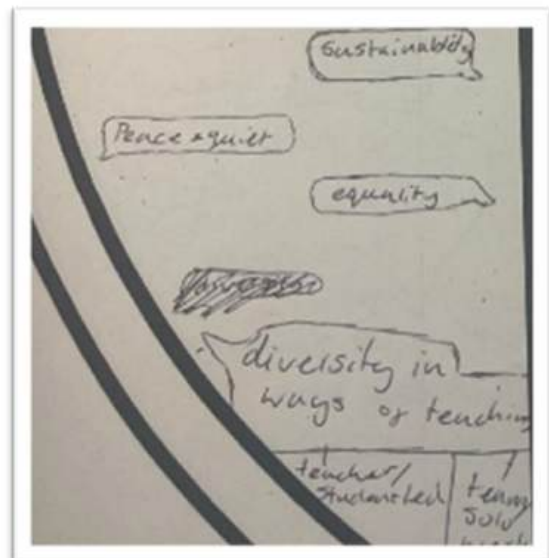
Collaborative - Most young people expressed sometimes school feels like a one-way conversation where they get told to do something and don't have a choice. They would like this to change into more open conversations between staff and pupils to allow for better, more collaborative relationships to be built.



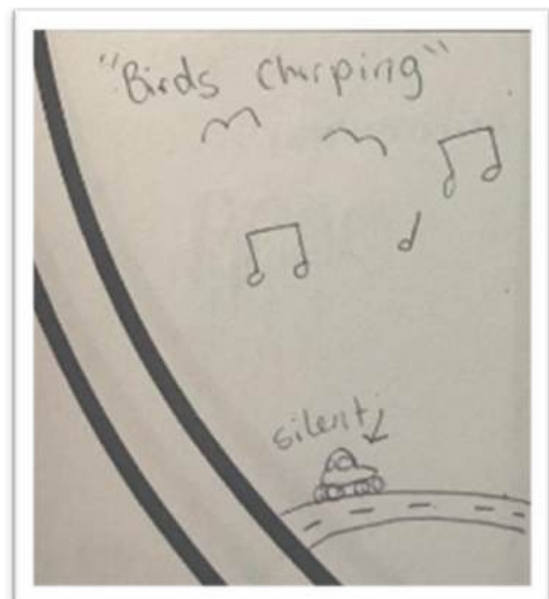
Understanding decisions - Young people expressed wanting a better understanding of the things they do in school and the reason they do it. They feel they could connect better with the work or facilities they have around them if they understood why they do it or what it's there for. Young people felt this could also address the stigma around schools, and hopefully help reduce the amount of bullying, so everyone felt comfortable no matter their interests or experiences.



Up to date education system - Most young people expressed they feel the education system is out of date. They didn't feel the current learning environment was setting them up for a successful future, unless they were taking certain particularly academic paths. They suggested a sustainable learning environment should empower them with the skills to create a successful, sustainable future for themselves and our planet.



Empowerment - Young people said a sustainable learning environment should feel empowering. They said this feeling of empowerment comes from conversations and the response and action they see because of young people expressing their views. Young people suggested if their voices were heard more directly in early education this would help with their future for things like voting, as they would feel empowered that they could make a difference instead of being dismissed or ignored.



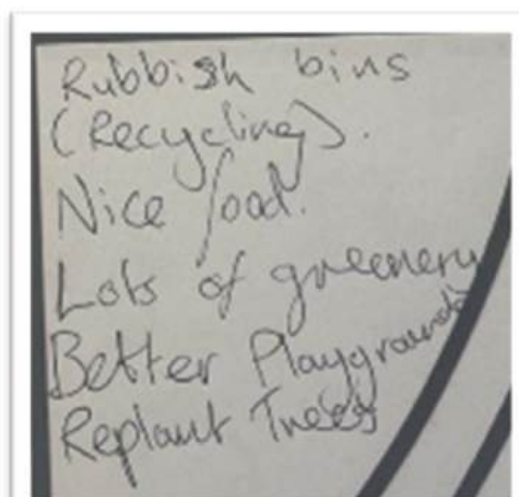
Young people's examples of Learning for Sustainability

The final part of the shield activity asked young people to share their examples of Learning for Sustainability. These examples may include either activities they currently do or activities they would like to do more of.

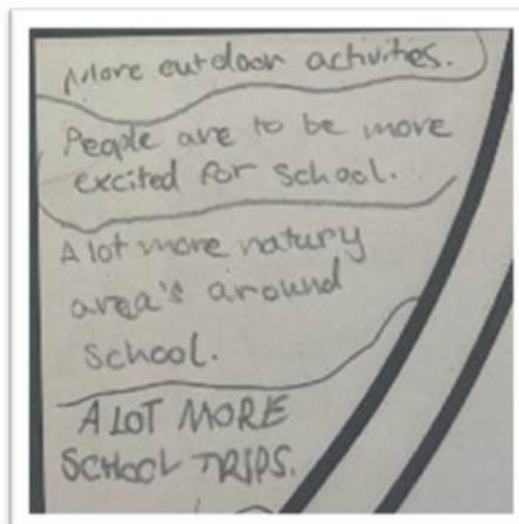
Individual and community action - Most young people gave examples of individual and community actions they felt could practically contribute towards improving the community or campus or reducing the impact of human activity on the environment. Examples of individual and community actions included litter picking, planting trees, beach cleans, and making bug hotels. Some young people suggested schools should have a garden or a greenhouse which all students would be involved in looking after. They suggested a school garden or greenhouse could be used to grow vegetables for food tech classes.



Facilities and resources - Some young people gave examples of facilities and resources which they felt represented Learning for Sustainability within the community and campus. Of these young people, most suggested having more rubbish bins and water fountains, clearer signage on recycling facilities, more healthy and sustainable food choices, more sustainable power sources, banning plastic in schools, and better access to public transport.



Practical learning - Some young people shared examples of practical learning activities for Learning for Sustainability. These examples included less screentime, spending more time outside in nature, carrying out projects, experiments and observations in nature, and doing more to learn about climate change and the environment. Some young people suggested activities such as a daily mile or PE lessons outdoors would also help young people to engage with the environment more.



Impact on Learning for Sustainability Youth Leadership Group

Throughout the project, the Learning for Sustainability Youth Leadership Group members have been supported to develop skills and knowledge to enable them to take the lead.

At the end of the project, they were invited to reflect on their experiences of this project. Their feedback shows the young people who led this project have developed skills and knowledge about Learning for Sustainability. They have enjoyed working as a team and building relationships with each other and with SYP staff.

Personal development

“Connected with different young people and their staff/ support workers and feel like I’ve done something to elevate and get more out of my role as MSYP” - Martha

“I thoroughly enjoyed this project! I love SYP project work because it allows you to branch out from local and national work and take a more personal perspective to the work that you do as an MSYP” - Islay

Teamwork and support

“Working as a team to create a plan was helpful as the workload was lighter.” - Martha

“This has been one of my favourite projects I have been involved in during my time in SYP! It has felt meaningful, and productive and I believe our report will provide valuable insights for Scot Gov in the months to come. This feeling of positivity is in no small part due to the efforts of Shannon, who has led this project for us with efficiency, flexibility and positivity. She has helped make this project feel meaningful and fun and was able to identify and utilise our collective strengths as a group to full advantage helping to create a good sense of teamwork throughout the project.” - Marcus

Skill development

“It improved my skills as I learnt to adapt session plans accordingly.” - Martha

“I enjoyed the sessions that I facilitated, they help to build my confidence and leadership. SYP staff were very supportive throughout the entire process, but I did like that they gave you the space to learn and do things for yourself rather than always trying to jump in and save the day (the best lessons are ones made from mistakes!). I think the sessions were helpful because they taught us how to adapt to different group styles, and how to articulate complex ideas in a way that young people can understand and engage with” - Islay

Facilitation

"I felt comfortable leading sessions as the young people were always respectable and listening most of the time. SYP staff always supportive, there on time, and made the attendees comfortable too, which helped me feel more relaxed going into the session." - Martha

"The workshops went very well and because our planning was so strong I felt very comfortable delivering the sessions. We were able to adapt and change them easily as needed and we gave ourselves adequate scope to flex and change the session plans based on the needs of the different groups we were at." - Marcus



Awareness and understanding of Learning for Sustainability

"I gained a greater understanding of what LfS is and feel I have gained a newfound passion for and belief in the aims and goal of LfS" - Marcus

"Planning the sessions was very fun, however, as I'm sure the rest of the group will agree, it was rather difficult to grasp at first. LfS in practise is simple, but articulating the concept (especially to young people) is a daunting and difficult endeavour. When understood however, it was fun and engaging and I feel like it has a lot of potential" - Islay



Hopes for the future

"Fulfilled because I'm sure our consultation workshops have been put to good use. Hopefully more focus and improvements within schools and learning facilities in terms of sustainability education, and more people able to get outside" - Martha

"Learned so much about Learning for Sustainability, when I have taken part in it myself, when it has worked really well, and when it has not. I feel like I can promote LfS and explain the concept to our young people, but would like to see some serious improvements [as a result of] the project." - Islay

Demographics

In total, 220 young people aged between 11 and 18 took part in this research.

Of these, 114 were young men (52% of all participants), 102 were young women (46% of all participants), and four young people did not want to disclose their gender (2% of all participants).

No additional demographics data was gathered from participants. However, all but one group took place in the community in which the young people lived.

Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) - The postcodes of each venue, excluding the venue used by the UK Youth Parliament group were entered into the 'Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation 2020v2 postcode lookup file'^[1] to identify the relative deprivation of the areas in which workshops took place. The young people in the UK Youth Parliament group live across Scotland, so they have not been included in the SIMD calculations. The results are shown in the table below.

	SIMD Decile		SIMD Quintile	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
1	0	0%	10	4.7%
2	10	4.7%	127 ⁶	60.2%
3	103 ⁶	48.4%	25	11.8%
4	24	11.4%	9	4.3%
5	6	2.8%	40	19.0%
6	19	9.0%		
7	0	0%		
8	9	4.3%		
9	25	11.8%		
10	15	7.1%		

The number of young people in Decile 3 / Quintile 2 is disproportionately higher than the others because these include the six workshops which took place in Stornoway.

The number column indicates the number of participants who attended workshops in each SIMD decile / quintile. Decile / quintile 1 represents the most deprived areas of Scotland. Decile 10 / quintile 5 represent the least deprived areas of Scotland.

Locations - The postcode of each workshop venue was used to identify the geographical location in which each workshop took place. The number / percentage shown in the tables below indicates the number of participants who took part in workshops in each region (excluding the UK Youth Parliament participants).

	Number	Percentage
Central Scotland	0	0.0%
Glasgow	0	0.0%
Highlands and Islands	118	55.9%
Lothian	44	20.9%
Mid Scotland and Fife	15	7.1%
North East Scotland	9	4.3%
South Scotland	0	0.0%
West Scotland	25	11.8%

To calculate the urban/rural classification of venue postcodes, all postcodes were entered into the 'Urban rural classification postcode lookup' file. The urban/rural classifications used in the table below are based on Scottish Government data published in May 2022.

University of Dundee (2022) 'Scottish Government Urban Rural Classification Postcode Lookup'. Available at: <https://www.dundee.ac.uk/corporate-information/scottish-government-urban-rural-classification-postcode-lookup>.

	Number	Percentage
1 - Large Urban Areas	44	20.9%
2 - Other Urban Areas	64	30.3%
3 - Accessible Small Towns	0	0.0%
4 - Remote Small Towns	0	0.0%
5 - Very Remote Small Towns	103	48.8%
6 - Accessible Rural Areas	0	0.0%
7 - Remote Rural Areas	0	0.0%
8 - Very Remote Rural Areas	0	0.0%



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