

OPUS2

Scottish Covid-19 Inquiry

Day 58

November 7, 2024

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1 Thursday, 7 November 2024
 2 MS VAN DER WESTHUIZEN: Good morning.
 3 THE CHAIR: Good morning, Ms van der Westhuizen. Now you
 4 have a witness for us.
 5 MS VAN DER WESTHUIZEN: I do, my Lord. It's
 6 Mr Steven Graham who is joining us today from Stornoway
 7 via video link.
 8 THE CHAIR: Yes, of course. Now, good morning, Mr Graham,
 9 can you hear us in Stornoway?
 10 MR GRAHAM: Good morning. I can't hear, Lord Brailsford, I
 11 can't hear.
 12 THE CHAIR: Just in any case, I'll speak louder, still not
 13 hear me?
 14 MS VAN DER WESTHUIZEN: I suspect you won't be saying a huge
 15 amount. I'm very presumptuous, my Lord, I'm assuming.
 16 THE CHAIR: You're probably correct.
 17 MS VAN DER WESTHUIZEN: I can always translate if it
 18 continues.
 19 THE CHAIR: As long as Mr Graham can hear you, I think the
 20 best thing is to start. I can hear him and you. Whilst
 21 you are doing that, the technicians can work behind the
 22 scenes to see if they can sort out my voice; all right?
 23 MS VAN DER WESTHUIZEN: Thank you, my Lord.
 24 THE CHAIR: Right, I should have said good morning,
 25 Mr Graham, my apologies.

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1 A. Good morning, my Lord.
 2 STEVEN GRAHAM
 3 Examination—in—chief by MS VAN DER WESTHUIZEN
 4 MS VAN DER WESTHUIZEN: Mr Graham, please could you confirm
 5 your full name?
 6 A. Steven Graham.
 7 Q. And you have given a witness statement to the Inquiry?
 8 A. That is correct.
 9 Q. My Lord, that can be found using witness statement
 10 reference number WT0381.
 11 And I understand, Mr Graham, that the statement you
 12 prepared had some input from your colleague
 13 Richard Tarves who's a business manager at e—Sgoil; is
 14 that correct?
 15 A. That's correct, yes.
 16 Q. And Mr Tarves provided a statement and the reference for
 17 that, my Lord, is WT0820.
 18 Mr Graham, I'll just set out what I understand your
 19 history to be, your teaching history. You have been a
 20 teacher for 17 years of which seven have been at
 21 e—Sgoil; is that correct?
 22 A. That's correct, yes.
 23 Q. And you currently and have been since August 2022 the
 24 head of school at e—Sgoil; is that right?
 25 A. That's correct.

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1 Q. And prior to that from late 2020 to August 2020 you were
 2 deputy head at e—Sgoil.
 3 A. That's correct, yes.
 4 Q. And then prior to that you were principal teacher at
 5 e—Sgoil for STEM subjects?
 6 A. That's correct, yes.
 7 Q. Thank you. And that was from August 2018?
 8 A. August 2019, I believe.
 9 Q. Mr Graham, would you mind explaining broadly, give us an
 10 outline of what e—Sgoil's offering was pre—pandemic?
 11 A. E—Sgoil is an online education provider which was
 12 established in 2016 in the Western Isles, initially
 13 conceived to be a local solution to a local problem to
 14 provide a degree of resilience to the system whereby we
 15 could support schools who were having recruitment
 16 challenges by beaming in a teacher remotely on timetable
 17 to provide live specialist input into a school that was
 18 having difficulty to recruit.
 19 Now, with conversations that took place between our
 20 own Education Department here in the Western Isles and
 21 Scottish Government, Scottish Government backed the
 22 project and gave it a national mandate, as did Bòrd na
 23 Gàidhlig and since our inception in 2016 we have been
 24 supporting schools to avail themselves of our online
 25 supply back in order to plug gaps and add a greater

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1 degree of resilience to the system.
 2 And it's maybe interesting to note that prior to the
 3 creation of e—Sgoil, I'm reliably informed that
 4 conversations were taking place between our own Director
 5 Of Education, Bernard Chisholm, and Scottish Government
 6 around the additional support and resilience a service
 7 such as e—Sgoil would provide to the system in the event
 8 of a mass disruption event, such as a global pandemic.
 9 Whether or not anybody actually foresaw that coming a
 10 few years later as a reality, I cannot comment, but it
 11 is interesting just to note that it was a proactive
 12 step, I would say, taken by Scottish Government to
 13 establish e—Sgoil and give it that national remit from
 14 its inception.
 15 Q. Thank you. So pre—pandemic, essentially an online
 16 supply service, you were providing supply teachers to
 17 schools who were unable to staff particular subjects; is
 18 that correct?
 19 A. That was correct, yes. It's an issue that affects
 20 schools both in urban and — primarily in rural
 21 districts and in addition to supporting — supporting
 22 schools with supply issues, we would also be providing
 23 enrichment opportunities, maybe aggregating classes
 24 across schools for particular events, doing a bit of
 25 school twinning, and maybe adding a greater degree of

4

1 equity to subject choices as well, where that was
 2 appropriate, and doing some Gaelic enrichment as well,
 3 working in partnership with Scottish Government's Gaelic
 4 and Scots Division.
 5 Q. And was that a paid for service?
 6 A. All of the supply that we were delivering would be paid
 7 for by either the school or the local authority. The
 8 enrichment tended to be fully funded as a result of
 9 funding secured either through Gaelic specific grant or
 10 maybe some other Education Scotland funding that had
 11 become available.
 12 Q. And I think you specifically mentioned webinars, did you
 13 supply webinars to support people learning online?
 14 A. Not prior to the pandemic.
 15 Q. No.
 16 A. That's something that was established as a result of the
 17 lockdown and continues.
 18 Q. Thank you. That pre-pandemic offering, was that offered
 19 principally in primary schools or secondary schools or a
 20 mixture of both?
 21 A. It was offered to both primary and secondary, but the
 22 nature of the staffing challenges that typically affect
 23 schools meant that the vast majority of the work that we
 24 engaged in before the pandemic was supporting secondary
 25 schools with specialist supply input.

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1 Q. Excuse me. At paragraph 17, should be up in front of
 2 you soon, you say that:
 3 "When COVID-19 hit, the Scottish Government funded
 4 e-learning offer was established."
 5 Could you just explain what you mean by
 6 "established" in that context and also whether that
 7 concept of e-learning offer existed as a concept before
 8 that?
 9 A. To my knowledge, there was no national e-learning offer
 10 as is it currently stands prior to the COVID pandemic.
 11 The COVID Education Recovery Group was established in
 12 April 2020 and as part of that a few months in the
 13 national e-learning offer was developed in response to
 14 that -- in response directly to the COVID Education
 15 Recovery Group and it comprised of three key elements.
 16 It was there to support and complement the work that
 17 schools were already doing and it launched in
 18 August 2020 with three elements, as I say, one which was
 19 live, which was delivered by ourselves so live,
 20 interactive, learning opportunities for schools and
 21 learners, the supported element was a curated bank of
 22 resources that had been pulled together by
 23 Education Scotland and the recorded element was the
 24 third and that was overseen by West Online School which
 25 was a subdivision of the West Partnership Regional

6

1 Improvement Collaborative based around the Greater
 2 Glasgow area and they were accumulating a bank of
 3 recorded resources, recorded videos that would guide
 4 children and young people through particular areas of
 5 the curriculum so that the various different
 6 stakeholders of the national e-learning offer would be
 7 in close communication, working in partnership, seeking
 8 to complement one another's work and ensuring there was
 9 no duplication taking place.
 10 Q. Thank you. So just in terms -- you say at paragraph
 11 19 -- you talk about:
 12 "March 2020 onwards, when COVID-19 had started to
 13 make itself known within the country, we were very aware
 14 that schools, through no fault of their own, were not
 15 ready or digitally able to deliver online education.
 16 The tools that existed within GLOW, the Scottish
 17 school's intranet, were not at the time sufficient to
 18 allow live interactive online lessons."
 19 So what steps were taken or what did that awareness
 20 lead e-Sgoil to do?
 21 A. Prior to -- in the early days of COVID, the e-Sgoil team
 22 was very small, it really consisted of a handful of key
 23 individuals and we looked to leverage the potential of
 24 that team and tried to take it upon ourselves to put out
 25 an offer based around the capacity that we had within

7

1 our own team. And what we felt was needed was some sort
 2 of online live interactive community whereby we could
 3 support young people who were coming to the end of
 4 courses at that time. I think the exam diet had been
 5 cancelled, but in terms of preparing them for courses in
 6 the next academic year, we took it upon ourselves to put
 7 out an offer there.
 8 I was delivering national 5 maths myself three times
 9 a week to an aggregated cohort of young people from
 10 across the country. We were working in partnership with
 11 other organisations, such as Keep Scotland Beautiful,
 12 Scotland Centre for Languages, to pull together what we
 13 could to provide opportunities for young people to
 14 engage with learning from their home, where they had the
 15 connectivity to do that.
 16 As you mentioned Glow at that point, which is
 17 Scotland's schools intranet, it did not allow for live
 18 video calling and within Microsoft Teams that function
 19 wasn't enabled at that point. So we were using another
 20 product that we had brought in and that we were using to
 21 deliver our core e-Sgoil work service and that -- that
 22 although it worked well with the purposes pre-pandemic,
 23 it did struggle when it came to scaling it up onto a
 24 national scale, such as what was required when the
 25 lockdown hit and impacted on every young person

8

1 throughout Scotland.
 2 So that was I suppose the pilot phase of what became
 3 known as the live element of the national e-learning
 4 offer.
 5 Q. And you mentioned, following on from paragraph 19, work
 6 that you did with Education Scotland's curriculum
 7 innovation team and with --- work you did alongside
 8 Scholar, the Scottish online study platform. Is that
 9 what you were referring to there or is that something
 10 else?
 11 A. That's correct, yes. As part of the webinar programme
 12 that we put out at that point in time, we were looking
 13 to maximise the use of what was already out there in the
 14 system. Scholar is an online interactive learning
 15 platform that at that point I think was accessible to
 16 young people from 30 out of the 32 local authorities and
 17 so as part of the webinar that I was delivering, I would
 18 be signposting the young people to particular resources
 19 that were posted on Scholar that they could engage with
 20 and would allow for their teachers to see their progress
 21 as well.
 22 Education Scotland's curriculum innovation team were
 23 very much embedded in all e-Sgoil activities as soon as
 24 the lockdown came upon us. They were the interface,
 25 I would say, between ourselves and the Scottish

1 Government and were collaborating on that offer and
 2 working with other partners and stakeholders as well to
 3 ensure that it was fit for purpose and that it met the
 4 needs of schools and young people.
 5 Education Scotland's staff were made available to us
 6 and were deployed to actually lead in some of these
 7 webinars and also help to prepare some of the resources
 8 and provided support where that was possible and it
 9 wouldn't have necessarily been apparent to schools and
 10 young people that some of the teachers delivering these
 11 webinars were in fact Education Scotland staff who had
 12 been redeployed for that purpose to support learners in
 13 schools.
 14 Q. Thank you. And you say at paragraph 23:
 15 "When the digital team came on board ... we were
 16 able to launch something of an online school."
 17 And then you go on to talk about some challenges.
 18 Could you elaborate on some of the challenges of
 19 delivering that online school that you experienced? You
 20 talk about Glow not allowing for Teams and you talk
 21 about issues with VScene, if you wouldn't mind
 22 elaborating on some of those challenges.
 23 A. Yes. Around the time that COVID came upon us in
 24 March 2020, e-Sgoil had started up a recruitment process
 25 to recruit a team of digital deputy heads. That was in

1 partnership with the Northern Alliance, which was the
 2 regional improvement collaborative that stretched across
 3 the north of Scotland, and had that not been in place,
 4 e-Sgoil would not have been in a position to respond in
 5 the way that it did when schools returned and young
 6 people were perhaps isolating and shielding.
 7 So what that allowed was six digital deputies to be
 8 in place in August 2020 to support with what was at that
 9 point essentially an online school. As you know, young
 10 people, all young people had returned to school by the
 11 point of August 2020, but there were a number who were
 12 shielding and who were isolating for a period of up to
 13 two weeks and we were tasked with supporting schools to
 14 meet the needs of the young people at that point. Now,
 15 prior to --- I'm not absolutely sure when Teams within
 16 Glow enabled videoconferencing, but prior to that we
 17 were using the VScene product that I described earlier
 18 that was struggling with the sheer demand that was
 19 placed upon it when it came to delivering it at a
 20 national level. So when Teams did --- when Teams did
 21 enable videoconferencing within Glow, that then allowed
 22 for us to really ramp up in terms of the scale of
 23 support that we were able to provide young people with,
 24 because we had something that was reliable and could
 25 cope with the numbers that was requiring support.

1 So essentially what the online school offer looked
 2 like, it was a twin-track approach, where we had a team
 3 of staff who were supporting small cohorts of learners
 4 for a period of up to two weeks and they had almost a
 5 rotational curriculum, where they had a bank of
 6 resources that would see them through, maybe over the
 7 course of a month, and they could then go back and
 8 reteach the same lessons with different cohorts of young
 9 people. But at the same time we had young people who
 10 were perhaps immunocompromised and could not return to
 11 school and were needing to be supported for a longer
 12 period of time and that then required for a different
 13 team of staff to support the long-term learners and from
 14 that really we were able to establish something of a
 15 provision for interrupted learners, which is something
 16 I know we're going to come on to discuss.
 17 Q. We'll come on to discuss that in a moment.
 18 Mr Graham, you describe in paragraph --- sorry, how
 19 long did it take --- so were those challenges with Glow
 20 and VScene ironed out by August 2020 or did they
 21 continue beyond that?
 22 A. By August 2020 my understanding is that video calls had
 23 been enabled within Teams. We were in close contact
 24 with Education Scotland's Glow team from March 2020
 25 onwards and I think they were very aware themselves of

1 the need to enable that and I think it was once all
2 safeguarding concerns had been seen to and everyone was
3 confident and assured that everything that should be in
4 place was in place, that switch was flicked and it then
5 allowed for not just ourselves to deliver live lessons
6 through Glow, it allowed for any school who --- or any
7 school teacher who wished to do the same to do that via
8 Teams as well.

9 Q. Thank you. At paragraph --- sorry ---

10 I just wanted to ask you in paragraph 130 you talk
11 about:

12 "We know schools were not ready to be able to give
13 online lessons. E-Sgoil tried to play its part in
14 preparing as quickly as possible at the start of 2020,
15 but it became evident that it was a real patchwork job.
16 I do not think anyone had fully considered the
17 implications of closing schools and delivering online
18 lessons or what its immediate and longterm consequences
19 would be."

20 Would you care to elaborate slightly on that?

21 A. I think no teacher as part of their training prior to
22 2020 would have had any experience of delivering online
23 or even preparing a lesson that would be suitable for an
24 online environment. I think the pedagogy and the
25 teaching style and the upscaling in terms of digital

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1 tools and competency is not something that was typical
2 across the learning estate.
3 I think, you know, schools did their best and I mean
4 I myself in the period of lockdown was at home with a
5 six-year-old, a four-year-old and a three-week-old child
6 and so a lot of teachers did not have the capacity to
7 teach from home in the way that they would have done had
8 they been in the school building. And I think,
9 anecdotally, we hear that some schools perhaps were much
10 better placed to move online, young people maybe had
11 devices and had been trained in how to use various
12 different digital tools, whereas other schools were not
13 as far advanced on that journey and young people maybe
14 didn't have the devices available to them.

15 And the other point I would make is that I suppose
16 some young people felt that they maybe got too much,
17 other young people and their parents maybe felt that the
18 didn't get enough, so I think everyone's experience was
19 different and it depended on a whole host of different
20 issues. Some teachers were involved in being on duty
21 during hub schools, others were not. Some were, as I
22 say, had caring responsibilities at home. Some had
23 digital connectivity which was good, some did not. And
24 I think it did become, I suppose, a bit of a postcode
25 lottery. And that's not meant as a criticism of

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1 teachers or schools at all. It's just, I think,
2 reflective of the reality of the situation that we found
3 ourselves in when the lockdown was enforced.

4 Q. Thank you. I think before we come on to speak about
5 i-Sgoil, if I could just ask you to comment on just a
6 few of the particular cohorts of learners that you were
7 delivering learning to. You have a fairly full list
8 starting at 105, but if we could focus just on initially
9 the students who were learning --- had English as a
10 second language and what you were doing to assist them.

11 A. Yes, we would always --- I would seek to summarise
12 everything that we do at e-Sgoil under the heading of
13 "removing barriers" and what initially when e-Sgoil was
14 established we were looking at tackling geographic
15 barriers and staffing barriers.

16 Now, COVID was a great leveler that put the same
17 barrier across every child and young person in Scotland,
18 but what we saw, I suppose, in two to three years ago
19 with the war in Ukraine and the resettlement of a vast
20 number of young people and their families to Scotland,
21 we felt there was a barrier there that we could support
22 them to maybe overcome.

23 What happened was that families were being displaced
24 to all parts of Scotland and had they all been in the
25 one thing location, it may have been much easier to do

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1 something with them and give them a common experience.
2 And one of the teachers that we have on our staffing
3 bank is of Ukrainian heritage and is semi-fluent in
4 Ukrainian and so what we did for that particular group
5 was we delivered a national package of family learning
6 which wasn't just open to young people, but also their
7 families. Because it was open to all, it took place in
8 the evenings and it allowed for them to be part and
9 plugged into a live interactive Ukrainian learning
10 community, which was supporting them to acquire the
11 English language and also looking at aspects of Scottish
12 culture as well. And it's something that was really
13 valued and very highly evaluated and I think it was well
14 received and it's something that could be used in other
15 ways as well to support other groups of young people who
16 have perhaps been resettled into Scottish communities.

17 Q. Thank you. And if I could also ask you just to expand
18 upon the students who were impacted studying practical
19 subjects and what e-Sgoil did in relation to them?

20 A. With practical subjects, obviously, there are challenges
21 there when it comes to delivering aspects of these
22 courses. We have always looked to support schools in
23 all areas of the curriculum, but wherever possible, we
24 would look to use additional technology, such as
25 overhead cameras and other such maybe software packages

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1 to allow for our teacher to have sight of any kind of
 2 hands—on activity that a young person is doing. But in
 3 particular, say, science courses, PE, these kind of
 4 subjects, there are practical elements that is cannot be
 5 over—supervised and administered safely online.
 6 So wherever a school does require any input from
 7 e—Sgoil for a practical subject, we would deploy our
 8 teacher to deliver the theory elements of the course
 9 and, where possible, somebody on site in the school with
 10 the relevant certification and qualifications would
 11 deliver the practical elements of the course. And where
 12 that's not possible, on occasions we've actually put our
 13 teacher physically into a school to do a block of
 14 practical work with the learners so that they are able
 15 to demonstrate their ability in all aspects of that
 16 particular course.
 17 Q. Thank you. And then finally, the placement—based
 18 learning project that you undertook with developing the
 19 young workforce department and the young people you were
 20 assisting with that.
 21 A. So developing the young workforce project is a programme
 22 that again continues as a legacy from the COVID
 23 pandemic. It is an opportunity for us to again remove
 24 barriers to young people who pre—COVID may only have had
 25 available to them those industry and business partners

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1 and employers who were there on their doorstep. So what
 2 we sought to do during the pandemic was to work with
 3 Education Scotland's developing the young workforce
 4 leads to essentially level the playing field and bring
 5 all partners together into essentially an online
 6 shopwindow where schools could request input at a
 7 particular time or join prescheduled sessions where they
 8 would gain inputs from industry partners that would
 9 bridge the gap between the school and the world of work
 10 and help to support them on that journey, perhaps
 11 towards the workplace of their choice. And it meant
 12 that any young person whether they were on Barra or in
 13 Barrhead could access the same suit of industry
 14 partners.
 15 Now, as part of that package we have sought to
 16 explore opportunities for virtual work placements and,
 17 again, in conversation with or in partnership with
 18 Education Scotland we have been exploring options there.
 19 And although we have done some work on that with our own
 20 interrupted learners, I think there's certainly
 21 potential for that type of work to — work placement to
 22 become more embedded in the Scottish curriculum. And
 23 again, it provides for young people, irrespective of
 24 their location, with opportunities to work in an
 25 environment that would lend itself to that type of

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1 online placement.
 2 Q. Thank you very much. Excuse me, Mr Graham, before we
 3 move on to speak about i—Sgoil, I have one more question
 4 in relation to e—Sgoil and the online offering. In
 5 paragraph 135, which is again I think under "lessons
 6 learned" you referred to A paper that went to four
 7 secondary schools, with the idea being that rather than
 8 duplicating and having everyone plan for a higher maths
 9 lesson, you could standardise the programme for learning
 10 across all subjects and have one teacher deliver it to
 11 everyone.
 12 "The other teachers could offer support and
 13 tutorials to complement that. It was not e—Sgoil's
 14 decision to make, though, and the schools decided to do
 15 their own thing. The schools felt they knew the young
 16 people and their best needs and that that should
 17 continue during lockdown."
 18 What was your aspiration or the intention behind
 19 what you were offering there?
 20 A. I think the — what I was referring to there took place
 21 actually just prior to the initiation of the lockdown
 22 and that was very much a Western Isles conversation that
 23 we were having here within our e—Sgoil head office. And
 24 the thinking was that, you know, the lockdown was coming
 25 and that teachers would face all manner of challenges in

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1 terms of meeting the needs of young people.
 2 At that point, we did not know how long the lockdown
 3 was going to continue for and we did know that some
 4 staff would be more able to support their young people
 5 online than others, for the reasons I mentioned earlier,
 6 caring responsibilities, connectivity, and just
 7 proficiency in using the online tools. And at that
 8 point, I think the e—Sgoil core team was operating
 9 almost like a war cabinet in terms of, you know, scoping
 10 out what could and should be done.
 11 And as part of that work we prepared a paper, a
 12 proposal that was put to the four secondary schools in
 13 the Western Isles, thinking that it would relieve stress
 14 on the profession were we to standardise the approach
 15 and have our four schools supported by, I suppose, a
 16 common curriculum whereby one maybe, say, maths teacher
 17 would be delivering live online lessons at any given
 18 time with young people from all four schools joining
 19 that lesson and then being supported off the back of
 20 that by their own teacher.
 21 Now, in the event of how things transpired, the four
 22 schools felt that their own teachers were best placed to
 23 meet the needs of their own young people and I think
 24 they felt that because (a) we didn't know how long the
 25 lockdown was going to continue and (b) at that point in

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1 the year the curriculum had, you know, run its course
2 almost and the work that was to be done -- all schools
3 were essentially at a different point in the curriculum
4 and had delivered the curriculum in a different order,
5 English classes would have been focusing on different
6 literature, for example, and they felt that the best way
7 of meeting the needs of young people would be to just
8 allow all four schools to coordinate their own approach.

9 But the option was certainly put to them and I think
10 it was with a desire to see a common experience for a
11 young person, irrespective of where they were, and,
12 again, to alleviate stress on the profession and avoid
13 duplication and make best use of the teaching resource,
14 as it stood at that point.

15 Q. Thank you. And I did say we were going to move on to
16 i-Sgoil, but I just have one more question on e-Sgoil.
17 We have heard a lot about impacts of school closures on
18 language and communication and you have mentioned today
19 about those with little English that you facilitate and
20 you specifically mentioned the Ukrainian nationals. You
21 mention at paragraph 86, and I think it's in the context
22 of Dug's Den, which you probably won't have time to go
23 into, but you mentioned that there was a definite Gaelic
24 language regression for young learners who were due to
25 go into Gaelic medium education during the pandemic.

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1 Primary education was also hard hit as young learners
2 had no access to the Gaelic language if they were from a
3 non-Gaelic speaking home for the lockdown period.

4 If you could first just explain what Gaelic medium
5 education is?

6 A. Yes, Gaelic medium education is an entitlement that is
7 available to many families across Scotland and it would
8 see a child involved in school, in primary school, where
9 the first four years, I believe, of their education
10 would be entirely delivered through the medium of
11 Gaelic. Once that child goes into Primary 5, the
12 balance between Gaelic and English gradually shifts so
13 that by the end of Primary 7 they are fluent in both
14 languages and they are, I believe, 50/50 receiving their
15 education in Gaelic and in English.

16 Here in the Western Isles, currently approximately
17 just over 50 per cent of our young people are involved
18 in Gaelic medium classes in primary school in Primary 1
19 and we have seen a gradual increase on these numbers
20 over the last number of years. Gaelic medium education
21 has been in existence for, I believe, in excess of 30,
22 35 years, and we see concentrations of Gaelic medium
23 schools across the highlands, but in some of our more
24 urban areas as well across Aberdeen, Edinburgh, Glasgow,
25 Stirling and in many areas of Scotland and in a great

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1 number of local authorities there will be some provision
2 for Gaelic medium education. And the majority of young
3 people in Gaelic education would probably come from a
4 home where there is not a Gaelic speaking parent.

5 Q. Thank you. And then so this regression you saw, was
6 that as a consequence of -- was that the impact on
7 learners who were English or other language learners,
8 non-Gaelic speakers, having a Gaelic education but due
9 to parents at home not speaking Gaelic, they were
10 impacted by the closure of schools?

11 A. The first few years of Gaelic education is described as
12 "total immersion" and that is where young people at that
13 age are sponges, soak up the language and the vocabulary
14 and the conversation.

15 Now, the COVID pandemic took all of that away for
16 any young person who was in Gaelic education and we were
17 very conscious of that as was Scottish Government, as I
18 say, the Gaelic and Scots division, so we worked
19 together as part of our national offer to ensure that
20 there was a Gaelic provision put in place for young
21 people who were in danger of regressing, because they
22 weren't immersed in the language at home during
23 lockdown. And, as a parent myself, having seen the
24 Gaelic teaching that took place, it was particularly
25 impactful and I know how well received it was not just

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1 by the young person -- the young people but by their
2 families as well.

3 As I say, schools did do what they could, but they
4 couldn't -- the e-Sgoil offer was there to complement
5 what schools were doing by way of live interactive
6 lessons. And I think it helped to support and maintain
7 that level of fluency that had been built up prior to
8 the lockdown affecting schools. And it's something that
9 has continued as a legacy through our national
10 e-learning offer moving forward where we are supporting
11 young people in Gaelic medium education with either
12 one-to-one or one-to-small-group support where there's
13 an identified need that has been brought to our
14 attention by their teacher. Our teacher can go in to
15 support school and support that young person and it's
16 plugging a gap and fulfilling a need where the school
17 might not have, for example, a Gaelic-speaking support
18 for learning assistant in their staff who can take the
19 time to work with a young person on a particular
20 identified area that they need some support with.

21 Q. Thank you very much, Mr Graham. If we could then turn,
22 please, to the interrupted learners programme or i-Sgoil
23 which you address in your statement. Could you
24 please -- and you start that at paragraph 28 to 38, but
25 if you could please give a brief description of what

24

1 i—Sgoil is.
 2 A. I—Sgoil is our provision for interrupted learners and it
 3 began prior to COVID as a pilot, I suppose. There are a
 4 large number of young people across Scotland who do not
 5 engage in a school, who have withdrawn themselves and
 6 who have not responded positively to any alternative
 7 strategy to get them back in school, such as a reduced
 8 timetable, you know, home support workers and so on.
 9 And if you were to aggregate the number of interrupted
 10 learners across the country, you would have the largest
 11 school in Scotland if you were to bring them all
 12 together in one place.

13 Now, a lot of these young people the main reason why
 14 they are not engaging with the school offer is as a
 15 result of mental health issues or anxiety or there is
 16 maybe a diagnosis of being on the autism spectrum as
 17 well. We were fortunate enough to gain some money from
 18 the Northern Alliance in, I think, it was 2019 to do
 19 some exploratory work in this area, because we felt that
 20 if these young people weren't going to school, why can
 21 we not use digital technology to bring school to them,
 22 where they are. And we sold it to the young people as
 23 engaging with them on their terms. And what I mean by
 24 that is that we could look to remove all of the anxiety
 25 triggers that were preventing them from engaging with

25

1 education. So the need to go to a school building, for
 2 example, could be taken away. The need to have your
 3 camera on could be taken away. The need to have your
 4 microphone on could be taken away and they could engage
 5 with learning using digital tools and, ultimately, be
 6 presented for qualifications and the desired outcome was
 7 that they would move on to a sustained positive
 8 destination and become economic contributors beyond
 9 school.

10 So what started off as a very small project with
 11 maybe up to 16 learners with a very restricted
 12 curriculum of just maths and English at National 4
 13 level, has now ballooned into a much greater provision
 14 off the back of the work that we were doing during the
 15 COVID—19 pandemic. COVID—19 rendered every young person
 16 in Scotland an interrupted learner and gave everyone a
 17 taste of what it was like to not be in school. And
 18 because of that it exacerbated many of the issues that
 19 those who are not engaging in school prior to lockdown,
 20 it exacerbated a lot of their anxieties and led to a
 21 deterioration in their mental health and so it was felt
 22 to be the next logical step to take the provision that
 23 we had for young people who were not able to go to
 24 school and to grow that into a provision for interrupted
 25 learners whereby any young person in Scotland from

26

1 Primary 2 to S6 could be referred by their school to
 2 access and be part of a live interactive learning
 3 community which would allow for them to essentially join
 4 school from their safe space, which typically would be
 5 from home and most often from their bedrooms.

6 Q. Sorry, I interrupted you. I was just going to ask you
 7 if you could describe the referral process and
 8 transition to i—Sgoil. Please, continue what were you
 9 going to say.

10 A. No, that's fine. Thank you. The referral process would
 11 see a school completing an online form. We're not naive
 12 to think that an online provision is going to suit every
 13 interrupted learner in Scotland, so one of the questions
 14 on that form is, is the young person willing to engage,
 15 because where there's a willingness to engage then we
 16 can hopefully do something there.

17 So the school would make a referral and the referral
 18 form would state that the young person should have been
 19 out of school for a period of at least three months,
 20 that all alternative strategies to reengage that child
 21 have been tried and shown to have not worked. We would
 22 look for there to be a coordinated support plan or a
 23 child plan in place or multiple agency support as part
 24 of that referral process. And the school would outline,
 25 you know, who that child was, why and how they had

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1 become an interrupted learner. And once the child is
 2 accepted, our guidance teacher would then set up an
 3 onboarding meeting and, alongside the school and
 4 parents, would look to transition that person onto
 5 our — into i—Sgoil, into our online provision.

6 It's important to state that the young person
 7 remains on their own school roll. The statutory
 8 responsibility for the young person's education remains
 9 with that local authority, and we are very much working
 10 in partnership with the local school and with the
 11 child's parents, carers, to work together to meet the
 12 needs of that young person and see them back into our
 13 team and back into the way of learning.

14 Q. Thank you. And you also go on from paragraph 39 and 40
 15 to discuss the numbers, the increase that you have seen.
 16 Would you mind sort of articulating the sort of scale of
 17 the increase?

18 A. Yes, so as part of the national e—learning offer, we
 19 promoted the provision through the network of directors
 20 of education across Scotland so that they were all asked
 21 to disseminate the fact that this offer was in place and
 22 share it with lead officers in their authority, head
 23 teachers as well, and we have seen significant demand
 24 ever since that point.

25 We have not shouted particularly loudly about it

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1 because we are aware that there is significant need out
 2 there and at the moment we are operating at capacity
 3 with an extensive waiting list for all levels at the
 4 moment. And to advertise the provision widely I think
 5 would lead to raised expectations and we wouldn't be
 6 able to meet the need, as things currently stand.
 7 So in terms of current, our most recent numbers for
 8 23/24, we supported 170 young people from Primary 2 to
 9 S6 and what that provision looks like is from 10 o'clock
 10 to --- well, from quarter to 10 until half past three,
 11 Monday to Friday, a series of live interactive lessons
 12 broadly replicating the curriculum offer, as it would be
 13 in a school.
 14 In 2021/22, we received 202 referrals from schools.
 15 22/23, we received 219 referrals and 23/24 we received
 16 286 referrals and we have currently got a waiting list,
 17 as I say, which is well in excess of what we can
 18 process. So I think we've left it open just to evidence
 19 the demand that's out there from schools. And I'm
 20 conscious of the fact that it would be even greater if
 21 we were to put something back out to directors or head
 22 teachers again to highlight that this provision is
 23 there. So at the moment, I would say, we've got in the
 24 region of around 20 young people in our primary
 25 provision. We've got around 30 in our S1/2 cohort. We

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1 have got 30 in an S3 cohort, with another maybe 15 due
 2 to start soon in S3. And there is in the region of 80
 3 in our S4 to 6 cohort.
 4 Now, one of the anxiety triggers we have sought to
 5 remove is the end of year exam and for that reason our
 6 S4 to 6 curriculum, the only courses with an end of
 7 course exam that we offer are applications of maths
 8 Nat 5 and Higher and English Nat 5 and Higher. All of
 9 the other courses that are available are equivalent to
 10 National 4, National 5 or Higher courses, but they're
 11 what are known as group awards or national progression
 12 awards and they are accredited with ongoing assessment
 13 throughout the year and there's no need for a
 14 high-stakes exam at the end, which, as I say, can be a
 15 particular anxiety trigger for a number of the young
 16 people who we support.
 17 Q. Thank you. And then just in paragraph 40 you obviously
 18 had a programme, not i-Sgoil per se, but you had a
 19 programme for children who couldn't engage and you have
 20 now got this increased interest in your programme
 21 post-COVID. You refer to --- in paragraph 40 to some
 22 i-Sgoil referrals making a direct reference to COVID-19
 23 as being a contributing factor.
 24 Would you care to elaborate on that?
 25 A. Yes, every interrupted learner is unique and they have

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1 their own unique background story as to how and why they
 2 have become an interrupted learner and have disengaged
 3 from the school system. As I mentioned earlier, the
 4 vast majority of our young people have a diagnosis of a
 5 mental health struggle or are on the autistic spectrum
 6 and we have seen in the narrative that is provided by
 7 schools as part of the referral process, we have seen a
 8 number of occasions where schools make direct reference
 9 to the COVID-19 pandemic as having been either what
 10 initiated their anxiety and their struggle in terms of
 11 mental health which led to them disengaging or
 12 exacerbated something that was already there and meant
 13 that school became even more of a challenge.
 14 And it wasn't just necessarily the young person that
 15 the pandemic affected either. If there was perhaps
 16 somebody at home who was immunosuppressed or who was
 17 particularly anxious and exercised about the danger of
 18 the pandemic, I think that then at times led to a young
 19 person choosing or deciding that they could not and
 20 ought not go to school. And so we have --- we have a
 21 number of occasions documented where schools have
 22 identified COVID-19 as being a contributing factor to
 23 why some of the young people on our books came to
 24 disengage from education.
 25 Q. Thank you. Just before we finish off, I just want to

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1 give you an opportunity to highlight or flag any key
 2 lessons that e-Sgoil considers should be applied to
 3 ensure that the impacts of the children that you are
 4 seeing coming through, young people and children, are
 5 addressed and mitigated through education and/or that
 6 provision is in place in advance of any future pandemic.
 7 A. I think leveraging the digital learning estate and
 8 making sure that it is resilient and in place and that
 9 teachers and young people are upskilled and familiar
 10 with how to use it is one of the main lessons I think
 11 that I would take from our experience over the last four
 12 years.
 13 Prior to COVID, you know, Teams calls, digital tools
 14 was an alien concept for many of us and I think having a
 15 greater awareness of these tools and how to use these
 16 tools in everyday learning within the school building
 17 would add a greater degree of resilience and capability
 18 and capacity for any future move to online learning,
 19 should there be a mass disruption event that comes our
 20 way.
 21 I think the Scottish school's internet, Glow, its
 22 importance cannot be understated. It is what allowed
 23 for us to roll out a national programme of offers that
 24 was equitable and accessible to any young person in
 25 Scotland. Glow is a national entitlement to any young

32

1 person and their school can provide them with a username
2 and password. And that would allow for us to aggregate
3 a class or a cohort with anybody in it from across
4 Scotland and would, again, allow for us to deliver any
5 number of programmes, some of which we have described
6 today. It's what underpins our current study support
7 offer, it's what underpins our interrupted learner's
8 offer and it's what underpins much of our developing the
9 young workforce offer as well.

10 So I would say that these things were -- would be
11 some of the main lessons. I think it's also shone a
12 light on interrupted learners. I think they are the
13 hardest to reach young people in Scotland and because of
14 that as well they can at times be the easiest to ignore.
15 And I think we would do well to consider some of the
16 impact that we have, had not just on young people who
17 are part of that i-Sgoil provision, but on their
18 families as well and consider how we can develop a
19 provision that would be available to all schools, a
20 provision that's sustainable and well resourced to meet
21 the needs of young people, especially given that the
22 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child is
23 now enshrined in Scots law, that can provide an
24 education that meets that young person where they're at
25 and supports and equips and enables them to continue

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1 with an education from, as I said, from their safe space
2 and supports them towards a positive destination.
3 There's a cost to that, as there is for anything,
4 but the value in my view far exceeds the cost and it's
5 something that we would do well to consider and it's
6 something that we are having conversations with Scottish
7 Government with at the moment to see how that model can
8 be pivoted and moved to a more sustainable footing to
9 ensure that we can ensure that there is greater capacity
10 to meet the need that is out there and work alongside
11 schools and parents and carers to support vulnerable
12 young people who have, for a number of various different
13 reasons, opted out of the school system and find it
14 inaccessible as things stand.

15 Q. Thank you very much, Mr Graham.

16 My Lord, I have no further questions.

17 THE CHAIR: No, thank you. Thank you very much, Mr Graham,
18 for what was undoubtedly very thought-provoking evidence
19 which we will give great consideration to. Thank you
20 for your time.

21 We will now take a break and come back with another
22 witness at 11.15 or thereby. Thank you.

23 (11.00 am)

(A short break)

24 (11.17 am)

34

1 MS VAN DER WESTHUIZEN: Hello, my Lord.

2 THE CHAIR: Now, good morning again, Ms van der Westhuizen.
3 You have another witness for us.

4 MS VAN DER WESTHUIZEN: I do my Lord. I have got
5 Ms Woolnough from Connect.

6 THE CHAIR: Very good. Good morning, Ms Woolnough.

7 A. Good morning.

8 THE CHAIR: Thank you for coming. Right. You're going to
9 be asked some questions. When you're ready, Ms van der
10 Westhuizen.

11 MS VAN DER WESTHUIZEN: Thank you, my Lord.

KRISTINA WOOLNOUGH

Examination in chief by MS VAN DER WESTHUIZEN

14 MS VAN DER WESTHUIZEN: Ms Woolnough, could I ask you,
15 please, to confirm your full name?

16 A. So my name is Kristina Woolnough.

17 Q. And you have given a witness statement to the Inquiry
18 and, my Lord, for reference it can be accessed by
19 WT0111. And Ms Woolnough, you had input from your
20 colleague, Sara McFarlane, who is the policy and support
21 officer at Connect; is that correct?

22 A. That's correct.

23 Q. And she has provided a confirmatory statement and, my
24 Lord, that can be accessed at reference WT0792.

25 Ms Woolnough, you have been a staff member at

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1 Connect since October 2020; is that correct?

2 A. That's correct.

3 Q. And before that you were hired by Connect as a
4 self-employed communications consultant and that was
5 from 2017.

6 A. That's also correct.

7 Q. At paragraph 9 you say that Connect is a membership
8 organisation of Scottish parents councils, parent
9 teachers associations and other parent-run organisations
10 and that the central purpose is to advance parental and
11 family engagement in the education and school lives of
12 children.

13 Could you provide a bit more detail about how your
14 membership is made up and also the numbers, please.

15 A. So we have about 2,000 parent-run groups who are our
16 members, most of them parent councils attached to
17 schools and some parent teacher associations and some
18 other kinds of groups. Parent councils are statutory
19 bodies and local authorities are required to support
20 parent councils in their roles and their
21 responsibilities and we have 25 local authorities take
22 out Connect membership for all of their parent councils
23 out of the 32 in Scotland.

24 Q. And just for clarity at paragraph 13 you refer to your
25 membership in 2023 to 2024 consisting of 1,503 primary

36

1 schools, 254 secondary schools, 17 schools that are both
 2 primary and secondary, 62 special needs schools and 57
 3 nurseries. Are those over and above the parent teacher
 4 and councils or does that —
 5 A. That reflects the Connect membership, yes. So they
 6 are the parents groups associated with those specific
 7 types of school, yes.
 8 Q. Thank you. Could you please explain a bit about what
 9 your role as communications manager entails?
 10 A. So I oversee and deliver our communications, policies,
 11 social media. I work with my colleague Sara McFarlane
 12 on the survey work and basically anything that involves
 13 communicating with our members or the wider public and
 14 some press and media work as well.
 15 Q. And was that the case during the pandemic as well?
 16 A. That was the case, yes.
 17 Q. I'm going to ask you just to discuss a bit of the work
 18 that Connect did during the course of the pandemic.
 19 Before I do that, what does Connect normally do in
 20 non-pandemic times?
 21 A. It does pretty much what we did during pandemic times,
 22 yes.
 23 Q. Okay, easy enough then. If I could ask you to provide
 24 information then about what you did during the times you
 25 talk about. Online information sessions, for example,

37

1 what were those and what did they cover?
 2 A. So these are still regular online meetings and training
 3 sessions for parent-run groups, our members. We do
 4 deliver some that are open to all parents and carers and
 5 parent groups in Scotland. They cover everything from
 6 organising your parent group, changing your
 7 constitution, technical type things, social and
 8 fundraising, but we also try and do health and wellbeing
 9 ones and ones with broader interest, for example,
 10 careers, education, with partners.
 11 Q. And during the pandemic so what did they cover
 12 specifically during the pandemic?
 13 A. So we had just began to move online with these
 14 information sessions. So during the pandemic, we did
 15 some open-ended ones, question and answer ones, so we
 16 could hear from parents and parent groups. We also did
 17 ones about having your AGM online, quite practical type
 18 things, because everyone was struggling because it
 19 was — June is a common time for AGMs, annual general
 20 meetings. And we also did about parent councils what's
 21 our role now, having sought clarification from Scottish
 22 Government about whether the statutory purposes of
 23 parent councils would still be applicable.
 24 Q. And who attended and in what sorts of numbers?
 25 A. So I'm afraid I don't know the numbers. They were high

38

1 over that year, 18 months, because it was basically the
 2 only support and information parent groups could access.
 3 It was our — we opened them to all parent groups
 4 because we realised that, you know, the 2,000-odd
 5 Connect members there would be other parent-run groups
 6 in Scotland who needed support and information as well.
 7 We also want — it's a way of touching base with
 8 parents and carers and those kind of overseeing parent
 9 groups. So it was a way of kind of keeping a
 10 communications loop going with them.
 11 Q. And just for clarification, again, you mentioned
 12 delivering information sessions, did you also say that
 13 you got information in from parents at that — at those
 14 sessions as well?
 15 A. Yes, particularly the Q&A sessions, but there's always
 16 an opportunity to catch up. The mechanisms are using
 17 Zoom, there's a chat function, so parents and parent
 18 groups can put anything in the chat function and also we
 19 invite them to put the microphones on if it's not too
 20 large a group as well.
 21 Q. And what was your involvement in those sessions?
 22 A. So I generally was managing the chat. So also people
 23 can ask specific questions or we can respond or link
 24 them to some sort of our resources, so that was
 25 primarily what I was supporting but —

39

1 Q. So you were seeing all the information coming in.
 2 A. Correct.
 3 Q. You also mention at paragraphs 20 to 30 you discuss the
 4 survey work undertaken by Connect during the pandemic.
 5 You mentioned earlier that the work you did during the
 6 pandemic is what you normally do anyway. Does Connect
 7 undertake surveys as a matter of course?
 8 A. Yes, yes, and they're open to all parents and carers,
 9 it's not just for our members so, yes, we do them as a
 10 matter of course.
 11 Q. And if you could perhaps take a little time to just take
 12 us through the surveys that you did during the pandemic,
 13 please. We'll come on to discuss some of the themes
 14 that were coming out of that, but if you can just give
 15 us an overview of the types of surveys that you
 16 undertook.
 17 A. So we did six. Most of them were really kind of keeping
 18 in touch with parents and carers, hearing how their
 19 experiences were, what was happening with them, it was
 20 an 18-month period actually and we did repeat some
 21 questions throughout, like things about home school
 22 communication and how was that going. So it was a way
 23 on a pretty large scale, because overall those — across
 24 those six surveys over 18 months, we had over 11,500
 25 responses from different parents and carers across all

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1 parts of Scotland. So it was a most extraordinary
 2 picture of what families were experiencing.
 3 So we were trying to --- we wanted to see what help
 4 and support we could be advocating for, because part of
 5 our role is to speak up and help parent voices be heard
 6 at national and a local and authority level and that
 7 kind of championing and advocacy--type role is really,
 8 really important. That's why we do the surveys as well.
 9 Q. Who else was doing these types of surveys at the time?
 10 A. Not anyone that I was aware of. Certainly our first
 11 survey ran from 1 to 30 April. That was very quick.
 12 I think lockdown was around 20 March. So we realised
 13 that nobody was hearing from parents and carers that
 14 they were obviously isolated at home so we very quickly
 15 thought we need to reach out, we need to hear voices,
 16 hear and then try and see what they're needing, see how
 17 they should be supported and then share that with local
 18 authorities and Scottish Government to try and complete
 19 the picture, if you like, of people's experiences.
 20 So that one I think was probably --- I have not come
 21 across anything that was as quick and, you know, looking
 22 at parents and carers and families experiences in that
 23 time.
 24 Q. And you said at paragraph 20 that you did surveys, you
 25 told us, and you also said you wanted to track how life

41

1 was going for parents and families. Was there a
 2 particular reason you felt this work needed to be done?
 3 A. So specifically we were hearing a lot about, I guess,
 4 public safety, we were hearing about schools, we were
 5 hearing from the teaching unions, we were hearing from
 6 other parts of the education system and it seemed to us
 7 that the voices of parents and carers who were now
 8 having sole responsibility for supporting their child's
 9 learning, if they could, and looking after their
 10 children, as well as working and dealing with ill--health
 11 or all the myriad of things that families have to deal
 12 with, we felt that there was a massive gap in hearing
 13 those voices and hearing about those experiences.
 14 Q. And you mention at paragraph 22, again, that you wanted
 15 to understand the range of views. And again, at
 16 paragraph 26, again you reiterate it was a strong focus
 17 on helping parents and carers to get their voices heard.
 18 This seems to be a recurring theme throughout the
 19 rationale for it about getting parents' voices heard.
 20 Who would you ordinarily have expected --- Has there
 21 ever been a need before to channel parents' voices?
 22 A. Yes, I think Connect was formally called something else,
 23 but it was formed in 1947 so there has been a long
 24 history of trying to ensure that parents are fully
 25 involved in school lives and learning and are

42

1 communicated with effectively and have channels of
 2 communication open to them back to schools and nurseries
 3 and early learning centres. So there's a long history
 4 of that so it wasn't a surprise to us, I suppose, that
 5 nobody was thinking about how families were going to
 6 cope actually.
 7 And obviously, a lot of people in positions of
 8 authority and making these decisions, many had families
 9 so they were fully aware of the consequences, but
 10 actually it didn't seem to be in the public focus in any
 11 which way. There was an assumption that parents and
 12 carers would manage and could manage, despite obviously
 13 exceptional circumstances and, you know, having to
 14 juggle all their responsibilities .
 15 Q. I wonder if you could just then outline the methodology,
 16 because you were obviously involved in the surveys with
 17 your colleague but if you could just explain the
 18 methodology used. What did the surveys look like?
 19 A. So we use an online survey tool called SurveyMonkey and
 20 build a survey, test it and then cascade it out through
 21 all our networks, e--news letters, social media, through
 22 our tagging partner organisations. We have a very
 23 large --- at the moment I think our Twitter feed is about
 24 10,000 so we have big audiences of parents and then they
 25 share it within their own networks as well. So, yes, it

43

1 was online, but that was all that was available to us at
 2 that time.
 3 Q. And what was --- was it tick box or what did the form
 4 actually look like?
 5 A. So it's a mixture of selecting options with comments
 6 boxes so, yes.
 7 Q. And how were the forms analysed and who was involved in
 8 that?
 9 A. So we didn't quite know when we started the surveys what
 10 the uptake would be. We usually do them ourselves and
 11 we do them and the SurveyMonkey has tools within it that
 12 can analyse the kind of statistics and then we analyse
 13 the comments ourselves. On this occasion, we had the
 14 help of Scotinform who used their various tools to
 15 analyse the first survey. The second survey which had
 16 nearly 8,000 responses, which was pretty overwhelming,
 17 Public Health Scotland helped analyse those responses
 18 using their professional tools as well.
 19 So we don't normally have thousands of responses.
 20 We're normally in the kind of, you know, hundreds and
 21 about 400 is a good response, so 500 is a good response.
 22 So it was a huge scale so we were very grateful for the
 23 help with that.
 24 Q. We'll come on just to have a look at the numbers again,
 25 but in terms of your role in the design of the survey,

44

1 did you have a role in designing it at all?
 2 A. Yes, I usually do write them, yes, with my colleague
 3 Sara. I draft it and she makes sense of them.
 4 Q. Do you draft the survey questions?
 5 A. Usually, yes.
 6 Q. In terms of the report writing, who does that?
 7 A. Sara collates the statistics usually and gives me the
 8 raw material and then I tend to write the kind of
 9 findings and kind of calls to action, the asks, you
 10 know, what we want to raise, I suppose, with Scottish
 11 Government or local authorities or all.
 12 Q. And just in terms of these specific surveys, what
 13 involvement — you mentioned that you had got assistance
 14 in terms of analysing them. What involvement did you
 15 have in analysing them or looking at, for example, the
 16 tick boxes, the comments box you mentioned?
 17 A. Yes, we looked at them as well, but they had the
 18 professional tools to, you know, use keywords to
 19 analyse, you know, types of responses in the comments
 20 boxes, but we did look at them all as well, yes.
 21 Q. And if we can just run through or if you can take us
 22 through the different — because I think you mentioned
 23 there were six and I see that you refer in paragraph 24
 24 to "How are you doing?" And ... do you want to
 25 elaborate?

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1 A. That's right. We did ask "How are you doing?" quite a
 2 few times. I was looking at this last night just to get
 3 my names of them. The first one was a "How are you
 4 doing?" and that was April 1st to 30th. The second one
 5 was —
 6 Q. Perhaps if we can just pause on the first one. What
 7 were you looking at?
 8 A. So we were literally asking people how were they doing.
 9 So we were looking at whether they had what they needed.
 10 These were open types of questions. Did they have what
 11 they needed? Was there effective communication with the
 12 school? Because I think, early doors, it was, you know,
 13 do what you can at home type of thing in terms of
 14 children's learning. So it was really a kind of a
 15 little test to see what was going on so. And at that
 16 point, I think nearly 60 per cent of parents had a
 17 concern about the information that they weren't getting
 18 and/or the equipment that they didn't have for doing
 19 school work.
 20 So I guess it was panicky, I suppose, and I think
 21 over that whole month of April you could see that
 22 people — the responses showed people were getting less
 23 panicked and more having what they needed and improving
 24 the communication between the school and home.
 25 Q. And that one, I think you say, had 1,578 responses from

46

1 across 29 local authorities. You did another one called
 2 "Our next steps" in May/June 2020 and that was the big
 3 one, that was the 7,858 responses from all 32 local
 4 authorities. What were you asking in that one or
 5 looking at in that one?
 6 A. So we were trying to see whether things had improved for
 7 people over that period of time and we were trying to
 8 drill down into where the areas of difficulty were.
 9 I was checking back yesterday, we did an interim report,
 10 obviously we were getting towards the end of the school
 11 term, at the end date of that particular second survey,
 12 which is 30 June, so we did an interim report and we did
 13 a series of briefings around the findings of survey 1
 14 compiled with the kind of interim findings of survey 2.
 15 And that led us to do these briefing sessions with
 16 I think we invited — we invited about 100 different
 17 organisations and bodies to attend these briefing
 18 sessions and we created a set of asks from that as well,
 19 as well as writing to the Cabinet Secretary at the time
 20 John Swinney.
 21 Q. And what were your asks?
 22 A. The asks were, now you're testing my memory —
 23 Q. Just in general terms. We don't need to —
 24 A. Okay. In general terms, it was about provision for
 25 children with additional support needs, improving

47

1 communications, about the return back to school, and
 2 there was a lot of talk at that time about part-time
 3 schooling and rotas and some children will be in two
 4 days and then not until the next week and different
 5 children of different ages were going to be in different
 6 days. So I think that was a huge response in that
 7 survey because people were very exercised about the
 8 prospect of that. So that was the May/June discussions.
 9 Q. And you mentioned I think you said a hundred or so
 10 bodies, who were they?
 11 A. So to both of them we invited the Directors Of Education
 12 to the first session, that was on June 3rd, as well as
 13 COSLA and all the unions. The second session, which was
 14 on 4 June, we invited local authority parental
 15 involvement officers, so kind of about 32 of them, and
 16 we also invited third sector partners and we invited
 17 some the education spokespersons for the different
 18 political parties and Scottish Government and the
 19 education committee from the Scottish Parliament we
 20 invited to that second briefing session.
 21 Q. And who came or didn't come, who were you expecting?
 22 A. We had about 30 attending across the two sessions out of
 23 the hundred invitees. We haven't got a record,
 24 unfortunately. We don't have that Eventbrite page
 25 anymore, so I could see in the chat only who had put

48

1 something into the chat, but I know it was over 30
 2 across the two sessions so ...
 3 Q. Okay, was the Scottish Government there or was it local
 4 authorities?
 5 A. There was some local authority representatives. I think
 6 we did a separate briefing session with
 7 Education Scotland, which I think was on 2 June or some
 8 officers from Education Scotland on 2 June and we were
 9 also having regular meetings with the parental
 10 involvement team at Scottish Government.
 11 So I can't tell you who exactly came to these
 12 sessions, unfortunately.
 13 Q. You then refer to a third survey "Back at school", what
 14 was that one about?
 15 A. So that one again was all children were back to school
 16 at that point. So we looked about how the
 17 communications between home and school were going so
 18 that we could compare with the previous surveys. We
 19 looked at access to digital devices. We looked at
 20 school attendance, and the impact of the various changes
 21 in schools. We specifically wanted to know whether
 22 schools had asked families about their experiences
 23 during the previous, I guess, six months, because they
 24 were having a focus on health and wellbeing and we felt
 25 that they couldn't --- and that was a Scottish Government

49

1 directive concentrate on health and wellbeing for
 2 children and young people. And we felt that they
 3 couldn't know how the children might be if they didn't
 4 know what had gone on in people's families and the vast
 5 majority said that they had not been asked, 79 per cent
 6 of respondents said they had not been asked about their
 7 family's experiences during lockdown.
 8 Q. Was there a similar session to feed back the responses
 9 or the results of that survey?
 10 A. I think in that one we cascaded out through our
 11 networks. We wrote to the cabinet secretary,
 12 John Swinney, on 26 November. There was a lot of
 13 concerns about the ongoing absences of children and
 14 young people because --- and their teachers, because of
 15 COVID or they were being required to stay at home for
 16 that set period of time. So the online learning didn't
 17 seem to be happening consistently for when children were
 18 sporadically off ill. So there was a lot of concern in
 19 parents about children's learning progress and
 20 preparation for SQA qualifications so that's what wrote
 21 to John Swinney about. So that was the area of our
 22 campaigning around that.
 23 Q. And then you refer to a digital survey in paragraph 25;
 24 was that the next one?
 25 A. That's right. That was run November to December 2020

50

1 and it was asking about access to internet and devices.
 2 Q. And that was a specific digital?
 3 A. Yes.
 4 Q. And how many responses was that?
 5 A. That had 419 responses and, again, we were looking at,
 6 like, 20 per cent had okay or poor internet service. So
 7 we were asking about the devices and whether they had
 8 access to the internet. So kind of throughout all of
 9 them, there is 20 to 30 per cent of people who are
 10 struggling or don't have what they need so there's this
 11 kind of consistent --- it may not be the same people, but
 12 it's a consistent a fifth to a third type of thing.
 13 Q. The next one you mention is "COVID-19 lockdown",
 14 I think. May not be mentioned by name. What was the
 15 next one?
 16 A. So the next one was called "Lockdown 2021". It was
 17 asking "How are you doing?" again and that was the name
 18 of it. That was 7 February to 31 March 2021 and that
 19 was looking at --- I guess, this was our second
 20 experience of a lockdown so we were looking again about
 21 communications and how experiences compared, ie had
 22 lessons been learned from the first lockdown, was there
 23 provision for online learning, were communications in
 24 place, how was that --- how was that all going?
 25 So people generally felt it was more organised so

51

1 across the piece from this one to the first one, we're
 2 now ending up with 70 per cent saying that it was more
 3 organised, they felt there was more thing --- more
 4 activities and more structure, but 19 per cent still
 5 said it was okay, it was as poor as before or was worse.
 6 We were also looking at the use of hubs and whether
 7 children were in these hubs or not and we were also
 8 asking how parents were feeling. So we had 55 per cent
 9 saying they were okay some of the time and not okay some
 10 of the time and 6 per cent were not okay all of the time
 11 and 69 per cent of parents with children with additional
 12 supports gave these two responses so.
 13 Q. And the last of the six, what was that called?
 14 A. It's called "How is it going?" so that was, again,
 15 asking about the ongoing impact of absence, because of
 16 COVID. About communication, about COVID, there was a
 17 lot more I guess public health information about COVID
 18 coming directly from schools at that time. We were also
 19 asking about mental health support and remote learning
 20 again.
 21 And about --- so over half said their child had had
 22 periods of absence so there was quite a lot of concerns
 23 around that again and, again, about SQA qualifications
 24 and presentation.
 25 Q. And the concerns about periods of absence, what were the

52

1 specific concerns and what were the reasons for the
 2 absenteeism?
 3 A. So the absence were to do with COVID, as far as we know,
 4 COVID related was what we asked about. And we know that
 5 the concerns were about missed learning, because it was
 6 quite clear when individual or one or two or three
 7 children were not in the class, they were not getting
 8 the learning and the arrangements were not necessarily
 9 being made by schools for those individual children and
 10 huge workload obviously, but teachers seemed more able
 11 to provide learning for whole classes by the latter part
 12 of 2020 than they were for sporadic individual absences.
 13 That seemed to be problematic.
 14 Q. You have already mentioned the online events and the
 15 engagement with Scottish Ministers and you have
 16 described some improvement over the course. How were
 17 your survey reports and results received and what was
 18 done on the back of them, if anything?
 19 A. I would say that, ironically, we promoted them and sent
 20 them out to all our mail lists and to stakeholders. We
 21 shared — because it was the election, wasn't it, we
 22 shared links to all the reports with new MSPs and also
 23 there was a new cabinet secretary for education so they
 24 were shared with her as well. So I would say engagement
 25 was probably less the more time went on.

53

1 The parental involvement team at Scottish Government
 2 continued to meet with Connect so we were feeding back
 3 mostly through that. What they did with that
 4 information, I don't know. We weren't on the CERG
 5 education kind of group looking at the COVID response
 6 and we didn't hear back from that, but we did write to
 7 them as well to share our findings. We don't know is
 8 the answer.
 9 Q. And CERG being COVID Education Recovery Group?
 10 A. Yes.
 11 Q. Was there any parental representation?
 12 A. There was the National Parent Forum of Scotland.
 13 They're volunteers. I should say that the person
 14 sitting on that was a parent volunteer, so it was a
 15 massive responsibility.
 16 Q. I think we'll come on to discuss the impacts in a
 17 moment. If we can have a discussion now about some of
 18 the impacts, because obviously you've lodged the reports
 19 but you were involved in writing them and you were also
 20 involved in analysing the underlying data and you have
 21 put in your statement some of the impacts that were
 22 felt, but if we could perhaps just tease out some of
 23 them and you can give us some insight into the thinking
 24 and what the specific concerns were because obviously we
 25 can see what the overall concerns were but percentages

54

1 don't really mean as much as hearing what the underlying
 2 concerns were.
 3 So you discuss impacts on families from page 31 of
 4 your statement. What was the source of the information
 5 that you used for this, for your witness statement? Was
 6 this the survey data and was there any other information
 7 that you gleaned during the pandemic?
 8 A. These information sessions which were attended by
 9 parents and carers and parent groups, so information did
 10 come through them, through the chat or by people
 11 speaking. We also have emails, so people can email us
 12 as well about any particular concerns and so on.
 13 Q. Thank you. If we could maybe spend a little time just
 14 discussing remote ... it's not a specific heading. You
 15 have the heading "Impacts relating to online teaching,
 16 digital literacy, access to information ...", but if we
 17 can perhaps discuss remote learning as a concept, once
 18 the schools closed and pupils were sent home and they
 19 were doing remote learning, just some of the issues you
 20 touch on in here and if I can ask you just to elaborate
 21 on those.
 22 For example, yes, during the pandemic children and
 23 young people had to cope, obviously, with the disruption
 24 to their schooling and they had to immediately engage in
 25 a different way of learning, ie remote learning, and

55

1 obviously families had to try and support them, often
 2 while trying to do their own work at home. So I think
 3 the first one I would like you to just elaborate a bit
 4 on is something we've heard quite a lot about across the
 5 board in relation to different contexts, not just in
 6 relation to education, but it's access to digital
 7 services and digital connectivity. You talk about it at
 8 paragraph 31. But if you could perhaps just articulate
 9 what you were hearing from parents about this particular
 10 aspect.
 11 A. I think the upshot is that it was slow to start and it
 12 doesn't and it didn't work for everybody. If people
 13 don't have, and they didn't have, enough devices in
 14 their homes or they didn't have good internet
 15 connectivity, you know, they couldn't manage the kind of
 16 apps and platforms that were being used by schools, it
 17 excluded them from the learning.
 18 We did ask for and encourage the delivery of packs
 19 to families and some parent groups were involved with
 20 other community groups in delivering these door to door
 21 or they had them in supermarkets. So as time went on
 22 people got more creative about how to support children
 23 and young people with learning materials. There's an
 24 assumption people have pencils and papers in their
 25 houses. They often don't. So there were issues around

56

1 connectivity, devices.

2 We had one refugee family responding to the survey
3 who had one Pay As You Go mobile phone between a family
4 of several children and they were in despair. And we
5 had people in rural areas and we had people who worked
6 outside the home who could not support their children's
7 learning or people who weren't well and didn't feel
8 confident.

9 One of our surveys asked about support and
10 information training for parents about how to use
11 digital devices and most parents — most respondents
12 said they hadn't had any support or information. There
13 was an assumption, I think, early on that people had the
14 kit, they had internet that was good enough and that
15 they had the time and the knowledge to do it and lots of
16 people don't. Of course they don't.

17 Q. And I don't know whether your data showed or were you
18 able to discern any particular differential impacts on
19 particular groups of parents or children?

20 A. I think obviously there were parents with younger
21 children or parents with children with additional
22 support needs who couldn't cope with sitting down doing
23 school work at home. So I think there were challenges
24 and also parents who were working out of the house.
25 There were issues for some families around even trying,

57

1 because it was too difficult, it was impossible in their
2 circumstances or they weren't well and it was just
3 another stress in an already stressful situation.

4 Q. In terms of mentioned some parents would have been
5 working, others wouldn't have been, but were there any
6 particular impacts on parents in terms of managing work
7 and children, any specific aspects of that that were
8 articulated or was it just generally a trial?

9 A. I think we heard all sorts of variations of how families
10 that could manage to get to deliver some kind of school
11 work at home. Some families with two adults in their
12 household, one would work from five in the morning until
13 lunchtime and then the other would take over. We had
14 parents who shared parenting living in different
15 households moving back in together. We had grandmother
16 moving in to help a single parent.

17 So people were as creative and as imaginative as
18 they possibly could be to try and, you know, support
19 their children, but I mean still it's not possible for
20 everybody. But, you know, it was a massive stress.
21 Whether you could manage it or you couldn't, I think it
22 was a massive stress.

23 Q. And some of those who weren't able to manage it, did you
24 hear from some?

25 A. Yes, they were — well, some of them indeed were shift

58

1 workers or they were working for the NHS and there were
2 some people who weren't well or didn't have the devices
3 or they had children, particularly with neurodiverse
4 conditions, who lost the structure of their school day
5 and could not and would not try and do any school work.
6 They were unable to engage with it.

7 Q. And during that period, during the initial lockdown when
8 children were at home, what were, if any, issues? You
9 talk at paragraph 32 about communication between school
10 and home during closure periods —

11 A. Yes.

12 Q. — was reduced or lost entirely for some families.
13 Would you like to elaborate on that?

14 A. Yes, that's right. We know because people kind of
15 literally left the building and were told not to go back
16 into it, whether it was a nursery early learning centre
17 or a school, they left the building — the staff I'm
18 talking about — without any equipment, without contact
19 details for families or parents and there was no
20 communication at all for a significant number of
21 families throughout the period actually. And even when
22 staff could go back in and could get the equipment,
23 there wasn't equipment for every member of staff and so
24 on.

25 So I guess for us the concern around was about

59

1 contingency planning, but also about communication and
2 relationships with families. So people wouldn't know
3 how those families were doing, because they weren't able
4 to get in touch with them and we really felt that this
5 was a vital thing that schools and nurseries should get
6 in touch with families and ask if they were okay.

7 Q. And those families, some of them were they getting in
8 contact with you?

9 A. Yes. Well, they completed our survey saying they had no
10 contact from the nursery or school.

11 Q. What were some of the concerns from families that, you
12 know, had they been able to be contacted could have been
13 helped with some of the issues they were facing?

14 A. I think that some of the families did need support.
15 They maybe had had social care involvement, they had
16 certainly had additional support for learning in school
17 and all of that was taken away. So the families were
18 literally left to manage who had had, you know, support
19 from different kinds of services and they were at a
20 loss. They didn't have the equipment or the specialist
21 knowledge to support their child.

22 Q. And you touched on there and you mentioned contingency
23 planning and you had that concern as part of contingency
24 planning. What was your concern there and what did you
25 feedback about communication and contingency planning?

60

1 A. Well, we fed back that this was essential and that it
2 needed to be improved, because schools and nurseries are
3 the gateways to lots — or can be the gateways to lots
4 of services for families. They are the organisations,
5 the establishments that see children everyday. They
6 know how they are. So there were families that nobody
7 saw and nobody knew how they were doing, because of the
8 lockdown and they had no means of getting in touch to
9 find out.

10 So I think there was — we had comments from
11 families saying they felt abandoned. We had one parent
12 with a son with autism who would not get out of bed,
13 because he felt his structure, his daily structure, had
14 been taken away from him and he couldn't cope.

15 Q. Are there any other — before we move on to look at
16 childcare hubs, are there any other key impacts relating
17 to remote learning that you would like to highlight
18 based on the surveys and the engagement you had with
19 parents?

20 A. I think parents were concerned about the kind of social
21 contact and skills and development of their children.
22 So I think particularly parents with much younger
23 children, who didn't go to nursery or didn't, you
24 know — maybe we could talk about it later — but the
25 parents didn't get to go into the nursery building at

61

1 all and didn't get to go into the school P1 and P2, so
2 there became a disconnect, I would say, for some
3 families between school and home.

4 Q. We can maybe touch on that now then. I think you're
5 referring to transitions, because we've heard something
6 about that already in our early learning and childcare
7 sessions. You refer to that at paragraph 62 to 66.
8 What were the specific concerns? Obviously, the Inquiry
9 is aware of the importance of transitions, but would you
10 care to elaborate on that, the importance of transitions
11 and what the specific concerns were that the parents
12 had?

13 A. I think they were — the main issue for parents was that
14 they weren't able to visit or see the school or the
15 nursery where their child was going to go. They weren't
16 able to meet at the staff. These are all normal parts
17 of transition and actually parents need to — that helps
18 parents develop confidence in the people who are going
19 to be looking after their child and helping their child
20 to learn and progress and that wasn't able to happen for
21 several year groups actually and also in secondary
22 school, S1 and S2, so ...

23 Q. Have any of your subsequent surveys looked at
24 transitions or the ongoing — are there any ongoing
25 issues in relation to the absence of transition or

62

1 support at that time?

2 A. We have looked at transitions in the past. We're just
3 doing a survey just now about "How is your home—school
4 partnership going?" So we're going to be interested to
5 see what parents are feeling like their home—school
6 partnership, how the relationship is. But in terms of
7 transition — sorry, I'm losing my thread a little bit
8 here.

9 Transitions they're normally — they're set piece
10 things that happen. It's a visit for the children, it's
11 a visit for the parents of kind of familiarisation
12 visits. There's talks, meet the teacher or the form
13 teacher in secondary school. There's these
14 opportunities for parents to gather and get a feel for
15 the place where their child is going to be. So
16 obviously, all of those standard things didn't happen
17 and couldn't happen.

18 Q. Well, perhaps we can then move on to discuss issues in
19 relation to access to childcare hubs, which we've heard
20 something about already. You refer — you discussed
21 this at paragraphs 50 to 51 and one of the matters you
22 talk about is a lack of clarity regarding eligibility
23 criteria. Would you care to expand on that, please,
24 what the specific concerns were?

25 A. So we were — nobody was clear what the eligibility

63

1 criteria were and we did press Scottish Government
2 repeatedly to offer a definition and I think the answer
3 was that local authorities would need to decide this for
4 themselves.

5 So then local authorities were deciding it for
6 themselves and it was never clear what the criteria
7 were, what the definition of "vulnerable" was, and we
8 very strongly felt that people should be able to
9 self—refer, because we were hearing from families who
10 were desperate because social services and support at
11 school had been removed and they had nowhere to go.

12 So we also pressed for kind of helplines to be set
13 up by local authorities. I think that did happen
14 eventually. But the hubs we felt that parents should be
15 able to, as I say, self—refer, but it's still very
16 opaque. We don't know what the criteria were. We
17 believe it was like children with child protection
18 concerns around them, but it's not clear what the
19 criteria were.

20 Q. And just related to that, you refer to a lack of uptake
21 by eligible children. So even where maybe it was
22 clear—ish there was a lack of uptake. Did you get any
23 inkling or insight into why that might have been from
24 your surveys or responses?

25 A. So less from our surveys. We did ask was anybody

64

1 accessing them, but it was tiny amounts, but I had a
 2 friend who worked in one and what I understood in
 3 Edinburgh was that they were only a few of them across
 4 the city. So children who might be deemed to be
 5 vulnerable, couldn't actually get to them. So they
 6 weren't where the children and the families were and I
 7 suspect that's probably the case across Scotland that
 8 local authorities decided who to invite and then it
 9 wasn't clear that transport arrangements were made
 10 available or that it was followed up. Certainly my
 11 friend said there was hardly anybody there ever where
 12 she worked.

13 Q. And were the hubs in specific --- were they evenly spread
 14 or where were the hubs that needed transport to get to?

15 A. Well, they were --- they were quite far apart. There
 16 weren't very many of them. Excuse me. There weren't
 17 very many of them and they were far apart. So even in a
 18 city, I think it was difficult for people to get there.

19 Q. And were they static, sorry, were they static or did
 20 they ---

21 A. I'm not sure. I'm not sure anybody knows where they
 22 were. There was one in my area, but it was like the
 23 whole of north of Edinburgh, I think, so maybe there was
 24 only one or two. I don't know, I'm afraid.

25 Q. And we've heard about inconsistencies between local

65

1 authority areas in terms of eligibility criteria. Was
 2 that something that your parents had any concerns about?

3 A. Well, we had several parents feeling that they needed to
 4 access these hubs, ones with children with additional
 5 support needs, specifically, some with complex needs,
 6 and also for the first kind of period of lockdown key
 7 workers as well and I guess, I suppose, you know,
 8 teachers, teaching staff who also have children were
 9 supposed to juggle everything as well.

10 So again, it was impossible to know how it was being
 11 decided who could be eligible or indeed how to get in
 12 touch to find out. If you were struggling, who did you
 13 get in touch with to say "I need help"?

14 Q. And you mentioned that one of the things you promoted
 15 was parents --- self-referral by parents. What sort of
 16 response --- what sort of percentage of parents were
 17 wanting that, because there's obviously a potential to
 18 overwhelm in the hub schools if everyone said they were
 19 eligible? So what sort of percentage were these parents
 20 that really needed access in terms of having vulnerable
 21 situations?

22 A. Yes, I mean I think I have got statistics on people who
 23 felt they weren't managing. I have to sort of scabble
 24 about and see what they were. So I think it's --- so 13
 25 per cent said they didn't have what they needed so in

66

1 terms of managing everything at home. So that's one
 2 indication. And then how parents were feeling, we had
 3 six per cent saying they were not okay all of the time.
 4 So you would think that that would mean they were
 5 struggling. So we're probably talking, you know, those
 6 kinds of percents.

7 We were advocating that the authority should trust
 8 parents to not abuse, you know, a scarce resource. That
 9 actually if you had a helpline, if you had people able
 10 to say these are my circumstances, I'm really not
 11 coping, that that could be addressed or sorted or
 12 support could be signposted for these families if it
 13 wasn't a hub, but there wasn't anything.

14 Q. Even latterly?

15 A. Latterly, I think they had phone numbers. We did at one
 16 point look at the local authority websites and we
 17 compiled a webpage of the links to those local authority
 18 webpages which had the kind of emergency contact
 19 details. So it was kind of more emergency social care.
 20 So I don't know how well that operated. I don't know
 21 what the uptake was.

22 Q. Before we move on to the next impact, which is impacts
 23 of children with additional support needs, that you have
 24 already mentioned, is there anything else in relation to
 25 hubs or access to hubs that you wish to raise?

67

1 A. Just the lack of transparency, the lack of openness. It
 2 may be that local authorities themselves didn't know
 3 what their criteria were or weren't willing to publicise
 4 them, but somebody knew and Scottish Government wasn't
 5 willing to define or say. So we did try and find
 6 guidance on all of these things, but didn't manage to do
 7 any of that. Because we were trying to help parents
 8 understand whether they might be eligible or not so they
 9 could get in touch with somebody and see.

10 I guess it was that gap between government and local
 11 authorities and the communications loop as well and
 12 whether things were set up so that that could happen.

13 Q. Thank you. If we can move on then, as I said, to
 14 discuss any impacts on families with children with
 15 additional support needs. I think you discussed this at
 16 paragraph 40 to 44. You said I think that they felt
 17 more impacted than anyone else and felt abandoned.
 18 Would you care to elaborate on some of the concerns that
 19 you were hearing about?

20 A. I think it's just the fact of the matter that supporting
 21 a child with additional needs at home with their
 22 learning is difficult. They get specialist help in
 23 school, they have specialist equipment in school, some
 24 of them will have one-to-one support in school and all
 25 of that was removed.

68

1 I know from my own experience — I have got three
 2 now grownup children with additional support needs —
 3 concentration spans, motivations, all the things that
 4 are a struggle for them, focus, in school, trying to do
 5 school work at home is incredibly difficult . So we know
 6 those families struggled. We know that they didn't have
 7 tailored support that would help them and, I mean, in
 8 the end I think many of us, our organisation included,
 9 said "focus on learning at home, not doing schoolwork at
 10 home." You know, if you can spend time together reading
 11 together or going for a walk or cooking together or
 12 talking together, these are all learning at home and
 13 these are all completely crucial parts of a child's
 14 development.

15 But parents were very concerned that they weren't
 16 doing what was necessary with schoolwork. So you know,
 17 there's a lot of pressure. I think when you are child
 18 has additional support needs, you feel that even more
 19 strongly and also parents with children with additional
 20 support needs are used to fairly regular meetings with
 21 school staff to look at, you know, progress and support
 22 and these things. And that obviously was taken away as
 23 well. And then when they did go back to school, the
 24 specialists weren't allowed to go into school. And in
 25 some circumstances, there hadn't been a specialist in

69

1 school for 18 months because of COVID restrictions.
 2 Q. You mentioned a loss of structure, which you touched on
 3 already. You also mentioned a backlog in additional
 4 support needs diagnosis. Could you elaborate on that,
 5 what is being experienced in relation to that and is
 6 that ongoing?
 7 A. I think there's still problems, but it did last a long
 8 time, because that does sometimes involve a specialist
 9 going into school to do assessments to work one-to-one
 10 with the child and then to make referrals. So I think
 11 we all know that the mental health services for children
 12 and young people are massively stretched and
 13 oversubscribed so that wasn't helped at all by COVID.
 14 It certainly exacerbated. But, yes, diagnosing, you
 15 know, neurodiversity, what tools and IT kit is of use to
 16 children, usually a specialist comes in to help with
 17 that from the local authority, none of that was
 18 happening so, yes.
 19 Q. And I think you also mentioned lack of or inconsistent
 20 access to special support in schools. What was that
 21 inconsistent, was that across local authorities or —
 22 A. As far as we could see, it was. There were some schools
 23 and some teachers who did provide the tailored support
 24 and tailored resources, of course, and some that didn't
 25 presumably have capacity or that did involve specialists

70

1 or specialist equipment.

2 And they just couldn't work one-to-one with the
 3 children, so the specialist, as I said, couldn't come
 4 in, whether it be a physio or an OT, occupational
 5 therapist, or someone bringing IT equipment or looking
 6 at special tools or writing pencils or whatever, that
 7 couldn't happen. And also I think some schools have no
 8 support department, high schools, or they have a
 9 learning support teacher in a primary school or
 10 assistants and because there were restrictions on who
 11 could go into which classroom and people would stay in
 12 bubbles, particularly, I think, for primary that would
 13 be problematic, because you wouldn't be able to have a
 14 learning support teacher working one-to-one with a child
 15 at that time either.

16 Q. Before we go and consider issues that arose in relation
 17 to the reopening of schools, was there anything else in
 18 relation to particular impacts on families with children
 19 with additional support needs?

20 A. I think just that these are the families that often face
 21 the most challenges and need the most support and to
 22 help the children and young people learn, they need the
 23 most input and it was taken away with the lockdowns but
 24 it was not put back again afterwards. So I think the
 25 most vulnerable were hardest hit through the experience

71

1 of COVID and there didn't seem to be for a long time any
 2 special provision or consideration for that.

3 Q. And do you know why that was? Have any of your parents
 4 fed-back or had feedback on that?

5 A. I don't know. I don't know, no. Some, I guess, the
 6 children hadn't been diagnosed or hadn't been — hadn't
 7 had the kind of support that they needed identified, and
 8 hadn't — some may not have been in nursery or those
 9 specialists weren't going into nursery, so when there
 10 was transition into school, none of that would have been
 11 identified with specialist involvement.

12 Q. In terms of then turning to school reopening, I think
 13 were there any particular issues arising in relation to
 14 the phased return to learning when there was, you know,
 15 some people were still at home and some people were in
 16 school and not everyday — pupils were not in school
 17 everyday. Were there any particular issues that arose
 18 in relation to that for families?

19 A. I think for — it was quite complicated and families
 20 with multiple children, it just was difficult I think.
 21 It was complicated and difficult, and also I guess not
 22 knowing. We were — at that time, I was watching the
 23 daily briefings, I was live Tweeting, listening for the
 24 word "school" and "reopening", and we had the massive
 25 engagement through Twitter. That's when parents

72

1 really --- that could really switched onto Twitter to get
2 latest news so, yes.

3 Q. You touched on it earlier in relation to communication
4 with parents and the focus on health and wellbeing and
5 how could you take into account health and wellbeing if
6 you didn't know what had been happening during the
7 lockdown. Were there any other concerns in relation to
8 health --- focus on health and wellbeing? I think you
9 mention at paragraph 58 about concerns about limited
10 learning. What were those concerns?

11 A. Yes, so we also found that parents had not been asked
12 about their child's learning at home, which seemed to us
13 extraordinary that there wasn't. Not only were they not
14 asked about how their experience had been and, you know,
15 was there anything that the school needed to know, for
16 example, that had happened during the first lockdown,
17 but nor were they asked about the child's learning. So
18 66 per cent were not asked about their child's learning
19 during lockdown.

20 So I think there was definitely a sense that parents
21 felt quite hurt about that. Those that had managed to
22 support the child's schoolwork at home had pulled out
23 all the stops to do it and then there wasn't very much
24 interest in what they had done. So in terms of
25 continuity, it's serious from the point of continuity of

73

1 learning, and we very much were advocating that in order
2 to have a smooth transition back into school, schools
3 needed to know how families had been during that time
4 and what learning had been happening so that they could,
5 as it were, hit the ground running. But I think they
6 did their own assessments and checks on what learning
7 had been happening so --- so it wasn't really much of a
8 transition back into school, I would say.

9 Q. And concerns about provision of support for secondary
10 school pupils to complete missed coursework due to
11 lockdown absence, I think you have reference to that in
12 paragraph 52, what were those concerns?

13 A. So there were concerns around what had been made
14 available. The first lockdown, the online learning,
15 what had been made available, because it was quite slow
16 to start in some schools in some subjects, it was very
17 varied. You know, not all teachers had digital skills
18 to enable them to deliver online learning or materials
19 that were ready to do online learning. Some did, some
20 didn't. So I guess it was patchy. Some young people
21 could and would learn during the lockdown period for
22 their subjects for qualifications and some couldn't.

23 Then the second period of lockdown, the same thing
24 kind of happened, although over again there was more
25 organisation around online learning and more

74

1 opportunities, but it didn't work for everybody and so
2 some young people still missed learning because they
3 weren't in school and weren't --- or weren't getting the
4 support that they needed to focus so --- and then that,
5 obviously, if you've missed coursework for
6 qualifications, it has a knock-on effect. So parents
7 were very concerned about that.

8 And then later, being absent, as we talked about,
9 when they had COVID or were required to leave that
10 I think five days eventually after they had had symptoms
11 showing to stay at home and them not getting any
12 learning during those periods.

13 Q. Just in relation to that, if children --- when the
14 schools were back, the children that were absent,
15 because of having to self-isolate, was there any
16 provision or the particular concerns, is that the
17 concern about support for secondary pupils?

18 A. That's right. And the --- I'm just looking at my survey
19 results but they again --- so this, the survey 6 that
20 was, 54 per cent said no alternative arrangements for
21 learning during individual absences had been made, 46
22 per cent said there were alternative arrangements when
23 individual pupils were absent for periods of time. So
24 you have got just over half, obviously, saying that when
25 their child was off ill, not necessarily being actually

75

1 ill but just, you know, doing that period of isolating
2 at home that was required, there was no learning
3 provided for them.

4 Q. You mention then parental engagement and communication
5 in different --- several different contexts.
6 Specifically in paragraph 38 there was a concern raised
7 about a delay in parents being allowed back into schools
8 for events and meetings and inconsistencies around that.
9 Please could you elaborate on what the concerns were
10 with that?

11 A. So this was a time where and we were asking parents if
12 they had been invited to have parent consultations of
13 some sort or another and also whether they were able to
14 get back into schools. So there was massive
15 inconsistencies and some schools and some nurseries
16 didn't have parents back into the building for many,
17 many, many, many months and well into 2021, even after
18 the summer of 2021, they still weren't having people
19 back into the school.

20 So I think local authorities could give --- Scottish
21 Government gave guidance, local authorities could do
22 guidance of the guidance and then head teachers could
23 decide or nursery leaders could decide and they all
24 decided it in various ways. So for us it felt like
25 parental engagement --- although parents had been fully

76

1 involved delivering , you know, schoolwork at home with
 2 their children in the periods of lockdown, when it came
 3 to actually more business as usual, parents felt very
 4 shut out. So it was almost like a rollercoaster : full
 5 involvement, no involvement, full involvement, no
 6 involvement.
 7 And we were advocating that on the basis that
 8 parents had been fully involved in the children 's
 9 learning , those that could manage to be, the time that
 10 they knew most about what their child was learning and
 11 we felt that that could be built on because there's
 12 plenty of academic evidence that where parents are
 13 engaged and involved and informed about their child's
 14 learning , children make more progress and have better
 15 outcomes. So we were very keen at that --- not at that
 16 level , obviously, but the communication, the
 17 understanding of what your child is learning should be
 18 continued because there are a benefit for those --- for
 19 many children so...
 20 But that just dropped right off when they went back
 21 to school. It was how it had been before COVID. Some
 22 schools are absolutely brilliant , don't get me wrong,
 23 they're really good at keeping parents informed about
 24 learning and it's not just about progress reports, it 's
 25 about having a conversation at home about what a child

77

1 has been doing at school that's a bit more meaningful
 2 than just getting a "it was fine" type of answer, yes.
 3 So I guess we had hoped for something positive to come
 4 in terms of parent-school relationships and
 5 communication.
 6 Q. Yesterday the Inquiry heard evidence from School Leaders
 7 Scotland, which is a trade union you'll no doubt be
 8 familiar with that represents, amongst others, head
 9 teachers, deputy head teachers and principal teachers,
 10 and one of the witness observed in his evidence that
 11 there has been an increase in conflict or I think he
 12 termed it conflict between schools and parents, for
 13 example, with parents taking the child's side, including
 14 disciplinary matters or otherwise. And he thought this
 15 might be attributable to a societal change more
 16 generally, but possibly also to the pandemic and he
 17 noted that there has been a degree of disengagement as
 18 well on the part of the parents.
 19 Just given what you were talking about there and the
 20 communication and things going back to usual, is this
 21 something that you recognise as an issue or is that the
 22 same issue or is this a different issue that you think
 23 he's referring to there?
 24 A. We do think that the legacy of COVID is enormous for
 25 children and young people particularly and then also for

78

1 their parents. Just --- I have described this
 2 rollercoaster of full immersion where, you know, whether
 3 you can or you can't you're meant to take full
 4 responsibility for your child's schoolwork, to not
 5 knowing anything much about it at all, and this
 6 disconnect about being responsible for the learning ,
 7 responsible for the health and wellbeing. Then your
 8 child goes back to school and nobody asks you about how
 9 your family has been, if has anything happened, is there
 10 anything the school should know, to be aware of, how the
 11 child 's learning has gone?
 12 So there is a complete disconnect from that. So
 13 that kind of rollercoaster , it doesn't always build
 14 constructive relationships going forward. I think the
 15 vast majority of survey respondents were delighted when
 16 their children were able to go back to school and were
 17 very thankful of staff . I think people have a short
 18 fuse now. I think we were all faced with kind of life
 19 or death it felt like it was situation and I think in
 20 the context of that, there's a short fuse.
 21 I think for families who couldn't manage the school
 22 learning , who didn't feel supported, who felt abandoned,
 23 who --- I mean, historically, there have been families
 24 who they have had, you know, the parents have had a bad
 25 time at the school and they --- that can be passed on to

79

1 children in that if the children and the young people
 2 feel there's nothing there at school for them.
 3 So there's a whole raft of stuff around
 4 disengagement and behaviour and interactions, which is
 5 not just to do with parents and children, far from it,
 6 it 's to do with how did the school approach
 7 relationships , what is the offer for young people. If a
 8 school is offering primarily academic subjects, that's
 9 not going to work for about half of the population in
 10 school. So there's a lot, a lot, a lot of research and
 11 work around difficulties .
 12 Obviously, it 's not acceptable for anybody to, you
 13 know, behave aggressively, but actually it 's about
 14 building relationships building them at the outset,
 15 don't wait to be in touch with parents when there's
 16 trouble. Build a relationship , build a positive one
 17 early on, nursery, primary, secondary. Make sure the
 18 communication channels are open, that parents know who
 19 to speak to if they're worried. If a parent is upset
 20 about --- or if a parent is upset because something is
 21 going on at school, there's probably something that the
 22 child is presenting at home. It may be that there's an
 23 underlying issue. It 's about finding out working
 24 together. It 's not about polarising, you know, parents,
 25 staff .

80

1 I don't think it's helpful to talk in those terms.
 2 It's about how to find a way to go forward.
 3 Q. Before we move on to the subject of SQA exams and the
 4 alternative certification model and the issues around
 5 that, was there anything else you wanted to raise about
 6 communications and issues on returning to schools?
 7 A. Just that at the heart of it, as I have said, are
 8 positive relationships and positive attitudes and
 9 respect for one another and that takes an effort. It's
 10 not just — it's not a given, because the child in
 11 school everybody feels respectful of each other, it
 12 needs a bit more than that. And it did in these times
 13 as well and where that didn't happen in school
 14 communities, there were problems, those parents never
 15 heard from those schools. So it's about best practice,
 16 I think.
 17 Q. Thank you. At paragraphs 45 to 49 you discuss issues
 18 relating to changes in the SQA exams and the
 19 introduction of the alternative certification model
 20 which was implemented to address challenges posed by the
 21 cancellation of exams. Could you please explain the
 22 concern that parents had around this and why they were
 23 concerned?
 24 A. So I think the alternative certification model it came
 25 quite late. We had been asking about it for quite a

81

1 long time. So it came quite late so people — parents
 2 didn't understand the system that already existed, which
 3 is basically that teachers do estimate grades. That
 4 happens I think at two points in the year. I'm not a
 5 teacher, I don't know, but I think there's one in autumn
 6 and one, a kind of a verification validation, in the
 7 spring. And that gets sent to the SQA to sense-check
 8 their marking, I believe is how it operates.
 9 Parents didn't know about that, young people didn't
 10 know about that, because it's something that schools
 11 don't like to talk about, although I'm not entirely sure
 12 why. But I guess they want to distance themselves from
 13 SQA results in some way. But because parents didn't
 14 know about that, then the alternative certification
 15 model came as a, you know, like, "ugh, teachers haven't
 16 done this before." But actually teachers would have
 17 been doing that all along so it wasn't —
 18 So I think the complexity was around pupils who had
 19 missed learning, some pupils prefer exams, some parents
 20 prefer exams, tends to be ones that do better. But for
 21 those that hadn't been able to do continuous learning
 22 that would then lead them to get good estimates probably
 23 from their teacher who would like to do a kind of dash
 24 at the end, this alternative certification model
 25 wouldn't have been a very attractive proposition

82

1 I think. So I think there's confusion around it and not
 2 having any basis for understanding that this was
 3 something that teachers did all the time.
 4 Q. Okay. And then you mention paragraph 48 concerns about
 5 the SQA modeling and awarding of grades according to the
 6 area in which pupils attend school. What were parent's
 7 concerns around that?
 8 A. I think again what came out of this whole process was a
 9 greater understanding of how the SQA moves bands for
 10 different grades. So the banding can go up or down
 11 depending on how a cohort of pupils has done but there's
 12 also a sense check which is against a previous model of
 13 a similar school or the same school so there was a
 14 massive concern about schools in areas of social
 15 deprivation which were being benchmarked effectively
 16 against themselves so the opportunity to — for young
 17 people to make progress or do better was artificially
 18 constrained by this kind of bench — sense checking
 19 benchmarking, but I think you probably need to ask the
 20 SQA about that but that was what the concern was, people
 21 hadn't understood that SQA banding for grades goes up
 22 and down depending on the cohort but essentially it's a
 23 kind of competitive grading system that one year a
 24 performance would end up in a different grade to a
 25 similar performance a different year so I think that has

83

1 led to more discontent about the qualification system
 2 and the grading system.
 3 Q. Okay. And then finally in relation to this you mention
 4 at paragraph 49 some campaigning that Connect did in
 5 relation to a lack of consideration of exceptional
 6 circumstances by SQA. Could you please explain a little
 7 bit more about that?
 8 A. So part of SQA appeal system has been as long, as I can
 9 remember, that there are exceptional circumstances so if
 10 someone is very ill or suffers a bereavement or
 11 something, the school can let the SQA know and
 12 exceptional circumstances can be applied. That often
 13 does, I believe, mean looking at coursework and giving a
 14 grade based on that. For whatever reason, the decision
 15 was taken that exceptional circumstances would not apply
 16 in these COVID years when it was the time when there was
 17 most chance that young people had experienced extreme
 18 difficulties and challenges, whether it would be mental
 19 health or whether it would be bereavement or Long COVID
 20 or whatever, so they decided not to apply it so we
 21 campaigned hard that they — this was the very time they
 22 really needed to apply that consideration. I don't know
 23 why they didn't apply it. Perhaps they thought they
 24 would be inundated but that's — that's — you know,
 25 that was what they did. We felt they prioritised their

84

1 integrity above the achievements and health and
 2 well—being of young people.

3 Q. Just in terms of the final point that I have on my list
 4 to cover with you, and I'll invite you to address
 5 anything else that you might have, is absence rates.
 6 You mention it at paragraph 67 and you also refer
 7 elsewhere in your statement, unfortunately I don't have
 8 the reference for the paragraph, about ongoing impacts
 9 in terms of absence and behaviour. What were the issues
 10 noted by parents in relation to absenteeism and feelings
 11 of abandonment?

12 A. I think one of our surveys showed that the rates of
 13 absence were high during 2021 and we know from what
 14 schools have told us and the government statistics that
 15 some children never went back to school. Sometimes that
 16 could be because of parental anxiety or health issues;
 17 that can also be anxiety or Long COVID or, you know,
 18 health issues in children and young people but the —
 19 there is still a lower attendance rate now in the kind
 20 of post—COVID years than there was before COVID so
 21 something — something has gone awry for some families
 22 and some children and young people and they've just
 23 never come back to school. I think that some — in some
 24 education circles they're called "ghost children" now,
 25 I think. So — and I don't — I know local authorities

85

1 and Scottish Government are focusing on this now and
 2 they're beginning to look harder at — some children
 3 will be home—educated but they should be known about by
 4 the local authorities but, yes, it's a real concern.

5 Q. Ms Woolnough, just before I ask you to address any
 6 lessons to be learned, were there any other impacts that
 7 you wanted to discuss or address? We have your
 8 statement anyway and I think we have pretty much covered
 9 all of them.

10 A. No, I don't think so. I think I have emphasised and you
 11 have drawn out the main impacts on the vulnerable
 12 families and children and young people and families who
 13 became vulnerable who weren't vulnerable or known to
 14 social services or schools before the pandemic. That I
 15 think was why we were asking for the self—referral to
 16 hubs because there would be families who became
 17 vulnerable because of that experience.

18 Q. And finally, you've got a section we have that in your
 19 statement on lessons to be learned but were there any
 20 particular lessons that you wish to draw to the
 21 Inquiry's attention?

22 A. Well, I have mentioned contingency planning and I guess
 23 at the heart of it is still communications with parents
 24 and families, knowing — knowing and making sure —
 25 everyone making sure contact details are up to date,

86

1 keeping in touch with families, the importance of health
 2 and well—being in families and children and young
 3 people's health and wellbeing. There's still in some
 4 schools a resistance to being — and probably in some
 5 families — a resistance to being involved in health and
 6 wellbeing and care and we strongly think that that needs
 7 to change but schools are gateways for all of these
 8 services and also they're an essential part of their
 9 communities so — that's not really an impact, sorry, I
 10 got — I digressed.

11 Q. No, it can be a lesson as well. Ms Woolnough, unless
 12 you have anything to add, I don't.

13 My Lord, unless your Lordship does, that's the end
 14 of my questions.

15 THE CHAIR: No, I have no questions, I'm happy to say, but
 16 I would just like to thank Ms Woolnough for her very
 17 helpful evidence. I'm very grateful, thank you.

18 A. Thank you, my Lord, thank you.

19 THE CHAIR: We shall take a break for lunch now and we'll
 20 come back at 1.45, I believe, so 1.45, thank you.
 21 (12.34 pm)
 22 (Luncheon adjournment)

23 MS VAN DER WESTHUIZEN: Good afternoon, my Lord. I didn't
 24 see you there, you sneaked up on me.

25 THE CHAIR: Not at all, good afternoon, Ms van der

87

1 Westhuizen. Now, you have another witness for us this
 2 afternoon, please.

3 MS VAN DER WESTHUIZEN: I do, my Lord, we have got Dr Wood
 4 with us, who is co—founder of A Place in Childhood.

5 THE CHAIR: Good afternoon, Dr Wood. Now, when you're
 6 ready.

7 DR JENNY WOOD
 8 Examination—in—chief by MS VAN DER WESTHUIZEN

9 Q. Thank you my Lord. Dr Wood would you mind giving your
 10 full name?

11 A. Yes, my name is Dr Jenny Wood.

12 Q. And you have given a witness statement to the Inquiry;
 13 is that correct?

14 A. Yes, I have.

15 Q. My Lord, for reference that's WT0571.

16 Dr Wood, you're co—founder of something called A
 17 Place in Childhood; is that correct?

18 A. Yes, it is.

19 Q. Could you please — you've obviously got a doctorate.
 20 Could you please explain your academic background?

21 A. Yes, so I have a PhD in children's rights in the
 22 Scottish town planning system which I gained in 2016.

23 Q. And you are co—founder of A Place in Childhood, what
 24 is — or APiC, as I think it is known. What is APiC and
 25 how did you come to cofound it?

88

1 A. So we're a social enterprise that works with children
2 and young people and our main aim is to enable children
3 and young people to have a say in the things that matter
4 to them and, particularly, to be able to make changes in
5 their communities. Often children and young people
6 aren't listened to so that's something we really wanted
7 to make happen so that was based on my PhD research and
8 also the PhD research of some of our other co-founders
9 and we really want to look at practical action to bring
10 children and young people into the discussions around
11 the places that they live and how the environments
12 affect them, because this is often a bit of a blind spot
13 for policymakers, and in research there's lots of
14 evidence but it's not necessarily used.

15 Q. And I'll come to ask you to talk to you about some of
16 the projects that APiC undertook during the pandemic.
17 Can I ask you to, please, outline what APiC did
18 pre-pandemic?

19 A. So we've done a range of different projects prior to the
20 pandemic. Most of our projects are around rights-based
21 research with children and young people or participatory
22 work. So a few projects that we did before the pandemic
23 would include supporting Scottish Government and Play
24 Scotland to co-create new versions of what they call the
25 play standard tools for children in young people. And

89

1 we have also done various research projects and bits of
2 work with organisations like Play Scotland and Sustrans
3 Scotland to get children and young people's voices
4 around play and getting outside and using their
5 environments.

6 Q. In paragraph 12 and 13, you summarise what you did
7 during the pandemic. We'll come on to talk shortly
8 about the #ScotYouthandCOVID" series, but you say,
9 I think in paragraph 13, that an important project you
10 did was related to play pedagogy and you co-produced the
11 Play Pedagogy Award and I think that was with Play
12 Scotland, who we've heard from this week. Could you
13 explain a bit more about what that project involved?

14 A. Yes. So that project was around improving the
15 experience for primary-age children in Scotland. So
16 Play Scotland is really interested in how play can be
17 used to further that and that's also of something of
18 deep interest to us as well. So we supported them to
19 create a — like a toolkit for playful learning in
20 schools and then we worked with them to co-create what
21 an award could look like in Scottish primary schools.
22 So we did that with a range of teachers from around
23 the country and we convened a range of online workshops
24 to talk about what that should look like, so kind of
25 mapping their journeys from not having done any play

90

1 pedagogy to kind of being experts in play pedagogy.
2 Some were right at the start of their journey and some
3 had done a lot of work really off their own back. And
4 it was about how can we create an award that's really
5 motivating for schools and teachers to take part in to
6 improve the experience for their children and what do
7 all of those steps need to look like?

8 So, you know, educators are the real experts in how
9 this works within the school environment, so we wanted
10 to co-create it with them so we knew that it would work
11 for them and, also, we didn't want it to just be for
12 early years, which is often where play is focused. We
13 wanted it to be something that could work throughout
14 primary school years.

15 Q. And why was that? Why was it important for it to work
16 beyond early years?

17 A. Because play is really fundamental for children. It's
18 really important to their wellbeing. It's one of their
19 UN-sanctioned rights. But it's also a really good way
20 of educating children in ways that actually feeds off of
21 their core motivation to learn. Children naturally want
22 to explore and they want to understand things.
23 Sometimes we try to put them into quite rigid structures
24 about the ways they're meant to learn that don't always
25 work for them. So play pedagogy is a way of making it

91

1 more child-centred and developing projects together that
2 don't necessarily have a defined end goal, but through
3 that process of discovery they learn in a way that suits
4 them.

5 So it's not just something that works for early
6 years, it's actually something that would work for any
7 age of children and that would include secondary school,
8 but we needed to start somewhere. And the word "play"
9 is so often associated with younger children, but
10 actually play pedagogy is really about just
11 child-centred learning and trying to put them at the
12 centre of what that looks like, rather than trying to
13 get children to fit within the existing systems we have.

14 Q. Thank you. We can turn now perhaps to have a discussion
15 about your other main project, which you refer to at
16 paragraph 14 and that's the #YouthandCOVID series.

17 Before we go on to look at some of the findings of
18 that, could you please explain how APiC came to
19 undertake this project and, importantly, why?

20 A. Yes, so we started to think about the ScotYouthandCovid
21 Project at the end of March and in early April 2020 as
22 we went into lockdown. We, I think like all other
23 organisations in the sector and beyond, there were a lot
24 of, you know, tough decisions that were having to be
25 made, a lot of things were just being cut off. All of

92

1 our work, you know, had been put on pause. And we also
2 knew that there were a lot of other organisations that
3 were having to think of furloughing staff and having to
4 make very big decisions about what kind of services they
5 can still offer.

6 So we felt that through all of this, at the same
7 time, children and young people are also experiencing
8 something completely new that there's no precedent for
9 and, just because we're in a crisis, doesn't mean that
10 their participation and their wellbeing isn't important.
11 So we made that decision that if all of our other
12 projects are on the back burner right now, then we've
13 got this opportunity to do something live working with
14 children and young people to find out what are these
15 first days of lockdown like, what's changed for them,
16 what could be better.

17 And because my colleague who's one of the other
18 co-directors of A Place in Childhood has a background in
19 online qualitative research, he felt that he had the
20 skills to be able to convene something that was entirely
21 online and, therefore, would be fine to do during COVID.
22 So we had a think about how we could make this happen
23 and we just decided to put the rest of our remaining
24 money into trying to get something that would really
25 highlight what's going on in the lockdown from children

93

1 and young people's own perspectives.

2 So we decided that based on other projects we had
3 done, we could put together as diverse a panel as
4 possible of young people from across the country and
5 actually they could then interact online and we would be
6 able to see what's going on in all of these different
7 places as well and give those young people an
8 opportunity to think about what could be improved from
9 their experience, with the idea as well that that might
10 be something that Scottish Government or other partners
11 might be quite keen to hear, especially considering a
12 lot of existing participatory projects would have, kind
13 of, come to an end for now.

14 Q. And why it was important — I think you mentioned you
15 put the last of your existing money into the project.
16 Why did you feel it was important to do that?

17 A. Because we felt it's so important to have children and
18 young people's participation, because they're the only
19 ones that really know what's going on for them and there
20 might have been other projects going on, we had no idea,
21 but to our knowledge this is something that we could
22 contribute and we weren't sure that anyone else was
23 contributing it. And I think it felt that we had the
24 expertise to be able to try and do this online.

25 So in some ways we didn't have a lot to lose. We

94

1 felt we should really do this for the sake of children's
2 rights and because we have got an opportunity to and we
3 can see a pathway to make it work.

4 Q. You produced a report, "Key findings from children and
5 young people's participation in crisis report". That's
6 been lodged with your statement. I don't propose to go
7 to it now, but could you please just describe the work
8 you've mentioned putting together a panel of children
9 from work that you — or engagement you had previously
10 had? Could you please describe a little bit about the
11 project, what it looked like?

12 A. Yes, of course. So we convened our panel of 25 what we
13 called "young consultants". They were between the ages
14 of 10 and 16 at the point. We decided that 10 was
15 probably the youngest we felt that we could really work
16 with online, without having done this before, and that
17 10 to 16 age group it would give us a really good
18 insight of what's going on for those young people that
19 are at about that transition from primary into secondary
20 and then those that are also looking at exams and their
21 future beyond school.

22 So we convened from five different areas. We had
23 five young consultants in each and the areas were
24 Aberdeen, Edinburgh, Glasgow, rural Stirlingshire and
25 rural Falkirk. So we had a mix of ages, we had a mix of

95

1 different places and we also tried to get an even gender
2 split to the extent we could. We were also looking to,
3 across the places that we knew we could recruit from,
4 try to find a mix of different types of areas, so
5 different socioeconomic backgrounds of children and
6 young people.

7 So whilst 25 is not a big number overall, we were
8 really selecting for diversity of experiences to bring
9 to the table so we could have a good understanding of to
10 what extent some experiences might be universal, some
11 might be based on age, some might be based on place or
12 some might be based on other circumstances that the
13 young people were dealing with.

14 So we brought them together online initially for
15 three workshops. We thought that that would be a good
16 starting point and that is kind of the money that we had
17 to see what would happen. So we convened those
18 workshops in sort of April/May time of 2020 and we tried
19 to keep the questions just really broad, because what we
20 could see happening was that where there was
21 participation of young people, it was a lot of surveys
22 and surveys can collect really great data. But for one
23 thing, young people often don't fill out surveys for a
24 multitude of reasons and, for another, when you're
25 producing a survey for young people to fill out, an

96

1 adult has already decided what it's important to ask
 2 about. So we wanted to find out what the young people
 3 thought was important to ask about.
 4 So we had really broad questions such as, what
 5 changes have you experienced since lockdown happened?
 6 What challenges have you experienced in relation to
 7 those changes, and, you know, are there things that have
 8 been positive, are there things that have been more
 9 challenging? And then over the course of these
 10 workshops that also evolved into, what changes did they
 11 think could make a difference to their experience?
 12 Particularly --- or some of them were bigger changes,
 13 such as, you know, actually having a crisis plan for
 14 when schools needed to lockdown, the whole country needs
 15 to lockdown and we have situations like this, but also
 16 just small things that could have been different, such
 17 as setting outdoor tasks, especially for, say, PE for
 18 instance.
 19 So that was just some of the things they came up
 20 with.
 21 Q. Yes. So you have already touched on some of the things
 22 that came out of it. What were the general broad
 23 findings and were there recommendations or what was the
 24 outcome of the report?
 25 A. So the broad findings I think was that for the young

1 people everything had changed very fast and I think it
 2 had for all of us, but it was very difficult for a lot
 3 of them to comprehend what was going on and the
 4 messaging wasn't really for them and there was a lot of
 5 complication and a lot of things to be scared about.
 6 There were also huge changes in the way that
 7 education was now being delivered and quite a lot of
 8 diversity as well, so pupils were really missing the
 9 ability to collaborate with their classmates. Some
 10 schools were able to do a bit of live teaching, some
 11 didn't seem to be doing any at all. Some young people
 12 seemed to have access to good resources, like ipads and
 13 things to do their work, whilst some only had access to
 14 a phone or one shared device. They didn't all have
 15 access to good enough internet or space within their
 16 homes to be working.
 17 So some had kind of already disengaged and they
 18 thought this isn't going to go on for very long so I
 19 just won't bother. Some were finding it easier, because
 20 actually having that space from school was really good
 21 for their different learning styles or anxieties that
 22 they might have or different learning needs they had.
 23 So it was quite diverse in the experiences and some were
 24 good and some were bad. Some were spending more time
 25 outdoors, some were spending less time outdoors due to

1 various fears.
 2 And also some young people were telling us things
 3 like, we don't have paper in our home, which we need to
 4 work, but we also can't get paper in the area that we
 5 live. We would actually have to travel quite far to get
 6 something like that, which we are technically not meant
 7 to be doing and then also it's an added expense and not
 8 every young person had access to those kinds of
 9 resources at home to be able to buy all of these
 10 materials.
 11 It was really quite diverse I think in what was
 12 going on for them.
 13 Q. And you discuss I think the key impacts at paragraphs 22
 14 to 23 of your report and, as you note, some were
 15 positive and some were negative and I think you
 16 specifically mentioned, as you have already done, some
 17 positive examples about being able to spend more time
 18 with family, have more time to watch movies they liked
 19 or play video games. As you have already mentioned
 20 there, the weather was nice and some were able to go
 21 outdoors.
 22 Then you have touched on but in here you also state
 23 about some of the struggles that people had at school
 24 and I think worried about grandparents. And then at
 25 paragraph 26 some specific concerns about remote

1 learning.
 2 Is there anything in particular about education that
 3 they were raising that was of concern?
 4 A. So I think it was, as I said before, some of that lack
 5 of ability to actually engage because they didn't have
 6 the resources was a big concern. And I think another
 7 thing was young people just feeling like they're not
 8 getting like feedback on their work, so they didn't
 9 really know how to respond if they didn't feel like they
 10 were getting that good feedback. And they might have to
 11 send maybe an email to a teacher, if they knew how, or
 12 they might have to get a parent to help them. Not
 13 everyone had parents around, but it can be very
 14 difficult when you're that age and you have never done
 15 any of this before to even know how to ask a good
 16 question to get the kind of feedback and support you
 17 need. And then there would obviously be a delay in
 18 getting that feedback back and then that feedback might
 19 be useful or it might not be useful or you might have no
 20 idea how to interpret it.
 21 So it led to this lag and a lot of frustration and
 22 confusion. And we could see that some were already just
 23 starting to completely disengage from learning because
 24 of just how difficult that experience was for them.
 25 It's also just that lack of being able to do group work.

1 So something that the young people seemed to really
 2 respond well to in the project was that on the online
 3 environment we were using like Zoom and an online
 4 whiteboard platform they were able to get into smaller
 5 groups and collaborate on things with people from their
 6 area, but also people not from their area. But they
 7 said that that's not something they were really getting
 8 at school and a huge number of young people really
 9 benefit from that kind of working together. So when
 10 that was taken away, it made a lot of school quite hard
 11 for a lot of people.

12 Q. Thank you. And you mentioned earlier what you had hoped
 13 to do. Who was the target audience for this report?
 14 Was there a target audience in mind or was this —

15 A. Our target audience I think primarily was Scottish
 16 Government, because we were concerned that there wasn't
 17 very much done to actually hear what young people needed
 18 and what young people were going through. So we thought
 19 there might also be wider interest in the work.

20 And yes, also from, you know, the young people
 21 involved, we also wanted them to feel valued and that
 22 they had been heard, but we were hoping that Scottish
 23 Government would see this as something useful for their
 24 planning for if this happened again, but also, yes, how
 25 we might respond in the future to some of these concerns

101

1 that young people have raised.

2 Q. And in terms of why it's important to hear from young
 3 people, presumably there was evidence being collected
 4 from teachers, et cetera about the impacts on children,
 5 why is it important to hear from or is it important to
 6 hear directly from children or not?

7 A. I think it's because children have knowledge that we
 8 can't know without asking them. They experience these
 9 things day-to-day and they're the ones that can really
 10 express how it feels and what their specific struggles
 11 are. So teachers and parents they see it from one
 12 perspective, but children sometimes see it from a
 13 different perspective and add really key details about
 14 what's going on for them, but they also often are able
 15 to see the solutions to what's going on for them and
 16 that might not always come from adults who see it only
 17 from their perspective.

18 I think particularly around things around wellbeing,
 19 it's really the children that know how they're feeling
 20 and knowing what is and isn't working. So if we don't
 21 listen to them, then we're actually missing just a
 22 really key part of the picture and also in listening to
 23 them, it has a really big impact on their self-esteem
 24 and their sense that they are being valued by the
 25 services that are meant to support them.

102

1 And I think one of the key things that really came
 2 out from this report, but also future reports, was just
 3 that they felt that these systems that were meant to be
 4 caring for them, suddenly it felt like a lot of the care
 5 had disappeared and a huge amount of that care, I think,
 6 comes from actually feeling heard and valued. And no
 7 matter how much in many ways teachers and parents are
 8 trying to do that, like, remotely, in this kind of
 9 learning situation, it's very, very difficult for them
 10 to actually feel that, if there's not people directly
 11 interacting with them and asking "How are you doing?"
 12 not just "Here's something I think you should do." It's
 13 kind of about how the young person feels and their sense
 14 of efficacy.

15 Q. Thank you. And then so just with the target audience in
 16 mind, you tried to get in touch, I think, with the
 17 Scottish Government. You refer to that at paragraph 34.
 18 What was — what were you hoping to achieve there?

19 A. So we were hoping that Scottish Government would find it
 20 useful to have these insights and that particularly that
 21 report finished with a set of those small changes that
 22 could make a big difference, which I think I have
 23 outlined some of already and we wanted government to
 24 have those and potentially be willing to discuss them
 25 and see if there was a route forward.

103

1 Particularly, we thought that there might be
 2 discussions that could be had about — with young people
 3 essentially to further define what a curriculum within
 4 this crisis might look like that meets their needs, as
 5 well as the needs of the system. So we wanted to get in
 6 touch to let them know that the outputs existed, but
 7 also that there was a further opportunity, if they were
 8 open to it, to engage further with our young consultants
 9 who were already primed and ready to do this work to
 10 think about potential solutions.

11 Q. And what was the response?

12 A. So the response from the Scottish Government was pretty
 13 much that everything is in hand and that they didn't
 14 foresee us needing to go into another period of remote
 15 learning, because this crisis at that time has mostly
 16 been averted and can be managed in a different way. But
 17 also that if we do need to go back into remote learning,
 18 then they will call upon the e-Sgoil platform which
 19 should — which is already created and should therefore
 20 fill the gaps. I think that is the crux of their
 21 response to us.

22 Q. Okay. You then come on in your report to discuss
 23 another — a second youth and #ScotYouthandCOVID 2,
 24 Children and Young People's Participation through the
 25 Crisis Project. How did that come about then?

104

1 A. So we very much felt that this was kind of the start of
2 the conversation, because we had only been able to run a
3 few workshops and it was clear that this crisis was
4 actually — we thought, I think like everyone, it might
5 only last for a few months and then things might get
6 back to more of a semblance of normal, but it was clear
7 upon publishing the report that that wasn't necessarily
8 the case.

9 And from getting that report out, I think it was on
10 Twitter, the Children's Commissioner at the time reached
11 out to us and said that they found our work really
12 helpful and asked if there was anything that they might
13 do to support in getting that work out there or thinking
14 further about how young people could be involved. So we
15 had a chat about that and we discussed a bit more about
16 the project and, you know, just what an opportunity we
17 felt we had to continue engaging with this group who are
18 able to give their opinions live on what's happening and
19 the Commissioner agreed that there would be value in
20 continuing the conversation and, therefore, they agreed
21 to financially support us and to support us also in
22 deciding what a future round should look like.

23 So they supported us so that we could engage more
24 with the young consultants around, kind of, the end of
25 the second lockdown and they commissioned essentially a

105

1 project that was about twice the size to continue that
2 conversation.

3 Q. And could you then just again — you've obviously
4 explained the methodology and who was involved in the
5 first one, could you please do the same again for this
6 second one?

7 A. Yes, certainly. So we reengaged with the original young
8 consultants that we had pulled together, but also some
9 additional young people that wanted to be part of it
10 when others didn't. So it was mostly the same set, but
11 with some slightly new faces as part of the
12 conversation, slightly bigger team and we did something
13 very similar to what we had done in the first round, but
14 we had six workshops, I believe, this time around.

15 So we started off with looking back at what had
16 happened since we had finished the previous round to get
17 a sense of what has been going on and to kind of fill in
18 that gap, so they told us lots of other changes that had
19 been occurring and what things had maybe been the same,
20 what things had changed and new ideas they might have
21 about how things could be improved. And then we kept
22 the conversation going around what's happening to them
23 now what issues are arising and through these
24 conversations over time what emerged was like a set of
25 themes that were really strongly, like, common amongst

106

1 everyone, but certain people had specific interests in
2 specific areas.

3 So we got to a point where most of the discussions
4 that had been happening in breakout groups were in these
5 place-based groups initially, where they had, you know,
6 in-person links with each other and they knew each other
7 somewhat beforehand, but then we started to get into
8 different groups which we call "task forces" and these
9 were based on the different themes that they had
10 outlined as really important. So we had these new task
11 forces with new teammates that were mixing across areas,
12 sometimes across ages, and they then worked together to
13 put together like set of asks of the Scottish Government
14 that they would like the Scottish Government to know
15 about and to take forward based on things that had been
16 arising for them as important.

17 So there were quite a few different task forces.
18 I think there was motivation in school, uncertainty,
19 transitions, particularly between primary and secondary,
20 but also out of secondary. There was wellbeing, skills
21 and employment and then also one looking at more local
22 issues that were happening within individual
23 communities.

24 Q. And you produced a report on the back of that. Again,
25 what happened with that report, what was the next stage?

107

1 A. So that report it contained a final set of 34 asks that
2 the young consultants had refined through their
3 conversations based under each of those headings and we
4 published that I think it was July 2021 and working with
5 the Children's Commissioner's team and there was a lot
6 more media interest in this report this time round.

7 So one of our young consultants was invited onto
8 Good Morning Scotland with BBC Radio Scotland alongside
9 the Commissioner at the time and they had a chat about
10 the report and that young person's experiences of school
11 during the time that we had been covering. And then
12 there was also I think it's called the Morning Programme
13 after that, where there was a kind of a round discussion
14 about the report, which I was on alongside some other
15 guests and another young person. And so BBC Radio
16 Scotland had reached out to Scottish Government to get a
17 response from them to play as part of that work and so
18 we got a response from them in relation to it.

19 Q. And you've mentioned the themes and in paragraph 34 you
20 refer to 34 asks; was that part of that project?

21 A. Yes.

22 Q. And what happened with the 34 asks?

23 A. So the 34 asks were in the report and they were what was
24 communicated, I think, in our outputs and also to the
25 media and in the radio shows.

108

1 Q. And you then go on to talk about a third project which
2 is a series of blogs, I understand. So could you please
3 explain again how you came to do that third project?
4 A. Yes.
5 Q. And what the methodology was?
6 A. Yes. So at the end of the second round we had this list
7 of 34 asks, but we also as part of that had spoken to
8 the young people about what they would want to happen
9 with those 34 asks. And they told us that whilst they
10 thought they had done a really thorough job between them
11 of putting together these sets of asks, they were also
12 really aware that they were only a group of 25 young
13 people from specific areas and that there would
14 certainly be young people from other geographic areas or
15 from other kind of experiences that they didn't have
16 that they felt should be contributing to any work that
17 gets communicated further about how we should move
18 forward from the pandemic.
19 So with their instruction that we should be
20 involving more young people, particularly those that
21 have had potentially harder experiences or from
22 different age groups and different backgrounds to them,
23 we spoke with the Children's Commissioner about what a
24 third round of the report would look like. And so that
25 third round ScotYouthandCovid3 was quite an extensive

109

1 project and it involved various different streams.
2 So on one hand we kept up regular workshops with our
3 original young consultants, who were kind of steering us
4 through the project, telling us what had been going on
5 for them in the interim and right at those points in
6 time, also sort of, I guess, overall editorial on the
7 project. And then we also convened a set of primary
8 school young consultants. There were 15 of them from
9 the same areas as the older young consultants so that we
10 could hear from current eight to ten years old as well
11 and what had been happening for them. So I think we had
12 two or three workshops with them. But we also had
13 groups — we had workshops with what we were calling
14 "seldom heard" groups.
15 So we worked with the Commissioner's office to get
16 in touch with various groups that might have specific
17 experiences that it would be worth sharing and are
18 likely to have been missed so far. So we had two groups
19 of young carers, one in Edinburgh, which we met in
20 person, and one that crosses the Highlands but is based
21 in Dingwall so we spoke to them online, a group of them.
22 We also spoke with unaccompanied refugees and asylum
23 seekers in partnership with the Scottish Refugee
24 Council. And we also spoke to children that had a
25 family member in prison during the pandemic and also

110

1 Long Covid Kids who had experienced long COVID during
2 the pandemic and so had specific experiences to share.
3 And so the project from there was a mixture of
4 convening these new workshops and then producing blogs,
5 sharing those with our original young consultants and
6 talking about those additional insights with them,
7 whilst gathering their additional insights and then,
8 from all of that, we were working together to finalise,
9 like, a manifesto for change, which is what the young
10 consultants and other young people we had spoken to felt
11 should be taken forward as a result of the pandemic. So
12 not everything about it relates directly to what
13 happened in the pandemic, but it's like young people's
14 view of the future of Scotland, having experienced
15 something like this and what they think would be a
16 better future for everyone.
17 So that was the kind of the very final output of the
18 whole project.
19 Q. And just in terms of the penultimate output, you
20 produced a series of reports in relation to each of the
21 themes or the groups that the young people had
22 identified.
23 A. Yes.
24 Q. Had they come up with the groups themselves or was that
25 a combination of them and the Commissioner?

111

1 A. It was a combination of them and the Commissioner. So
2 they had specifically said that they wanted us to focus
3 on young people that have had experiences different to
4 theirs, particularly experiences that might have been
5 harder than some that they have experienced, and they
6 also said that they would quite like different
7 geographies involved. So I think they mentioned, you
8 know, like the Highlands, Fife, Dundee, those were
9 places that we hadn't done any work. So they wanted to
10 make sure this was as close to representative of every
11 young person in Scotland as possible.
12 Q. Could I perhaps ask you, you have it in your report, but
13 just to give us an indication, with reference to the
14 groups, of what sort of impacts or experiences these
15 particular groups were experiencing. Perhaps we could
16 start with young carers.
17 A. Yes. So the young carers, they had had quite a lot
18 different experiences, I would say, from our young
19 consultants and other young people. I remembered that
20 one of the things that was quite difficult for them
21 during a lot of the quite strict rules that we had was
22 that a lot of them applied to children aren't allowed to
23 do things like go into supermarkets or go into
24 pharmacies, but actually for a lot of young carers that
25 is something that's fundamental to their

112

1 responsibilities as a young carer. So they would need
 2 to actually be fighting their own case that they had to
 3 be able to be doing these things, which is obviously
 4 incredibly stressful for them and stressful for their
 5 parents who they're asking their young people to do this
 6 often because they don't have a lot of choices so they
 7 felt bad for being in that situation.
 8 So there was a lot of stress, I think, in a lot of
 9 people's families and the young carers were also more
 10 likely to have experienced the death of a loved one or
 11 severe health difficulties of someone they lived with
 12 who was then having to get healthcare during the
 13 pandemic, which was obviously disrupted. And then there
 14 was also the fact that they would then be maybe going
 15 back to school really, really worried about contracting
 16 COVID and passing that on to someone vulnerable within
 17 their household, but not really having very much choice
 18 around that. So there was a lot of guilt and shame and
 19 trauma I think attached to that.
 20 And I remember that there was also, because a lot of
 21 these young carers would be taking care of younger
 22 siblings who might need a lot more support at school.
 23 Or also I remember one young person was telling us that
 24 their sister wasn't — like needed to read people's lips
 25 and wasn't able to whilst people were wearing masks and

113

1 that was a really difficult experience for everyone.
 2 And her sister just basically stopped going out, because
 3 it was too difficult. And all of this was just an extra
 4 strain on young carers who were already doing a huge
 5 amount extra that's often not understood. And having
 6 the same kind of school experiences as well, where a lot
 7 of the extra support that they may have been getting if
 8 they were in school was much harder to deliver whilst
 9 remotely.
 10 So it was a very difficult and I think also very
 11 varied experience for them as well, because these
 12 experiences were common across, you know, Edinburgh and
 13 the Highlands, but in the Highlands there was also that
 14 added level of remoteness that was quite difficult for a
 15 lot of young people. And meant that even when things
 16 sort of lightened up in terms of the restrictions, it
 17 was still very difficult for them to actually meet
 18 people and get to places that they might need to get to.
 19 Q. Thank you. And the other group you had identified or
 20 the children and young people identified was the primary
 21 school pupils. Please could you elaborate a bit more
 22 about what their experiences and concerns were?
 23 A. Sure. So the primary school pupils, a lot of them were
 24 quite young when all of this kicked off, so they weren't
 25 necessarily as immediately aware of why some of their

114

1 experiences might be related to the pandemic or the
 2 seriousness of what was going on. But a lot of what
 3 they told us they remembered was really, really missing
 4 seeing friends because a lot of them would have been
 5 very young. They wouldn't have had mobile phones or
 6 even if they did, they wouldn't have had numbers for
 7 their friends necessarily. So they went from having
 8 friends and seeing people all the time to potentially
 9 seeing barely anyone.
 10 And some of them had, you know, good experiences at
 11 school and we did hear some really good innovative work
 12 with like one young person talking about how their
 13 teacher had actually worked really, really hard to make
 14 sure that they could still have group collaboration
 15 whilst they were learning remotely and used something
 16 like Minecraft education so that everyone in the class
 17 could be creating something together and having fun and
 18 would do things like having an hour where everyone can
 19 come together and ask questions everyday. But some it
 20 seems didn't get very much teaching at all and it seems
 21 like, I think, because they were so young, it's very
 22 difficult to teach a lot of things like reading and
 23 writing remotely so they didn't necessarily get very
 24 much of that.
 25 And I think the other thing that was really strong

115

1 from the primary age pupils was they were incredibly
 2 frustrated and I think very, very angry. Actually at
 3 the time that we were talking, there had been a lot of
 4 talk about the parties in Westminster and they were
 5 absolutely furious that that was happening. Yes, they
 6 really wanted to talk about it quite a lot, because they
 7 thought that they had had to follow so many different
 8 rules and yet the decision-makers that are meant to be
 9 caring for everyone didn't seem to care. That just felt
 10 like a massive sort of moral injury to them.
 11 Q. Your next group you have is refugees and asylum seekers,
 12 what were their particular concerns?
 13 A. Yes. So the group of refugees and asylum seekers that
 14 we worked with, they had arrived during the pandemic,
 15 but they were not necessarily able to comment on whether
 16 or not their experiences were because of the pandemic
 17 and I also must be clear as well that I couldn't comment
 18 on whether or not things had changed for them because of
 19 the pandemic or if this would have happened anyway. But
 20 they had quite a lot distressing experiences that they
 21 did want to share with us.
 22 So because these young people had arrived
 23 unaccompanied they were in state care and a lot of them
 24 didn't feel that they had very good relationships with
 25 those that were meant to be caring for them and they

116

1 felt that the role — that the people within Scottish
2 Refugee Council were doing a lot more to care for them
3 than their state-sponsored carers who some of them felt
4 were not really supporting them in getting to know the
5 sort of day-to-day of life in Scotland and how various
6 things work that they really need to understand, like
7 bills and shopping and things such as that. So a lot of
8 them felt quite alone.

9 They also commented on how they had arrived in
10 Glasgow together, but then they had been split up and
11 sent to different local authorities and they didn't know
12 why and they felt like they had been separated from
13 people that they knew and I think those that had been
14 put into rural areas very much felt that they wanted to
15 be in Glasgow where they had that sense of community.

16 But I think the really main thing that came from
17 them is that they really wanted to be able to mix with
18 other young people their own age, but what was happening
19 for them is that they were being put into college to
20 learn English with a lot of people of all different
21 ages, mostly much older. And they said that there's
22 plenty of nice people around, but they really want to be
23 with young people their own age and they want to be
24 learning skills for their future and potentially
25 learning English through more apprenticeship-style

117

1 schemes and getting to interact with others.

2 I remember one of them talking as well about how
3 they were 16, but they weren't allowed to go to school
4 and they were never able to go to school in their own
5 country and so they were really looking forward to and
6 hoping they would be able to go to school in Scotland
7 but instead they had to go to college and most of the
8 people around them were in their 30's and 40's and that
9 was feeling very isolating for them.

10 Q. Thank you. Then you have got a group of young people
11 with family in prison, if you would tell us about their
12 experiences.

13 A. Sure. So the young people that had a family member in
14 prison, a lot of them I think, very understandably,
15 really struggled with the lack of contact with their
16 family member who they were used to being able to see on
17 at least a semi-regular basis. There was a huge amount
18 of uncertainty about when and whether they would be able
19 to see that person, which was incredibly distressing and
20 very stressful on the family. And they also weren't
21 able to attend the support groups that they were used to
22 attending in person due to the pandemic for a while,
23 which was extra distressing for them.

24 But the other thing that also came through really
25 strongly from that group, and I think this is partly

118

1 just because of the age that they were, but some of them
2 were going through that transition from primary school
3 to secondary school, which was also very, very disrupted
4 by what was going on and they didn't feel prepared at
5 all for going to secondary school and that some
6 important sort of rites of passage of being able to go
7 and visit your school and get to know everything had
8 kind of been taken away from them and so they were
9 really worried about that at the time we spoke to them.

10 Q. And we've heard a bit about transitions and how
11 important it is, particularly for different stages, you
12 know, transitions from primary to secondary or early
13 learning to primary; why was it particularly impactful
14 for this group or were they just reflecting how
15 difficult it was for the rest of their cohort as in
16 their age?

17 A. Yes, I think that they were reflecting how difficult it
18 was for their cohort, but I think for them particularly
19 as well having had the experiences that they had and the
20 uncertainties that they were dealing with, I think it
21 was somewhat heightened for them and the — so I think
22 they just really wanted to talk about that, because it
23 was very present on their mind.

24 But I should say we did hear very similar things
25 from our original young consultants who were

119

1 transitioning from primary to secondary school at the
2 time of that first report as well. At that time,
3 I guess they couldn't go really at all and at this point
4 they could do little bits of things, but I remember one
5 of the participants of this group was talking about how
6 they had had a visit from a secondary school teacher to
7 tell them things that they didn't think were really that
8 useful like how to pack their bags, when what they
9 really wanted to know was what does the school look
10 like, how do I get to where I'm going, what are the
11 expectations on me. And they didn't use these words,
12 but it sounded like what they were saying was a lot of
13 what was going on was a bit trivial to the situation
14 that was actually at hand.

15 Q. Thank you. And then another group you had, I think the
16 last group, was Long Covid Kids Scotland, you engaged
17 with them as well.

18 A. Yes. So we spoke with a group, I think they were
19 between the ages of 8 and 16, online with Long Covid
20 Kids and we also spoke with their parent/carers as part
21 of that as well.

22 So they were experiencing a huge amount of isolation
23 and I would also say a huge amount of anger from some of
24 them. So I think because there had been so much talk in
25 the press and I think from government as well that COVID

120

1 doesn't really affect children and that it's safe for
2 children to go back to school, I think it felt
3 particularly difficult for them, because they felt
4 completely unseen and like everyone was just taking
5 their experiences incredibly trivially, like they didn't
6 matter. So there was a huge amount of anger about that,
7 I think understandably, and some of those young people's
8 lives had been really seriously impacted.

9 So some were having better times than others and had
10 school environments that were quite supportive and doing
11 their best to help the young people feel included when
12 they could go in, but some young people just couldn't go
13 to school at all and they felt there wasn't a lot of
14 care and understanding about why that was the case.

15 But one thing I did think was really important about
16 what they talked about, especially the older ones, was
17 that the period where there was more remote learning
18 actually in some ways was much easier for them to engage
19 with as someone with a serious illness, because they
20 could do it at their own pace and they could get the
21 materials and they felt like they were missing out less,
22 whereas actually when it went much more back to normal
23 for everyone else it was more of a problem for them
24 because they couldn't balance their energies
25 appropriately and they had — for those that had exams

121

1 coming up I think it was particularly stressful that
2 they were being expected to either sit exams when they
3 really didn't feel that it was going to be very easy for
4 them or even possible or really frustrated that due to
5 having had COVID and now having Long COVID, which a lot
6 of people were sort of suggesting that young people
7 couldn't have, and that they weren't getting a lot of
8 dispensation for that, but then also their whole lives
9 to them it felt like had been put on pause. At one
10 moment something great was happening for them and then
11 the next it was going to take them three years to finish
12 one year's worth of exams so it was hugely upending for
13 them and their families.

14 Q. Thank you. Dr Wood, you mentioned the manifesto was the
15 culmination of the work. What's happened to that,
16 what's the next step after that?

17 A. So the manifesto we released that — I can't remember
18 exactly when we released it, but it was quite an
19 extensive manifesto that had a set of I think it was
20 five changes and then a set of principles about
21 basically the Scotland that they would like to see and
22 how they think it could come about.

23 Q. Just for reference, it's at paragraph 89 of your
24 statement. I don't know if it's possible to bring it
25 up. I think the changes start earlier, so I don't know

122

1 if you need that in front of you, but from paragraph 75
2 it's heading "Children and young people's manifesto:
3 future improvements."

4 A. Yes.

5 Q. Excuse me.

6 A. So, yes, so they had a set of principles about what they
7 would like the future to look like and these principles
8 were equality, understanding, dialogue, care, purpose,
9 and environment, and then they had these big changes
10 related to those and a huge amount of them were related
11 to care in their education and care in the systems that
12 support them. And so we released those as a draft
13 manifesto and the idea — and the young people really
14 wanted this to be tested with as many young people as
15 possible.

16 So we put together a survey and a facilitator's pack
17 to get this out there to as many children and young
18 people as possible to see if they agreed or if they
19 thought there were important things missing or really
20 important things that would need to be taken out of a
21 manifesto that represents what they want from the
22 future. Unfortunately, we didn't actually have the
23 resource to launch it to the extent we wanted to so it
24 didn't — we have the full manifesto and a huge amount
25 of work has gone into, but it's not actually something

123

1 we have been able to test with nearly as many young
2 people as we would like, but it has been something that
3 has fed all of our work since and I think has also
4 contributed a lot to the Children's Commissioner's work
5 around what children and young people would like to see
6 from their future.

7 As I said, a huge amount of it is about thinking
8 about how education can be much more centred on children
9 and young people's needs and involve them at every stage
10 and help them feel cared for and motivated through it,
11 as well as social and health systems that really meet
12 people's needs at every stage as well.

13 Q. Thank you. And then finally, Dr Wood, can I ask you to
14 mention if there are any lessons to be learned. We have
15 obviously got your statement, but any particular lessons
16 that you think could be learned from either the project
17 that you undertook or just generally?

18 A. Yes. So I mean I think there's a huge number of lessons
19 that could be learned and I think that the young
20 people's set of 34 asks and their manifesto for future
21 changes I think lay out really a huge number of what
22 those learnings could be.

23 But I think in summary, from my perspective of
24 working with them, I think the first one would be that
25 there needs to be a plan for if something like this

124

1 happens again and it needs to be a coordinated plan with
2 resource and with consistency, because there was just so
3 many different things going on all at once that young
4 people's education and their care didn't seem to be very
5 top priority to be doing something about and it was
6 different in different areas and it was a bit of a
7 patchwork.

8 But at the same time, young people had a lot of
9 shared experiences about what could be better, so I
10 think there's a huge amount of learning in if we had to
11 go back to remote learning, having a clear model in
12 place that would still prioritise things like hearing
13 what's happening to young people in their own terms,
14 really caring about their wellbeing, making sure there's
15 opportunities to collaborate and I think also being
16 really careful about what gets taught and how it gets
17 taught.

18 Because I know some of the reflections from our
19 older young consultants was well that in some ways they
20 feel that the education they had during the pandemic
21 that understandably teachers were trying not to overload
22 them and a lot of them did feel overloaded and it was
23 very overwhelming but they have since realised, like,
24 trying to go to university, for instance, that there
25 were things that were taken out of their course that

125

1 actually is now really fundamental for them to know and
2 now they feel behind.

3 And similarly with exams, we need to have some kind
4 of system sort of what we're going to do with exams that
5 is consistent and is fair and doesn't penalise young
6 people for where they live or for what's going on for
7 them. And I think that a lot of young people felt that
8 that really wasn't in place during the pandemic and
9 they're really worried about whether or not
10 qualifications they have got now really mean as much as
11 if they were got in, say, 2019 or 2024. So they feel a
12 little bit lost in that.

13 So I think those are a couple of really key things,
14 but I think that that sense of just care and making sure
15 that young people feel cared for is the thing that has
16 really come through all of this work because there's a
17 lot of young people now that feel quite disengaged from
18 school and also, just in general, feel quite disengaged
19 and I think we're seeing it more and more in the work we
20 do in schools. It has maybe leveled off a little bit
21 from their heights of just after the pandemic, but there
22 seems to be a lot more disengagement, absenteeism, young
23 people struggling to regulate their behaviour in the
24 environments that we have and there's a lot of
25 opportunities that they seem to have lost that don't

126

1 seem to be coming back or if they have come back, young
2 people aren't aware that they can engage with them
3 again.

4 So young people need a lot more support now with
5 what they can be doing with their mental health and with
6 their education and I think there's a bit of a tendency
7 to go back to normal, but we have gone back to normal
8 and I can definitely say from being in schools before
9 and being in schools after, it is quite different, the
10 behaviour that you see and what young people seem to be
11 going through and the level of loneliness that we
12 witnessed among young people during these projects, but
13 also that we're witnessing now going into schools. And
14 when, you know, a 13-year-old will actually tell you as
15 a relative stranger that they are lonely, I think that
16 says quite a lot and is quite worrying.

17 So I think we need to be doing a lot more that is
18 not just about investing in our standard child and
19 adolescent mental health services, but is also about
20 community and young people talking to each other and
21 having opportunities to socialise, to play, to hang out,
22 to be in their communities and to feel valued, because
23 I don't think the breadth of issues that have arisen
24 through this are going to be solved by just each
25 individual young person that needs having access to a

127

1 single mental health professional. I think we need a
2 much more broad strokes and preventative approach than
3 we have at the moment.

4 Q. I almost forgot. Just in relation to the SQA and the
5 alternative certification model, were there any
6 particular aspects of that that arose or were mentioned
7 by the young consultants you engaged with?

8 A. Yes. So that definitely happened to quite a few of our
9 young consultants that were in older years and from
10 different areas they were also able to kind of compare
11 notes on what was happening in their various schools, so
12 there was a lot of very palpable frustration and anger,
13 particularly around the results that were determined by
14 the algorithm.

15 We had young people from one area where they were
16 basically saying "I got As, but my As mean nothing
17 because everyone is getting As because of where we
18 live". And then someone who was, you know, on track to
19 get As and then was given all Ds because of the place
20 she lived and was basically saying "It's impossible for
21 me to achieve, because someone has just decided that the
22 place I live means I can't". So there was huge, huge
23 anger and we could see that real diversity of experience
24 from talking with them. So it was clearly incredibly
25 unfair and obviously it did get changed in the end, but

128

1 the young people I think lost a lot of trust in the
2 system from having been through that and having put in a
3 huge amount of work in difficult circumstances and then
4 that's what happened to them, they were not okay about
5 it at all.

6 Q. Thank you very much, Dr Wood.

7 My Lord, I have no further questions for Dr Wood.

8 THE CHAIR: Very good. Thank you very much. Dr Wood,
9 that's all.

10 We're well ahead of schedule, Ms van der Westhuizen,
11 we're due back at quarter past 3. I know that
12 Ms Stewart has asked for a little extra time, if it's
13 possible to come back before then I'm more than happy to
14 do it, but I don't know if that can be arranged or not.
15 I will leave it to you to see what can be done, if
16 anything.

17 MS VAN DER WESTHUIZEN: Thank you, my Lord, I will take it
18 up upstairs.

19 THE CHAIR: Very good, if I don't hear to the contrary,
20 quarter past 3.

21 (2.42 pm)

22 (A short break)

23 MS STEWART: Good afternoon, Lord Brailsford.

24 THE CHAIR: Good afternoon, Ms Stewart. Have you got a
25 witness for us? You have two, don't you?

129

1 MS STEWART: I do, yes, my Lord, we have a panel of two this
2 afternoon, Ms Whitelock of the organisation LEAD,
3 Linking Education and Disability, and Mr Read of the
4 Scottish Transitions Forum facilitated by the
5 organisation ARC.

6 THE CHAIR: Very good. Good afternoon, Ms Whitelock and
7 Mr Read.

8 EMMA WHITELOCK: Good afternoon.

9 SCOTT RICHARDSON—READ: Good afternoon.

10 EMMA WHITELOCK

11 SCOTT RICHARDSON—READ

12 Examination—in—chief by MS STEWART

13 MS STEWART: Mr Read, can you tell us your full name?

14 SCOTT RICHARDSON—READ: Do I need to press the button to
15 speak or is it just on?

16 Q. No, your microphones are on.

17 SCOTT RICHARDSON—READ: Okay. My full name and title or
18 just full name?

19 Q. Yes, full name, please.

20 SCOTT RICHARDSON—READ: It's Scott Richardson—Read.

21 Q. Thank you. And is it okay if we address you as Mr Read?

22 SCOTT RICHARDSON—READ: Yes, it's shorter.

23 Q. That's what we have been addressing you as so far. And
24 you provided a response to a Rule 8 request to the
25 Inquiry; is that right?

130

1 SCOTT RICHARDSON—READ: That's right, yes.

2 Q. And this can be found at SCI—ARC—000007.

3 And, Ms Whitelock, your full name, please?

4 EMMA WHITELOCK: Emma Whitelock.

5 Q. Thank you, and you have provided a witness statement to
6 the Inquiry.

7 EMMA WHITELOCK: Correct, yes.

8 Q. And this can be found at WT0197. Now, your respective
9 witness statement and Rule 8 set out information for us
10 about your work on supporting people to transition from
11 children's services to adult services. Now, we're
12 interested in hearing from you today in connection with
13 this transition in relation to education services.

14 First of all, by way of background, Ms Whitelock, can
15 you please tell us a bit about LEAD, about what its work
16 involves and what your role is, in particular insofar as
17 it relates to education.

18 EMMA WHITELOCK: Great, thank you for that. Well, unusually

19 I have had eight jobs at LEAD Scotland and I have been
20 the CEO since 2015 so I have got some strategic and
21 operational knowledge about post—school education and
22 disability. I guess I lead the organisation taking
23 forward our strategic ambition, we support disabled
24 people and unpaid carers and we support people to move
25 forward into further learning, volunteering,

131

1 employability pathways and work. We provide local
2 learning opportunities — local learning services in
3 nine local authority areas, online opportunities across
4 Scotland, we have got befriending services in Fife, we
5 run Scotland's national helpline for disabled people and
6 going through transition from that helpline and we
7 support people to have a say via our policy work.

8 Q. Thank you. Can I ask you what's the profile of LEAD's
9 service users in respect of what their needs are, what
10 age they are?

11 EMMA WHITELOCK: Yes. Great question. So what I would say
12 the kind of profile is that people are generally —
13 learners are generally age 16 right through life into
14 nineties and we've got different projects giving
15 different targeted approaches, but what might be in
16 common with a lot of people is lacking confidence, some
17 people lack expectation, not knowing where to start,
18 what options there are, seeking guidance.

19 We act as a bridge to connect people with their
20 ambition and then support people in a person—centred way
21 one to one, often with a home visit to get started and
22 from there then first step can be taken, will they be
23 learning at home, learning in the community, moving to
24 college, employability pathways. It's person centred so
25 lots and lots of different journeys, lots of partners

132

1 involved and then we will exit and they will move on to
 2 assist in each pathway, if that gives enough of an
 3 overview.
 4 Q. It does thank you. In terms of thinking about your
 5 title, Linking Education and Disability, are all of your
 6 service users, are they disabled?
 7 EMMA WHITELOCK: Most people are disabled and we work with
 8 around unpaid carers, primarily because they experience
 9 similar barriers. And when we say "disabled people",
 10 some people don't identify with that label. So we don't
 11 ask people to prove that, but most people would be
 12 disabled under the wider definition of the Equality Act
 13 and it's --- we work with people pan impairment, people
 14 with mental health difficulties, physical impairments,
 15 sensory impairments, you know, really quite a lot.
 16 We've got a great breadth of people who come and use our
 17 services.
 18 Q. Thank you. And one the projects that LEAD was involved
 19 in, was it formed, the Transitions Forum, which Mr Read
 20 is a part of.
 21 EMMA WHITELOCK: Yes.
 22 Q. Can you please tell us, please, tell us a little bit,
 23 Mr Read, about the forum again, what its work involves
 24 and your own role, in particular, concerning education?
 25 SCOTT RICHARDSON--READ: Yes, so, my official title is --- I

133

1 forgot what my title was there for a second --- policy
 2 and development worker or policy development officer for
 3 the Scottish Transitions Forum and the Scottish
 4 Transitions Forum works with organisations like LEAD in
 5 the third sector and what you would call NGOs, I guess,
 6 or voluntary sector organisations, alongside education,
 7 health, social work, employability, Skills Development
 8 Scotland, transport benefits, anyone who has skin in the
 9 game to help young people move from being a young person
 10 into young adult life or adult life and we primarily
 11 focus within that within the 14 to 25-year-old age range
 12 with young people. And we use the phrase "additional
 13 support needs" because it encompasses all of the
 14 additional support needs that young people might have,
 15 including disability, autism, mental health, et cetera,
 16 et cetera which might have a focus for this Inquiry
 17 today.
 18 So, yes, primarily we bring together these
 19 organisations like LEAD and others. We are a membership
 20 organisation, but it's not paid. We have over 1,120
 21 members --- I checked this morning, so that's hot off the
 22 press --- who we encourage and help to work together to
 23 improve transitions for that particular demographic in
 24 Scotland.
 25 Q. Thank you. And you mention in your Rule 8 response that

134

1 the Divergent Influencers are an important part of the
 2 work that you do. Can you tell us a bit about who these
 3 people are and what they're seeking to achieve and
 4 influence?
 5 SCOTT RICHARDSON--READ: Yes, the Divergent Influencers is
 6 the Sunday name. I tend to call them the DIs because it
 7 is a bit easier.
 8 So the DIs or the Divergent Influencers are a group
 9 of young people with additional support needs who
 10 represent an intersectional cross-section of young
 11 people that have gone through transition and moved into
 12 young adult life in Scotland. All the work that we do
 13 strategically is based around the experience and the
 14 lived experience of the groups of young people and
 15 others and young adults that some of my colleagues work
 16 with around what it is that makes a difference.
 17 So the DIs obviously were going through transition
 18 during the pandemic, which I was working alongside. And
 19 we have just formed as a group in 2019 and we had our
 20 first proper meeting in January, I think, just as people
 21 started to talk about the pandemic. So we got to know
 22 each other very well and what was going on in those
 23 years of the pandemic actually and did a lot of work
 24 together.
 25 Q. Thank you. I'll come on to ask you a little bit more

135

1 about the DIs a little bit later on. I want to focus
 2 with you both this afternoon on post school transitions.
 3 I'm aware you deal with transitions at all ages and
 4 stages of education, but for today I want to focus on
 5 post school.
 6 Ms Whitelock, could you explain to us what
 7 transitions are and why they're important?
 8 EMMA WHITELOCK: Well, moving from children --- being a young
 9 person into your next steps an adult can be a real cliff
 10 edge for young people and families. So it's really
 11 important that they are supported, that the right people
 12 are in the room, sufficient breadth of options and
 13 opportunities are looked at and that people make
 14 informed choices about what is next.
 15 It is also a key time. There is a lot of other
 16 scaffolding that needs to be put in place for successful
 17 transitions. So it's moving from school into college or
 18 community-based education or employability pathways, but
 19 it might also be looking at housing, moving from
 20 children to adult services, health, you know, and
 21 lots --- there's lots and lots of things going on at that
 22 stage. So it's a very stressful time for people.
 23 It's also an important time to stick with people and
 24 support people through it, because it's easy for this
 25 sort of overwhelming period to disengage and so really

136

1 providing continuity of support that's really important.
 2 It can fall down at various parts of it so it's
 3 important to do it, and it's important for families too.
 4 If somebody has been at school for five days a week and
 5 then they move on to and they haven't been supported
 6 into the next steps appropriately, they may end up doing
 7 something for half a day a week, which impacts not only
 8 on that person, there's a waste of their talent and
 9 potential, it may be that family members have to give up
 10 work to stay and support people as well, so it can be a
 11 very impactful. People worry about it and there is a
 12 lot of fear around it.
 13 And sometimes it goes well, but sometimes it's quite
 14 challenging, it doesn't go so well and it kind of
 15 long-lasting impacts if it doesn't go well. As an
 16 organisation, we work sometimes with peoples in their
 17 thirties, forties and fifties for whom that transition
 18 pathway didn't go well and really they are still
 19 recovering and still don't expect to be an equal
 20 citizen, to have the equal opportunities to move into
 21 different pathways all through life. So it's important
 22 people are valued and listened to and have a good
 23 starting position on that at that stressful time.
 24 Q. What you're describing is the transition planning that
 25 appears throughout your statement, Ms Whitelock, and

137

1 also in the Rule 8 response from ARC.
 2 Pre-pandemic, Ms Whitelock, what did this transition
 3 planning look like? For example, is it an event or a
 4 process and who's involved in that?
 5 EMMA WHITELOCK: I think I'll pass this one to Scott because
 6 he's so heavily involved with the rhetoric and I think
 7 he can give value by giving a really full answer to this
 8 one.
 9 SCOTT RICHARDSON-READ: Thanks.
 10 EMMA WHITELOCK: You're welcome.
 11 SCOTT RICHARDSON-READ: So transitions for members of the
 12 Scottish Transitions Forum isn't an event. It's not
 13 like a "one and you're done" thing. It's not a switch.
 14 It's not posting a letter. It's a drawn-out process and
 15 it's a process that's supported by legislation, like the
 16 Additional Support for Learning Act, and it's primarily
 17 responsibility for transition sits within education to
 18 draw together appropriate agencies, which is health,
 19 social work, college, Skills Development Scotland,
 20 anybody who has got skin in the game of helping this
 21 young person succeed.
 22 That's what the law says and that's what should
 23 happen, but frequently before the pandemic it wasn't
 24 fully happening and during the pandemic, you can
 25 imagine, if it wasn't happening fully before the

138

1 pandemic, it got even worse during COVID. There is
 2 rhetoric around supporting the rights for a young person
 3 to have a voice within the transitions meeting and
 4 technically young people can call anybody they want to
 5 come to that transitions meeting and sit around the
 6 table to help them move into young adult life and, as
 7 Emma said really eloquently, it's not just about
 8 education, employment and training. For these young
 9 people, it's a whole life change.
 10 A lot of them are moving through precarious
 11 processes from children's services into adult services,
 12 which comes with responsibilities for new assessments.
 13 So those adult services might be within social work,
 14 they could be in further or higher education, they could
 15 be within health systems, they could be about learning
 16 to self-refer in terms of physio or OT. It could be, as
 17 you said Emma, about housing, learning to drive, all the
 18 aspirations of a young person.
 19 And also within all of that transition what the DIs
 20 and others that I have spoken to is about the
 21 maintaining and furthering of relationships and other
 22 things that sit around that whole transitions
 23 experience. For a young person who's pretty excited to
 24 be leaving school that they may or may not have liked in
 25 the first place and moving into young adult life,

139

1 I think we can all remember that kind of thing, but for
 2 young people with additional support needs or autism and
 3 disabled people, that's more complicated because a lot
 4 of the picture puzzle or the puzzle pieces sit with the
 5 professionals that are around that table helping you
 6 plan.
 7 And if they're not there to help you make the
 8 decision, or if they're not there to let you know about
 9 how much funding is happening or how the college's
 10 accessibility is or what community opportunities might
 11 exist, you're not going to know and you're not going to
 12 be able to make that step, because you don't know what
 13 you don't know. Sorry if that sounds like a bit of a
 14 riddle.
 15 Q. That's helpful.
 16 SCOTT RICHARDSON-READ: Is there anything you would add,
 17 Emma?
 18 EMMA WHITELOCK: It is just you mentioned the Additional
 19 Support Needs Act, when you're 16 it's the Equality Act
 20 and there are a lot of people — it may seem like a
 21 small point, but it's a huge point. How do you identify
 22 if somebody says I'm a pupil with additional support
 23 needs, they then have to say I'm a disabled person,
 24 because they're thinking under the Equality Act. And
 25 the word "disability" has a social stigma for some

140

1 people and they are unwilling to use that. As an
 2 organisation we try and encourage people to see it as a
 3 positive way to open up and access rights and
 4 entitlements, but that can be a barrier for a lot of
 5 people, even that small language change.
 6 Q. Okay. In terms of you mention, Mr Read, there about
 7 effective transitions not being fully realised
 8 pre-pandemic, why was that?
 9 SCOTT RICHARDSON-READ: It's a good question. There's lots
 10 of reasons.
 11 Q. Probably quite a complex question.
 12 SCOTT RICHARDSON-READ: Yes, it's really complex and there's
 13 lots of reasons. I should have mentioned we work very
 14 strategically within Scottish Government and people like
 15 ADES and the strategic bodies that are in help,
 16 education and healthcare to kind of group together under
 17 principles and standards and primarily we've found like
 18 seven places where it usually falls down and that's a
 19 lack of information, a lack of coordination, a lack of
 20 planning, people not getting the support that they need
 21 and we're not necessarily talking about a service here,
 22 we're talking about support in the general terms.
 23 People not planning early enough and nobody really
 24 taking accountability of the process and it is not just
 25 one person's responsibility or one profession's

141

1 responsibility. The responsibility sits across multiple
 2 different professional areas that each have a role to
 3 play and, if any of these are out of sync or not
 4 working, it will compound the issue, so you can imagine
 5 that lots of those fell by the wayside during COVID.
 6 Q. In terms of the timing, as you said, it doesn't always
 7 happen early enough, at what point in a child's school
 8 education would transition planning commence?
 9 SCOTT RICHARDSON-READ: By law?
 10 Q. For them to consider post-school transitions?
 11 SCOTT RICHARDSON-READ: But law, it should happen at least a
 12 year before the young person is due to leave school, but
 13 that doesn't mean it has to happen at least a year
 14 before the young person, it can happen sooner than that.
 15 And we find for young people with complex health
 16 conditions, in particular, life-shortening conditions,
 17 that needs more planning time and some people even start
 18 to look at transition for that young person around about
 19 the age of 14, sometimes 13, just to make sure that when
 20 they leave school — they could potentially leave at 16,
 21 I suppose, but usually they would stay on until they're
 22 18 — everything is in place in terms of healthcare
 23 needs, social care needs, educational needs, housing
 24 needs, accessibility needs, transport needs, benefit
 25 needs and they fully are realising their own autonomy

142

1 and their right to have a voice in the meetings that
 2 kind of follow from that, because there's a huge step
 3 change from being a young person and having your mum and
 4 dad help you make decisions in a rights based way, then
 5 moving into the world of a young adult and all of those
 6 decisions are now yours, because that's the — that's
 7 your right, isn't it, when you become an adult.
 8 So within the transitions process there's also
 9 technicalities around things to do with capacity to make
 10 safe decisions to do with welfare and financial choice
 11 and so for parents who don't realise that their parental
 12 rights stop, have to look at things like power of
 13 attorney and guardianship and other measures to be able
 14 to legally support their young person to be able to make
 15 those choices and that can come as a huge shock too. So
 16 we like to think of the transitions not just for the
 17 young person, though the focus should be on them, but it
 18 is a transition for the entire family, including
 19 brothers and sisters, potentially, who might have to
 20 step into a young carer role for that sibling that they
 21 might have.
 22 Q. Very helpful thank you. I want to come to a section of
 23 your statement with you, Ms Whitelock. You set out for
 24 us, starting at paragraph 9, about the impact of the
 25 closure education settings had on transitions and you

143

1 speak at various points throughout your statement of a
 2 break down of transition pathways. Can you tell us what
 3 it is you mean and it's a phrase you've used this
 4 afternoon, "a transition pathway", what's meant by that?
 5 EMMA WHITELOCK: Well, in this case going from school to
 6 what's next, you know some people their transition
 7 planning halted so then that impacts on the pathway or
 8 the transition planning may have started, but at the
 9 point when, you know, the COVID-19 locked everything
 10 down, then it had to change. But people weren't
 11 initially around to talk to what that change might look
 12 like and so some people disengaged and that was let to
 13 be happen and so.
 14 And there was — some people were furloughed, as you
 15 know, which meant — we talked earlier about that kind
 16 of scaffolding of support and if somebody was seeking
 17 mental health support as well and they couldn't access
 18 that or it was very, very limited, we noticed that
 19 really — those problems became amplified for some
 20 people, which meant they weren't in the right head space
 21 to continue.
 22 So these are some of the challenges.
 23 Moving online, for some people they thought, well, I
 24 have been asking to go online and I was told "no" and
 25 now I can, great. And for some people this was a big

144

1 barrier . You know, the digital inclusion --- digital
 2 exclusion is statistically worse for disabled people.
 3 And during the pandemic, just because you may get access
 4 to a device, doesn't mean you know how to use it and go
 5 straight into using it to learn.
 6 If you had agreed in-class support as part of your
 7 transition pathway and planning and that then wasn't
 8 available , then it's down to there a family member to
 9 support? Some people reported --- parents phoned the
 10 helpline reported that young people were very anxious.
 11 There was a young person with autism, for example, who
 12 didn't want to put their camera on and found the whole
 13 thing quite stressful . There was lots of different
 14 examples about the pathways being, you know, from
 15 parents coming ---
 16 But I don't know if I can mention it now, but one of
 17 the things I mention later on is that the sector to some
 18 extent had shrunk a bit in that there were less
 19 provision, less places for people to move on to. If we
 20 think about community learning and development for
 21 example, that's a sector that has had reduced funding
 22 over a long period and in the CLD plans between 2018 and
 23 2021, it was noted in an aspect review by
 24 Education Scotland, as I wrote, that actually there
 25 weren't very many options for young disabled people.

145

1 That's potentially --- that could have been a strong
 2 pathway for people during this period, smaller groups,
 3 you know, local availability , but that wasn't
 4 necessarily to be there, because that sector wasn't
 5 targeting it . So that means, I guess, there's a lack of
 6 available pathways and those pathways change, look
 7 different or weren't there.
 8 We were trying to have some people move into
 9 volunteering, that can be added value to learning,
 10 active citizenship volunteering, but furloughing meant
 11 very few places were available and there was a lack of
 12 support for these to happen. And then some things don't
 13 translate well online . If you're doing a practical
 14 course, it's hard to translate that online . I'm sure
 15 I know there's more.
 16 Is there anything you want to answer in there while
 17 I have a think.
 18 Q. I was going to come to you, Mr Read, you've mentioned,
 19 Ms Whitelock, about the role of other professionals and
 20 you've give examples of social work, health and
 21 education working alongside each other.
 22 EMMA WHITELOCK: There's one more. Just the idea about a
 23 pathway can be supported by different professionals and
 24 what you find is that colleges and health and social
 25 services may not agree who's responsible for what

146

1 aspects of this and that worsened during COVID we noted
 2 as well .
 3 Q. And did that cross-sector working worsen? You mentioned
 4 furlough, is that the reason that it was more difficult?
 5 EMMA WHITELOCK: Yes, I would say we felt a little bit more
 6 as an island as an organisation at times, because people
 7 we were used to dealing with to support transitions had
 8 been pulled away to do other things now. It's
 9 understandable, we understood that, but of course it's
 10 impactful in that then some of our staff were feeling,
 11 well, what, should they step into different roles or
 12 they feel more alone. And it's frustrating for people
 13 to think I can't move this person on, because I can't
 14 get to the right person or to the right opportunity.
 15 That all changed so that was quite difficult .
 16 Q. That's helpful and just thinking there on the theme of
 17 other professionals and them being, as you say, pulled
 18 away to other roles , I want to come to you on that very
 19 point.
 20 Mr Read, ARC has published a report of a survey
 21 undertaken in connection with the views of parents and
 22 carers about the impact of COVID-19 and the lockdown on
 23 transition planning. Now you have summarised the
 24 findings of that --- those surveys very helpfully from
 25 page 9 and following of your response and they're also

147

1 on ARC's website for anybody who wishes to look at
 2 those. At page 13 of your Rule 8 response you're
 3 setting out the findings of that parent's survey and you
 4 mention that there was a lack of allied health
 5 professionals .
 6 How did this impact the ability of children and
 7 young people to have a transition, either into education
 8 or between education services?
 9 SCOTT RICHARDSON-READ: Again, a complex question, because
 10 different young people are engaged, as we've already
 11 kind of discussed, with different professionals around
 12 the table. Allied health professionals , like
 13 educational psychologists or speech and language or OT
 14 or physio or mental health services, is probably the
 15 ones I'm primarily focusing on when I say this, but
 16 there are others. That's not all of them.
 17 They, like other professions, were drawn into crisis
 18 situations within the pandemic. So for instance people
 19 who were getting physiotherapy for cerebral palsy that
 20 would stop, because you couldn't actually go and deliver
 21 it, which meant that people had a lessening of their
 22 physicality . That's not a very good phrase, but their
 23 ability to get around was lessened.
 24 The mental health service is really, really hard to
 25 access and for people who --- especially young people who

148

1 are very anxious and video technology is new and kind of
 2 inaccessible or the family are in poverty, which is
 3 there's a huge intersection between being disabled and
 4 being in poverty, they didn't have the digital equipment
 5 required to enable young people to have video call
 6 mental health support services from allied health
 7 professionals. So that fell away too and fell onto the
 8 shoulders of the parents and the families that were
 9 supporting them.

10 Speech and language are absolutely fundamental when
 11 it comes to the transition between, for instance, school
 12 and say a community space, because the speech and
 13 language professional is the one that holds the key to
 14 the communication for that young person. And even
 15 though there is a standardised approach with board maker
 16 or picture symbols, these can be different for every
 17 young person that uses them depending --

18 Q. Can you tell us -- I'm sorry. I don't want to interrupt
 19 your flow there, but you have just referred to two tools
 20 I assume that are used. Can you just explain to us what
 21 they are?

22 SCOTT RICHARDSON--READ: Yes. So they're just -- simply,
 23 they're kind of picture symbols that express, like,
 24 "stop", "I'm unhappy", or "lunch" or "toilet" or they
 25 help people communicate and it's like also known as a

149

1 PECS board. You might be familiar with them when you
 2 have seen people pointing at pictures to kind of
 3 represent what they want to do.

4 They're not all standardised across the piste for
 5 young people. Young people use different symbols,
 6 sometimes symbols that they have created for their own
 7 particular challenges or barriers, and speech and
 8 language therapists hold that information and help that
 9 information travel with the young people to wherever
 10 they are transitioning into. So for instance, those
 11 communication aids might be taught to college support
 12 staff so they know what the particular thing means and
 13 it's speech and language have a particular role in that.
 14 So as they fell away, it almost prevented young people
 15 from having a voice, because this is the way that they
 16 would be working with other professionals in the system.

17 So, yes, there's loads of examples where people
 18 weren't able to access that support. Those are few of
 19 them.

20 Q. In terms of the impact on a young person, there you have
 21 mentioned the impact perhaps on mobility or the ability
 22 to communicate, am I to understand your evidence is that
 23 this pause in that provision impacted their ability or
 24 their readiness to transition to another form of
 25 education?

150

1 SCOTT RICHARDSON--READ: Yes, in short. Imagine if you're a
 2 very anxious young person or somebody that needs more
 3 support and that support is taken away and it's put on
 4 pause because people, and as Emma said, understandably,
 5 have pulled into different formats of crisis, this work
 6 that needs to happen for this young person is put on
 7 pause and they can't necessarily connect with some of
 8 the tools that we put in place such as -- I think we all
 9 remember, is it, Zoom or Teams that we're using? All of
 10 those things, because of digital exclusion and poverty,
 11 and it's the intersection of all of these different
 12 things that really impact a lot of the families.

13 So personally I don't think you can look at this as
 14 a one single issue when it comes to transition. A lot
 15 of the young people I was working with or two of the --
 16 [Redacted]
 17 (A short break)

18 (3.37 pm)

19 MS STEWART: Good afternoon, my Lord.

20 THE CHAIR: Good afternoon again, Ms Stewart.

21 MS STEWART: There was, as I said just before we broke
 22 there, a breach of our restriction order, but I am
 23 advised that has now been resolved and we're able to
 24 continue.

25 Thank you. Mr Read, I was taking you there to a

151

1 section of your Rule 8 response at page 11.
 2 Ms Whitelock had been speaking there about barriers to
 3 online learning and you had spoken about the removal of
 4 allied health professionals from certain of their duties
 5 in connection with these children and the impact of
 6 that.

7 At page 11 here you say "I think ... " Sorry, I
 8 should explain this is the contribution from a parent
 9 and you're quoting from a parent who responded to your
 10 survey and they say:

11 "I think school should have been extended for a year
 12 for our guys especially."

13 Is that a concern that was expressed strongly or
 14 repeatedly in response to your survey by the parents?

15 SCOTT RICHARDSON--READ: It's a response that's expressed
 16 often. There is precedent within the transitions
 17 process for that last year of a young person to be at
 18 school to do a lot of that kind of further learning that
 19 helps them be independent outside of school. So it
 20 could involve things like travel training or self care
 21 or -- so without that last year being at school, a lot
 22 of those skills aren't learnt or aren't managed or a lot
 23 of the learning that that young person might be able to
 24 achieve isn't achieved.

25 So a lot of parents asked to -- and Emma might be

152

1 able to come on this from a lead point of view — extend
 2 even or add an additional education year to make sure
 3 that that learning is embedded or especially focus on
 4 those skills and that involves a lot of the transitions
 5 planning in that year. So if we reflect back to young
 6 people should be supported to transition from school
 7 according to law at least a year before they're due to
 8 leave school, it's that year where often a lot of the
 9 professionals and allied health professionals and others
 10 and third sector organisations get literally around the
 11 table with the parent and young person and/or carer and
 12 start that planning.

13 There's also the information that should be passed
 14 on. There's an information duty. Six months before the
 15 young person is due to leave school, the school has a
 16 duty to pass on the information to whichever service
 17 that they're moving to next. So that would be passing
 18 on information to the college. So without that year,
 19 that process doesn't happen, or it does happen, but it
 20 was happening during COVID, during video calls and we
 21 have already discussed how a lot of that was
 22 inaccessible or parents were having to sit with their
 23 young person to help them manage the online classroom
 24 setting or they weren't getting it or, yes, so like a
 25 different kind of change.

153

1 But for some young people it took away all their
 2 anxiety as well. So that at home schooling situation,
 3 school is their safe space, it's expressed in the
 4 findings of the report too that it is a young person's
 5 safe space, especially if they find school challenging
 6 and people were worried that that would then become the
 7 norm and they would lose all of the skills that they
 8 would need to engage with college or employment or
 9 training or further life opportunities, because they
 10 feel very comfy with their families and they're not
 11 having to kind of stretch themselves a little bit or
 12 challenge themselves when it comes to things that they
 13 find anxiety provoking or that kind of end of school.

14 Has that answered your question?

15 Q. It does, thank you.

16 I want to think to come to you, Ms Whitelock, just
 17 in relation to the breakdown of transition pathways and
 18 you have explained to us both of you already the impact
 19 of that on the learners and a little bit about the
 20 impact on the families, but what was the result of that?
 21 What was the impact of that breakdown? Were people just
 22 left? Was there more pressure on parents and carers,
 23 for example?

24 EMMA WHITELOCK: Yes, and some people disengaged, you know.

25 I think further down our statement you'll see that we

154

1 stepped up and tried to run befriending services for
 2 some people to see if that would kind of keep people
 3 engaged to then go back to learning. So some people did
 4 engage — disengage and I think some parents spent a lot
 5 of time trying to fight and ask for answers as well and
 6 some people phoned the helpline quite worried about the
 7 fact they couldn't get answers or the transition — as I
 8 mentioned, transition planning had started, it had been
 9 agreed, and then had to change, but they weren't sure
 10 how or the new terms weren't suitable. How do they
 11 renegotiate? How do you re-contract when the person is
 12 midway when you are not quite one thing or another?

13 I'm aware that some people — obviously when
 14 lockdown was there, there was no need for travel
 15 training, but in the space between school and let's say
 16 going to college, there can be a need for travel
 17 training. And so when you're ready to go back to
 18 in-person, how does that then get started at that later
 19 point? So some challenges around that.

20 I need to look into it further, but for some people
 21 there were some interruptions to their qualification
 22 profiles which of course is important going forward. So
 23 we are aware of some people accessing our adult services
 24 who don't have qualifications, they didn't finish them
 25 at school and we were aware of some home learners,

155

1 again, who didn't finish them at school and they're now
 2 seeking to do that as an adult. So it breaks the
 3 momentum for people as well and it takes quite a strong
 4 network to continue to move forward in that, but for
 5 some people they maybe don't have that resilience at
 6 that point and then you're sort of starting again.

7 I am not sure if that answers your question.

8 Q. It does. In terms of the helpline you mentioned, did
 9 transitions or particularly post-school transitions
 10 feature heavily in the requests and the queries you got?

11 EMMA WHITELOCK: Yes, they do anyway actually, they do.
 12 It's sort of an impartial space for people to understand
 13 what's reasonable to ask. We don't necessarily go into
 14 the rooms with people, but parents will phone up and I
 15 noted that from asking my team some parents are sort of
 16 outraged with the lack of provision. I mentioned that
 17 cliff edge at the start. So the lack of provision for
 18 the young person, it almost seems that the more support
 19 you need to learn and perhaps the lower level of an —
 20 the lower the level you're learning at an academic
 21 level, the less support available, the less options for
 22 you to move on to. And so that was a problem before the
 23 pandemic amplified through it and it's still a problem.

24 Q. Thank you. I want to finally just ask you, Mr Read,
 25 about the Divergent Influencers you mentioned at the

156

1 outset of your evidence. You've set out again in your
2 Rule 8 response that they created podcasts and they
3 published a magazine called Quaranzine. The magazine
4 contains artwork, poetry and prose that sets out their
5 experiences during the lockdown and the Inquiry has a
6 note of that.

7 I can quote from one contribution there. It says:
8 "There has been a mixture of negatives and positives
9 of living life during lockdown. Examples of negatives
10 was being told I wouldn't be able to do at the final
11 exams, which was a major anticlimax. This would have
12 been an opportunity to improve my final marks. I also
13 felt really lost during lockdown due to my routine
14 suddenly being changed. It had an impact on my mental
15 health. I felt anxious going out and at risk of
16 catching coronavirus."

17 And there's not a particular mention there of
18 transitions, but I wondered if you could summarise for
19 us, Mr Read, if you feel able to speak on behalf of the
20 Divergent Influencers, what they consider to be the
21 impact the pandemic and the pandemic response had on
22 their transitions.

23 SCOTT RICHARDSON—READ: They could probably tell you
24 themselves. I think it would be best coming from them
25 and I think they have already spoken to some of your

157

1 counsel already.

2 Q. Yes, in relation our Let's Be Heard project has been in
3 touch of with the Divergent Influencers. So it may be
4 that you feel able to offer something just now on their
5 behalf or it may be that you would rather leave that
6 engagement to them.

7 SCOTT RICHARDSON—READ: I think overall they have been
8 really anxious about it. Some of them have — are still
9 not over the pandemic and the anxiety that that brought
10 with it. Some of them when the pandemic was happening
11 were leaving post and food delivered in their vestibule
12 room because they could close the door between the
13 outside and the inside for three days because that was
14 the advice that they were given so they wouldn't catch
15 COVID and these are people with life-shortening
16 conditions and COVID would have been fatal so you can
17 understand that huge anxiety. Couple that with
18 everything and the mixed messages they were receiving,
19 the anxiety was running really high on the tail end of
20 the pandemic. All of them feel I would use the word
21 "gaslighted" quite significantly by, "Okay, it's fine to
22 now go and do things" and they are hearing still about
23 different strains of COVID, they are plugged into that
24 news, so for them it's been very, very complicated and
25 nerve-racking. And also, I guess on the other side of

158

1 it, as a positive, it has made them realise, as Emma
2 said, that a lot of them were fighting for accessibility
3 within university classes because some of them have gone
4 to university and college and flat no, we do not deliver
5 classes online, flat no, pandemic happens, oh, do you
6 know what, we've managed to suddenly provide everything
7 that you were asking for because the majority of people
8 now need it and if anything it has probably galvanized
9 them more to question the decisions that are happening
10 around disability and autism and accessibility and
11 equality and inclusion and what that actually means for
12 them but, yes, they will — they will be able to tell
13 you themselves and if you want to listen to the podcast,
14 it's kind of clear, I think, from that.

15 Q. Thank you. We have the podcasts and also the copies of
16 the Quaranzine which I mentioned which we will of course
17 take that into account but that was helpful for you to
18 set that out for us. Just in closing, I want to ask
19 both of you if you consider there are key lessons that
20 should be applied to address and perhaps mitigate some
21 of the impacts you've spoken about there, some of the
22 long-term and ongoing impacts perhaps, and I'll come to
23 you first, Ms Whitelock?

24 EMMA WHITELOCK: Yes, one of the challenges I think at
25 lockdown was everything had to happen so quickly and

159

1 there wasn't time to involve people as fully as we might
2 do so perhaps the lesson learned is whilst we all seek
3 to involve people meaningfully in the service design,
4 and, you know, I guess in relation to transition
5 pathways to make sure things were going well, that the
6 speed of the change meant that didn't happen and that
7 meant that a lot of people were left frustrated,
8 anxious, powerless really in that situation and so it
9 kind of goes against the grain of having persons centred
10 transition pathways so perhaps a lesson learned is to
11 seek to try and make sure people have more of a say at
12 that stage and to recognise the impact that it's not
13 just a one thing but mentioned at the start it's a whole
14 scaffolding of things and for some people it's more
15 compounded and to actually think how can we make sure
16 that those people are receiving extra support. I
17 mentioned a minute ago, the more support you need
18 perhaps for some people, the less options and support
19 that's available. Some people — it's a commitment that
20 there will be a post-school transition for people, it's
21 not a complete guarantee, and we are aware of some
22 people who don't — who actually do fall through the net
23 and don't move on to a post-school destination so I
24 think if we get it right for the group of people who are
25 the most marginalised and most excluded and who have

160

1 been hardest hit in this situation , then we're more
 2 likely to get it right for everybody. So I think we've
 3 mentioned some more lessons learned in my statement but,
 4 you know, at the heart of it we had to revert back to
 5 the "doing to" people rather than "working with" people
 6 to some extent and that was just --- it's very
 7 frustrating for people so I think it was quite
 8 negatively impactful and took us back the way probably
 9 around people feeling valued and trusting the very
 10 agencies that people need to trust in order to move
 11 things forward so I think we probably will see the
 12 ripples for a while to come, so, yes. That probably
 13 wasn't very eloquent, sorry, I can perhaps give a fuller
 14 answer afterwards ---
 15 Q. Yes, if you think that would be helpful to provide an
 16 answer to that particular closing question on key
 17 lessons, then please feel free to do that but as you say
 18 we've got some note --- a note of them in your statement
 19 but if that's something you want to do, by all means
 20 that would be helpful. Mr Read?
 21 SCOTT RICHARDSON--READ: So many. I think there are lessons
 22 in how everybody responded to the pandemic and I think
 23 one for me is the lack of agile systems and I think
 24 if --- something for me, if another pandemic comes
 25 around, how do all of the people involved in transitions

161

1 become agile and respond and it has clearly pointed out
 2 that the transitions happens within multiple different
 3 processes within bureaucracy and legislation and
 4 strategy and all of this stuff and at the end of the day
 5 it's just a young person wanting to do what they want to
 6 do with their life and for young people --- or disabled
 7 young people or autistic young people, it's infinitely
 8 more complex and how do we have a system around that
 9 young person that's not only agile but also gets them
 10 what they want to do and where they need to go to
 11 effectively and that's where the pandemic really shone a
 12 light where the friction kind of wore away these things
 13 that people rely on. But also there were lessons that
 14 we all learnt about accessibility and I just want to
 15 reflect on we were able to make all university classes
 16 available online and that is a huge thing for --- not
 17 everyone's cup of tea but granted it's the ways that we
 18 started to look and care for each other and recognise
 19 that there are vulnerable people in society that need
 20 support, huge lessons there, I think, and COVID really
 21 shone a light on all of that and we are not --- we've
 22 stepped away from all of the rhetoric around that. We
 23 used to clap for people, I can't believe some of that
 24 stuff now, and now we know that the health and social
 25 care system are experiencing even more cuts and even

162

1 more lack of funding and transition is just one element
 2 of a huge health and social care service that is
 3 massively underfunded and it's gone past --- it's gone
 4 past efficiency savings and it's gone into real cuts and
 5 if there was a pandemic next month, I think the response
 6 would be even worse than it was in 2020, 2019, because
 7 of what's been happening to health and social care
 8 services in Scotland since then so the rest of the
 9 things are in the report in the section 8.
 10 Q. Thank you. Thank you very much. And thank you both.
 11 My Lord, I have no more questions for the witnesses
 12 unless your Lordship has anything to ask or observe.
 13 THE CHAIR: No, I have got nothing to ask, thank you very
 14 much, Ms Stewart, but I do have something to observe.
 15 And thank you both, I should say before I say this. But
 16 turning to you, Mr Dean, can I thank you for your
 17 bravery frankly or your candour in saying to us at the
 18 end of the evidence, this is in relation to DIs, "you
 19 would be better let them tell you yourself, go to the
 20 people that experienced this". I would like to reassure
 21 you that I actually agree with that sentiment and it has
 22 been something that I have been thinking about quite
 23 hard as I have listened to evidence not only of you but
 24 of other people who have contributed to this particular
 25 sector of the Inquiry. We have a very significant

163

1 repository of statement and informations from people
 2 collected by Let's Be Heard, which I think you alluded
 3 to and have heard of, many thousands of such things, and
 4 including persons in the category that you mentioned,
 5 and I'm going to take particular care to ensure that in
 6 relation to DIs, we seek out some of that information,
 7 I'm sure the team that's doing this will be doing this
 8 in any event but for the avoidance of any doubt, we're
 9 going to look at that very carefully so we can reflect
 10 not what you said secondhand, that is not a criticism of
 11 you at all , but so we can reflect what these people said
 12 themselves and we get it very bluntly and very plainly,
 13 so I hope that's of some reassurance to you.
 14 SCOTT RICHARDSON--READ: Yes, thank you.
 15 THE CHAIR: Good. Right, with that, thank you both again
 16 and that brings us to an end of today's proceedings,
 17 thank you, Ms Stewart, and we're off until Tuesday so I
 18 hope everyone enjoys the weekend.
 19 (3.56 pm)
 20 (The hearing was adjourned to 10 am on Tuesday, 12 November
 21 2024)
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 24
 25

164

1 INDEX

2 STEVEN GRAHAM2
 Examination-in-chief by MS VAN DER WESTHUIZEN2

3 KRISTINA WOOLNOUGH35
 Examination in chief by MS VAN DER WESTHUIZEN ...35

4 DR JENNY WOOD88
 Examination-in-chief by MS VAN DER WESTHUIZEN ...88

5 EMMA WHITELOCK130
 SCOTT RICHARDSON-READ130
 Examination-in-chief by MS STEWART130

7

8

9

10

11

12

13

14

15

16

17

18

19

20

21

22

23

24

25

A
abandoned (3) 61:11 68:17
79:22
abandonment (1) 85:11
aberdeen (2) 22:24 95:24
ability (7) 17:15 98:9 100:5
148:6,23 150:21,23
able (61) 7:15 10:16 11:23
12:14 13:12 17:14 20:4
26:23 29:6 53:10 57:18
58:23 60:3,12 62:14,16,20
64:8,15 67:9 71:13 76:13
79:16 82:21 89:4 93:20
94:6,24 98:10 99:9,17,20
100:25 101:4 102:14
105:2,18 113:3,25 116:15
117:17 118:4,6,16,18,21
119:6 124:1 128:10 140:12
143:13,14 150:18 151:23
152:23 153:1 157:10,19
158:4 159:12 162:15
above (2) 37:3 85:1
absence (9) 52:15,22,25 53:3
62:25 74:11 85:5,9,13
absences (3) 50:13 53:12
75:21
absent (3) 75:8,14,23
absenteeism (3) 53:2 85:10
126:22
absolutely (4) 11:15 77:22
116:5 149:10
abuse (1) 67:8
academic (5) 8:6 77:12 80:8
88:20 156:20
acceptable (1) 80:12
accepted (1) 28:2
access (24) 18:13 22:2 27:2
39:2 49:19 51:1,8 55:16
56:6 63:19 66:4,20 67:25
70:20 98:12,13,15 99:8
127:25 141:3 144:17 145:3
148:25 150:18
accessed (2) 35:18,24
accessibility (5) 140:10
142:24 159:2,10 162:14
accessible (2) 9:15 32:24
accessing (2) 65:1 155:23
accounting (2) 83:5 153:7
account (2) 73:5 159:17
accountability (1) 141:24
accredited (1) 30:12
accumulating (1) 7:2
achieve (4) 103:18 128:21
135:3 152:24
achieved (1) 152:24
achievements (1) 85:1
acquire (1) 16:10
across (32) 4:24 8:10 11:2
14:2 15:17 19:10
22:7,23,24 25:4,10 28:20
33:3 40:23,25 41:21 47:1
48:22 49:2 52:1 56:4
65:3,7 70:21 94:4 96:3
107:11,12 114:12 132:3
142:1 150:4
action (2) 45:9 89:9
active (1) 146:10
activities (2) 9:23 52:4
activity (1) 17:2
actually (50) 4:9 10:6 17:12
19:21 40:20 43:6,10 44:4
59:21 62:17,21 65:5 67:9
75:25 77:3 80:13 82:16
91:20 92:6,10 94:5 97:13
98:20 99:5 100:5 101:17
102:21 103:6,10 105:4
112:24 113:2 114:17
115:13 116:2 120:14
121:18,22 123:22,25 126:1
127:14 135:23 145:24
148:20 156:11 159:11
160:15,22 163:21
add (6) 3:25 32:17 87:12
102:13 140:16 153:2
added (3) 99:7 114:14 146:9

adding (1) 4:25
addition (1) 4:21
additional (26) 4:6 16:24
47:25 52:11 57:21 60:16
66:4 67:23 68:15,21
69:2,18,19 70:3 71:19
106:9 111:6,7 134:12,14
135:9 138:16 140:2,18,22
153:2
address (7) 24:23 81:20 85:4
86:5,7 130:21 159:20
addressed (2) 32:5 67:11
addressing (1) 130:23
ades (1) 141:15
adjoined (1) 164:20
adjoinment (1) 87:22
administered (1) 17:5
adolescent (1) 127:19
adult (15) 97:1 131:11
134:10,10 135:12 136:9,20
139:3,11,13,25 143:5,7
155:23 156:2
adults (3) 58:11 102:16
135:15
advance (2) 32:6 36:10
advanced (1) 14:13
advertise (1) 29:4
advice (1) 158:14
advised (1) 151:23
advocacytype (1) 41:7
advocating (4) 4:14 67:7
74:1 77:7
affect (3) 5:22 89:12 121:1
affected (1) 31:15
affecting (1) 24:8
affects (1) 4:19
afraid (2) 38:25 65:24
after (8) 42:9 62:19 75:10
76:17 108:13 122:16
126:21 127:9
afternoon (14) 87:23,25
88:2,5 129:23,24
130:2,6,8,9 136:2 144:4
151:19,20
afterwards (2) 71:24 161:14
again (41) 17:22,23 18:17,23
19:5 21:12 29:22 33:4 35:2
39:11 42:14,15,16 44:24
49:15 51:5,17,20
52:14,20,23,23 66:10
71:24 74:24 75:19 83:8
101:24 106:3,5 107:24
109:3 125:1 127:3 133:23
148:9 151:20 156:1,6
157:1 164:15
against (3) 83:12,16 160:9
age (15) 23:13 92:9 95:17
96:11 100:14 109:22 116:1
117:18,23 119:1,16
132:10,13 134:11 142:19
agencies (2) 138:18 161:10
agency (1) 27:8
ages (7) 48:5 95:13,25
107:12 117:21 120:19
136:3
aggregate (2) 25:9 33:2
analysed (1) 8:9
aggregating (1) 4:23
aggressively (1) 80:13
agile (3) 161:23 162:1,9
agm (1) 38:17
agms (1) 38:19
ago (2) 15:18 160:17
agree (2) 146:25 163:21
agreed (5) 105:19,20 123:18
145:6 155:9
ahead (1) 129:10
aids (1) 150:11
aim (1) 89:2
algorithm (1) 128:14
alien (1) 32:14
alleviate (1) 21:12
alliance (2) 11:1 25:18
allied (5) 148:4,12 149:6
152:4 153:9
allow (8) 7:18 8:17 9:20 17:1

21:8 27:3 33:2,4
allowed (10) 11:7,21 13:5,6
16:8 32:22 69:24 76:7
112:22 118:3
allowing (1) 10:20
alluded (1) 164:2
almost (7) 12:4 20:9 21:2
77:4 128:4 150:14 156:18
157:2
along (1) 82:17
alongside (8) 9:7 28:3 34:10
108:8,14 134:6 135:18
146:21
already (25) 6:17 9:13 31:12
53:14 58:3 62:6 63:20
67:24 70:3 82:2 97:1,21
98:17 99:16,19 100:22
103:23 104:9,19 114:4
148:10 153:21 154:18
157:25 158:1
also (124) 4:22 6:6 10:7
16:6,11,17 22:1 28:14
33:11 36:6,14 38:8,16,20
39:7,12,18,22 40:3 41:25
48:16 49:9 52:6,7,18 53:22
54:19 55:11 57:24 60:1
62:21 64:12 66:6,8 69:19
70:3,19 71:7 72:21 73:11
76:13 78:16,25 83:12
85:6,17 87:8 89:8 90:1,17
91:11,19 93:1,7 95:20
96:1,2 97:10,15 98:6
99:2,4,7,22 100:25
101:6,19,20,21,24
102:14,22 103:2 104:7,17
105:21 106:8 107:20,21
108:12,24 109:7,11
110:6,7,12,22,24,25 112:6
113:9,14,20,23 114:10,13
116:17 117:9 118:20,24
119:3 120:20,23 122:8
124:3 125:15 126:18
127:13,19 128:10
136:15,19,23 138:1 139:19
143:8 147:25 149:25
153:13 157:12 158:25
159:15 162:9,13
alternative (10) 25:6 27:20
49:15 51:5,17,20
82:14,24 128:5
although (5) 8:22 18:19
74:24 76:25 82:11
always (8) 1:17 15:11 16:22
39:15 79:13 91:24 102:16
142:6
ambition (2) 131:23 132:20
among (1) 127:12
amongst (2) 78:8 106:25
amount (12) 1:15 10:5
114:5 118:17 120:22,23
121:6 123:10,24 124:7
125:10 129:3
amounts (1) 65:1
amplified (2) 144:19 156:23
analyse (5) 44:12,12,15,17
45:19
analysed (1) 44:7
analysing (3) 45:14,15 54:20
and/or (3) 32:5 46:18 153:11
anecdotally (1) 14:9
anger (4) 120:23 121:6
128:12,23
angry (1) 116:2
annual (1) 38:19
another (18) 8:19 30:1 34:21
35:3 47:1 58:3 76:13 81:9
88:1 96:24 100:6
104:14,23 108:15 120:15
150:24 155:12 161:24
anothers (1) 7:8
answer (8) 38:15 54:8 64:2
78:2 138:7 146:16
161:14,16
answered (1) 154:14
answers (3) 155:5,7 156:7
anticlimax (1) 157:11

anxieties (2) 26:20 98:21
anxiety (12) 25:15,24
30:4,15 31:10 85:16,17
154:2,13 158:9,17,19
anxious (7) 31:17 145:10
149:1 151:2 157:15 158:8
160:8
anybody (9) 4:9 33:3 64:25
alone (2) 117:8 147:12
139:4 148:1
anyone (1) 48:25
anyone (6) 13:16 41:10
68:17 94:22 115:9 134:8
anything (22) 34:3 37:12
39:18 41:21 53:18
67:13,24 71:17 73:15
79:5,9,10 81:5 85:5 87:12
100:2 105:12 129:16
140:16 146:16 159:8
163:12
anyway (4) 40:6 86:8 116:19
156:11
apart (2) 65:15,17
apic (5) 88:24,24 89:16,17
92:18
anything (22) 34:3 37:12
129:12 152:25
asking (17) 46:8 47:4
51:1,7,17 52:8,15,19 76:11
81:25 86:15 102:8 103:11
113:5 144:24 156:15 159:7
140:16 146:16 159:8
163:12
apart (2) 65:15,17
apic (5) 88:24,24 89:16,17
92:18
apologies (1) 10:25
apparent (1) 1:9
appeal (1) 84:8
appears (1) 137:25
applicable (1) 38:23
applications (1) 30:7
applied (4) 32:2 84:12
112:22 159:20
apply (4) 84:15,20,22,23
apprenticeshipstyle (1)
117:25
approach (6) 12:2 20:14
21:8 80:6 128:2 149:15
approaches (1) 132:15
appropriate (2) 5:2 138:18
appropriately (2) 121:25
137:6
approximately (1) 22:16
apps (1) 56:16
april (5) 6:12 41:11 46:4,21
92:21
aprilmay (1) 96:18
arc (3) 130:5 138:1 147:20
arcs (1) 148:1
area (10) 7:2 24:20 25:19
50:21 65:22 83:6 99:4
101:6,6 128:15
areas (21) 7:4 16:23
22:24,25 47:8 57:5 66:1
83:14 95:22,23 96:4
107:2,11 109:13,14 110:9
117:14 125:6 128:10 132:3
142:2
arise (5) 89:6 112:22 127:2
152:22,22
arisen (1) 127:23
arising (3) 72:13 106:23
107:16
arose (3) 71:16 72:17 128:6
around (60) 4:6 7:1,25 10:23
29:24,25 41:12 47:13
50:22 52:23 56:25 57:25
59:25 64:18 74:13,25 76:8
80:3,11 81:4,22 82:18
83:1,7 89:10,20 90:4,14,22
100:13 102:18,18 105:24
106:14,22 113:18 117:22
118:8 124:5 128:13 133:8
135:13,16 137:12
139:2,5,22 140:5 142:18
143:9 144:11 148:11,23
153:10 155:19 159:10
161:9,25 162:8,22
arranged (1) 129:14
arrangements (4) 53:8 65:9
75:20,22
arrived (3) 116:14,22 117:9
articulate (1) 56:8
articulated (1) 58:8
articulating (1) 28:16
artificially (1) 83:17

artwork (1) 157:4
ask (32) 13:10 15:5 16:17
27:6 35:14 37:17,23 39:23
46:1 55:20 56:18 60:6
64:25 83:19 86:5 89:15,17
97:1,3 100:15 112:12
115:19 124:13 132:8
133:11 135:25 155:5
156:13,24 159:18
163:12,13
asked (14) 28:20 35:9 49:22
50:5,6 53:4 57:9
73:11,14,17,18 105:12
129:12 152:25
asking (17) 46:8 47:4
51:1,7,17 52:8,15,19 76:11
81:25 86:15 102:8 103:11
113:5 144:24 156:15 159:7
79:8 107:13
108:1,20,22,23 109:7,9,11
124:20
aspect (2) 56:10 145:23
aspects (6) 16:11,21 17:15
92:18
58:7 128:6 147:13
aspiration (1) 19:18
aspirations (1) 139:18
assessment (1) 30:12
assessments (3) 70:9 74:6
139:12
assist (2) 15:10 133:2
assistance (1) 45:13
assistant (1) 24:18
assistants (1) 71:10
assisting (1) 17:20
associated (2) 37:6 92:9
associations (2) 36:9,17
assume (1) 149:20
assuming (1) 1:15
assumption (3) 43:11 56:24
57:13
assured (1) 13:3
asylum (3) 110:22 116:11,13
attached (2) 36:16 113:19
attend (3) 47:17 83:6 118:21
attendance (2) 49:20 85:19
attended (2) 38:24 55:8
attending (2) 48:22 118:22
attention (2) 24:14 86:21
attitudes (1) 81:8
attorney (1) 143:13
attractive (1) 82:25
attributable (1) 78:15
audience (4) 101:13,14,15
103:15
audiences (1) 43:24
august (9) 2:23 3:1,7,8 6:18
11:2,11 12:20,22
authorities (21) 9:16 23:1
36:19,21 41:18 45:11
47:1,4 49:4 64:3,5,13 65:8
68:2,11 70:21 76:20,21
85:25 86:4 117:11
authority (13) 5:7 28:9,22
41:6 43:8 48:14 49:5 66:1
67:7,16,17 70:17 132:3
august (6) 2:25 6:11,12
134:15 140:2 145:11
159:10
autistic (2) 31:5 162:7
autonomy (1) 142:25
autumn (1) 82:5
avail (1) 3:24
availability (1) 146:3
available (17) 5:11 10:5
14:14 17:25 22:7 30:9
33:19 44:1 65:10 74:14,15
145:8 146:6,11 156:21
160:19 162:16
averted (1) 104:16
avoid (1) 21:12
avoidance (1) 164:8
avoiding (3) 90:11,21 91:4
awarding (1) 83:5
awards (2) 30:11,12
aware (15) 7:13 12:25 29:1

41:10 43:9 62:9 79:10
109:12 114:25 127:2 136:3
155:13,23,25 160:21
awareness (2) 7:19 32:15
away (18) 23:15 26:2,3,4
60:17 61:14 69:22 71:23
101:10 119:8 147:8,18
149:7 150:14 151:3 154:1
162:12,22
awry (1) 85:21
B
b (1) 20:25
back (60) 3:25 12:7 20:19
25:7 26:14 28:12,13 29:21
34:21 43:2 47:9 48:1
49:13,15 50:8 53:18 54:2,6
58:15 59:15,22 61:1 69:23
71:24 74:2,8 75:14
76:7,14,16,19 77:20 78:20
79:8,16 85:15,23 87:20
91:3 93:12 100:18 104:17
105:6 106:15 107:24
113:15 121:2,22 125:11
127:1,1,7,7 129:11,13
153:5 155:3,17 161:4,8
backed (1) 3:21
background (4) 31:1 88:20
93:18 131:14
backgrounds (2) 96:5 109:22
backlog (1) 70:3
bags (3) 79:24 98:24 113:7
bad (1) 120:8
balance (2) 22:12 121:24
ballooned (1) 26:13
banding (2) 83:10,21
bands (1) 83:9
bank (4) 6:21 7:2 12:5 16:3
barely (1) 115:9
barra (1) 18:12
barread (1) 18:13
barrier (4) 15:17,21 141:4
145:1
barriers (7) 15:13,15,15
17:24 133:19 150:7 152:2
base (1) 39:7
based (15) 7:1,25 61:18
84:14 89:7 94:2
96:11,11,12 107:9,15
108:3 110:20 135:13 143:4
basically (7) 37:12 39:1 82:3
114:2 122:21 128:20,21
basis (3) 77:7 83:2 118:17
bbc (2) 108:8,15
103:15
beaming (1) 3:16
beautiful (1) 8:11
became (7) 9:2 13:15 31:13
62:2 86:13,16 144:19
become (9) 5:11 14:24 18:22
26:8 28:1 31:2 143:7 154:6
162:1
bed (1) 61:12
bedrooms (1) 27:5
before (34) 5:24 6:7 15:4
19:2 31:25 36:3 37:19
42:21 52:5 61:15 67:22
71:16 77:21 81:3 82:16
85:20 86:5,14 89:22 92:17
95:16 100:4,15 127:8
129:13 138:23,25
142:12,14 151:21 153:7,14
156:22 163:15
beforehand (1) 107:7
befriending (2) 132:4 155:1
began (2) 25:3 38:13
beginning (1) 86:2
behalf (2) 157:19 158:5
behave (1) 80:13
behaviour (4) 80:4 85:9
126:23 127:10
behind (3) 1:21 19:18 126:2
being (46) 14:20 15:23 19:7
20:19 25:16 30:23 31:22
50:15 53:9 54:9 56:16
66:10 70:5 75:8,25 76:7
79:6 83:15 87:4,5 91:1

92:25 98:7 99:17 100:25
102:3,24 113:7 117:19
118:16 119:6 122:2 125:15
127:8,9 134:9 136:8 141:7
143:3 145:14 147:17
149:3,4 152:21 157:10,14
believe (10) 3:8 22:9,14,21
64:17 82:8 84:13 87:20
106:14 162:23
bench (1) 83:18
benchmark (1) 83:15
benchmarking (1) 83:19
benefit (3) 77:18 101:9
142:24
benefits (1) 134:8
bereavement (2) 84:10,19
berard (1) 4:5
best (9) 1:20 14:3 19:16
20:22 21:6 13:8 11:15
121:11 157:24
better (9) 14:10 77:14 82:20
83:17 93:16 111:16 121:9
125:9 163:19
between (23) 3:19 4:4 9:25
18:9 22:12 46:24 49:17
57:3 59:9 62:3 65:25 68:10
78:12 95:13 107:19 109:10
120:19 145:22 148:8
149:3,11 155:15 158:12
beyond (5) 12:21 26:8 91:16
92:23 95:21
big (9) 43:24 47:2 93:4 96:7
100:6 102:23 103:22 123:9
144:25
bigger (2) 97:12 106:12
bills (1) 117:7
bill (33) 4:24 14:24 36:13
37:8,17 56:3 63:7 78:1
81:12 84:7 89:12 90:13
95:10 98:10 105:15 114:21
119:10 120:13 125:6
126:12,20 127:6 131:15
133:22 135:2,7,25 136:1
140:13 145:18 147:5
154:11,19
bits (2) 90:1 120:4
blind (1) 89:12
block (1) 17:13
blogs (2) 109:2 111:4
bluntly (1) 164:12
board (4) 10:15 56:5 149:15
150:1
boards (4) 36:19 47:17 48:10
141:15
books (1) 31:23
both (12) 4:20 5:20,21 22:13
37:1 48:11 136:2 154:18
159:19 163:10,15 164:15
bother (1) 98:19
box (2) 44:3 45:16
boxes (3) 44:6 45:16,20
brailford (2) 1:10 129:23
bravery (1) 163:17
brd (1) 3:22
breach (1) 151:22
breadth (3) 127:23 133:16
136:12
break (6) 34:21,24 87:19
129:22 144:2 151:17
breakdown (2) 154:17,21
breakout (1) 107:4
breaks (1) 156:2
bride (2) 18:9 132:19
brief (1) 24:25
briefing (4) 47:15,17 48:20
49:6
briefings (2) 47:13 72:23
brilliant (1) 77:22
bring (7) 18:4 25:11,21 89:9
96:8 122:24 134:18
bringings (1) 71:5
brids (1) 164:16
bring (5) 96:19 97:4,22,25
128:2
broader (1) 38:9
broadly (2) 3:9 29:12

broke (1) 151:21
 brothers (1) 143:19
 brought (4) 8:20 24:13 96:14 158:9
 bubbles (1) 71:12
 build (4) 43:20 79:13 80:16,16
 building (9) 14:8 26:1 32:16 59:15,17 61:25 76:16 80:14,14
 built (2) 24:7 77:11
 bureaucracy (1) 162:3
 burner (1) 93:12
 business (3) 2:13 17:25 77:3
 button (1) 130:14
 buy (1) 99:9

C

cabinet (4) 20:9 47:19 50:11 53:23
 call (7) 89:24 104:18 107:8 134:5 135:6 139:4 149:5
 called (11) 42:22 43:19 47:1 51:16 52:13,14 85:24
 88:16 95:13 108:12 157:3
 calling (2) 8:18 110:13
 calls (4) 12:22 32:13 45:9 153:20
 came (20) 8:23 9:24 10:15,23 11:19 31:23 48:21 49:11 77:2 81:24 82:1,15 83:8 92:18 97:19,22 103:1 109:3 117:16 118:24
 camera (2) 26:3 145:12
 cameras (1) 16:25
 campaigned (1) 84:21
 campaigning (2) 50:22 84:4
 cancellation (1) 81:21
 cancelled (1) 8:5
 candour (1) 163:17
 cannot (3) 4:10 17:4 32:22
 cant (12) 1:10,11 49:11 79:3 99:4 102:8 122:17 128:22 147:13,13 151:7 162:23
 capability (1) 32:17
 capacity (7) 7:25 14:6 29:2 32:18 34:9 70:25 143:9
 care (27) 13:20 30:24 60:15 62:10 63:23 67:19 68:18 87:6 103:4,5 113:21 116:9,23 117:2 121:14 123:8,11,11 125:4 126:14 142:23 152:20 162:18,25 163:2,7 164:5
 cared (2) 124:10 126:15
 careers (1) 38:10
 careful (1) 125:16
 carefully (1) 164:9
 carer (3) 113:1 143:20 153:11
 carers (25) 28:11 34:11 38:4 39:8 40:8,18,25 41:13,22 42:7,17 43:12 55:9 110:19 112:16,17,24 113:9,21 114:4 117:3 131:24 133:8 147:22 154:22
 caring (6) 14:22 20:6 103:4 116:9,25 125:14
 cascade (1) 43:20
 cascaded (1) 50:10
 catch (2) 39:16 158:14
 catching (1) 157:16
 category (1) 164:4
 cent (15) 22:17 46:16 50:5 51:6,9 52:2,4,8,10,11 66:25 67:3 73:18 75:20,22
 central (1) 36:10
 centre (3) 8:12 59:16 92:12
 centred (3) 124:8 132:24 160:9
 centres (1) 43:3
 ceo (1) 131:20
 cerebral (1) 148:19
 cerg (2) 54:4,9
 certain (2) 107:1 152:4

certification (7) 17:10 81:4,19,24 82:14,24 128:5
 cetera (3) 102:4 134:15,16
 chair (21) 1:3,8,12,16,19,24 34:17 35:2,6,8 87:15,19,25 88:5 129:8,19,24 130:6 151:20 163:13 164:15
 challenge (2) 31:13 154:12
 challenges (17) 3:16 5:22 10:17,18,22 12:19 16:20 19:25 57:23 71:21 81:20 84:18 97:6 144:22 150:7 155:19 159:24
 challenging (3) 97:9 137:14 154:5
 championing (1) 41:7
 chance (1) 84:17
 change (12) 78:15 87:7 111:9 139:9 141:5 143:3 144:10,11 146:6 153:25 155:9 160:6
 changed (7) 93:5 98:1 106:20 116:18 128:25 147:15 157:14
 changes (14) 49:20 81:18 89:4 97:5,7,10,12 98:6 103:21 106:18 122:20,25 123:9 124:21
 changing (1) 38:6
 channel (1) 42:21
 channels (2) 43:1 80:18
 chat (8) 39:17,18,22 48:25 49:1 55:10 105:15 108:9
 check (1) 83:12
 checked (1) 134:21
 checking (2) 47:9 83:18
 checks (1) 74:6
 chief (2) 35:13 165:3
 child (28) 14:5 15:17 22:8,11 27:20,23,25 28:1 33:22 52:21 60:21 62:15,19,19 63:15 64:17 68:21 69:17 70:10 71:14 75:25 77:10,17,25 79:8 80:22 81:10 127:18
 childcare (3) 61:16 62:6 63:19
 childcentred (2) 92:1,11
 childhood (4) 88:4,17,23 93:18
 children (107) 7:4 30:19 32:3,4 36:12 42:10 47:25 48:3,5 49:15 50:2,3,13,17 52:7,11 53:7,9 55:22 56:22 57:4,19,21,21 58:7,19 59:3,8 61:5,21,23 63:10 64:17,21 65:4,6 66:4,8 67:23 68:14 69:2,19 70:11,16 71:3,18,22 72:6,20 75:13,14 77:7,14,19 78:25 79:16 80:1,1,5 85:15,18,22,24 86:2,12 87:2 89:1,2,5,10,21,25 90:3,15 91:6,17,20,21 92:7,9,13 93:7,14,25 94:17 95:4,8 96:5 102:4,6,7,12,19 104:24 110:24 112:22 114:20 121:1,2 123:2,17 124:5,8 136:8,20 148:6 152:5
 childrens (12) 46:14 50:19 57:6 77:8 88:21 95:1 105:10 108:5 109:23 124:4 131:11 139:11
 childs (12) 28:11 42:8 69:13 73:12,17,18,22 77:13 78:13 79:4,11 142:7
 chisholm (1) 4:5
 choice (3) 18:11 113:17 143:10
 choices (4) 5:1 113:6 136:14 143:15
 choosing (1) 31:19
 circles (1) 85:24
 circumstances (10) 43:13

58:2 67:10 69:25 84:6,9,12,15 96:12 129:3
 citizen (1) 137:20
 citizenship (1) 146:10
 city (2) 65:4,18
 clap (1) 162:23
 clarification (2) 38:21 39:11
 clarity (2) 36:24 63:22
 class (3) 33:3 53:7 115:16
 classes (7) 4:23 21:5 22:18 53:11 159:3,5 162:15
 classmates (1) 98:9
 classroom (2) 71:11 153:23
 cld (1) 145:22
 clear (10) 53:6 63:25 64:6,18 65:9 105:3,6 116:17 125:11 159:14
 clearish (1) 64:22
 clearly (2) 128:24 162:1
 cliff (2) 136:9 156:17
 close (4) 7:7 12:23 112:10 158:12
 closed (1) 55:18
 closing (3) 13:17 159:18 161:16
 closure (3) 23:10 59:10 143:25
 closures (1) 21:17
 cocreate (3) 89:24 90:20 91:10
 codirectors (1) 93:18
 cofound (1) 88:25
 cofounder (3) 88:4,16,23
 cofounders (1) 89:8
 cohort (9) 8:9 29:25 30:1,3 33:3 83:11,22 119:15,18
 cohorts (3) 12:3,8 15:6
 collaborate (3) 98:9 101:5 125:15
 collaborating (1) 10:1
 collaboration (1) 115:14
 collaborative (2) 7:1 11:2
 collates (1) 45:7
 colleague (6) 2:12 35:20 37:11 43:17 45:2 93:17
 colleagues (1) 135:15
 collect (1) 96:22
 collected (2) 102:3 164:2
 collect (10) 117:19 118:7 132:24 136:17 138:19 150:11 153:18 154:8 155:16 159:4
 colleges (2) 140:9 146:24
 combination (2) 111:25 112:1
 come (39) 12:16,17 15:4 23:3 34:21 40:13 41:20 44:24 48:21 54:16 55:10 71:3 78:3 85:23 87:20 88:25 89:15 90:7 94:13 102:16 104:22,25 111:24 115:19 122:22 126:16 127:1 129:13 133:16 135:25 139:5 143:15,22 146:18 147:18 153:1 154:16 159:22 161:12
 comes (9) 16:21 32:19 70:16 103:6 139:12 149:11 151:14 154:12 161:24
 comfy (1) 154:10
 coming (12) 4:9 8:3 19:24 32:4 35:8 40:1,14 52:18 122:1 127:1 145:15 157:24
 commence (1) 142:8
 comment (4) 4:10 15:5 116:15,17
 commented (1) 117:9
 comments (5) 44:5,13 45:16,19 61:10
 commissioned (1) 105:25
 commissioner (6) 105:10,19 108:9 109:23 111:25 112:1
 commissioners (3) 108:5 110:15 124:4
 commitment (1) 160:19
 committees (1) 48:19

common (7) 16:1 20:16 21:10 38:19 106:25 114:12 132:16
 communicate (2) 149:25 150:22
 communicated (3) 43:1 108:24 109:17
 communicating (1) 37:13
 communication (19) 7:7 21:18 40:22 43:2 46:11,24 52:16 59:9,20 60:1,25 73:3 76:4 77:16 78:5,20 80:18 149:14 150:11
 communications (11) 36:4 37:9,10 39:10 48:1 49:17 51:21,23 68:11 81:6 86:23 87:9 89:5 107:23 127:22 100:14 105:10 106:16 107:10 114:5 115:10 127:20 132:23 140:10 145:20 149:12
 communitybased (1) 136:18
 compare (2) 49:18 128:10
 compared (1) 51:21
 competency (1) 14:1
 competitive (1) 83:23
 compiled (2) 47:14 67:17
 complement (4) 6:16 7:8 19:13 24:4
 complete (4) 41:18 74:10 79:12 160:21
 completed (1) 60:9
 completely (4) 69:13 93:8 100:23 121:4
 completing (1) 27:11
 complex (6) 66:5 141:11,12 142:15 148:9 162:8
 complexity (1) 82:18
 complicated (4) 72:19,21 140:3 158:24
 complication (1) 98:5
 compound (1) 142:4
 compounded (1) 160:15
 comprehend (1) 98:3
 comprised (1) 6:15
 conceived (1) 3:13
 concentrate (1) 50:3
 concentration (1) 69:1
 concentrations (1) 22:22
 concept (4) 6:7,7 32:14 55:17
 concern (14) 46:17 50:18 59:25 60:23,24 75:17 76:6 81:22 83:14,20 86:4 100:3,6 152:13
 concerned (5) 61:20 69:15 75:7 81:23 101:16
 concerning (1) 133:24
 concerns (31) 13:2 50:13 52:22,25 53:1,5 54:24,25 55:2,12 60:11 62:8,11 63:24 64:18 66:2 68:18 73:7,9,10 74:9,12,13 75:16 76:9 83:4,7 99:25 101:25 114:22 116:12
 conditions (4) 59:4 142:16,16 158:16
 confidence (2) 62:18 132:16
 confident (2) 13:3 57:8
 confirm (2) 2:4 35:15
 confirmatory (1) 35:23
 conflict (2) 78:11,12
 confusion (2) 83:1 100:22
 connect (17) 35:5,21 36:1,3,7,22 37:5,18,19 39:5 40:4,6 42:22 54:2 84:4 132:19 151:7
 connection (3) 131:12 147:21 152:5
 connectivity (6) 8:15 14:23 20:6 56:7,15 57:1
 conscious (2) 23:17 29:20
 consequence (1) 23:6
 consequences (2) 13:18 43:9
 consider (7) 33:15,18 34:5

71:16 142:10 157:20 159:19
 considered (4) 34:19 72:2 84:5,22
 considered (1) 13:16
 considering (1) 94:11
 considers (1) 32:2
 consisted (1) 7:22
 consistency (1) 125:2
 consistent (3) 51:11,12 126:5
 consistently (1) 50:17
 consisting (1) 36:25
 constitution (1) 38:7
 constrained (1) 83:18
 constructive (1) 79:14
 consultant (1) 36:4
 consultants (17) 95:13,23 104:8 105:24 106:8 108:2,7 110:3,8,9 111:5,10 112:19 119:25 125:19 128:7,9
 consultations (1) 76:12
 contact (8) 12:23 59:18 60:8,10 61:21 67:18 86:25 118:15
 contacted (1) 60:12
 contained (1) 108:1
 contains (1) 157:4
 context (3) 6:6 21:21 79:20
 contexts (2) 56:5 76:5
 contingency (5) 60:1,22,23,25 86:22
 continue (11) 12:21 19:17 20:3,25 27:8 33:25 105:17 106:1 144:21 151:24 156:4
 continued (3) 24:9 54:2 77:18
 continues (3) 1:18 5:17 17:22
 continuing (1) 105:20
 continuity (3) 73:25,25 137:1
 continuous (1) 82:21
 contracting (1) 113:15
 contrary (1) 129:19
 contribute (1) 94:22
 contributed (2) 124:4 163:24
 contributing (4) 30:23 31:22 94:23 109:16
 contribution (2) 152:8 157:7
 contributors (1) 26:8
 convene (1) 93:20
 convened (5) 90:23 95:12,22 96:17 110:7
 convening (1) 111:4
 convention (1) 33:22
 conversation (9) 18:17 19:22 23:14 77:25 105:2,20 106:2,12,22
 conversations (5) 3:19 4:4 34:6 106:24 108:3
 cooking (1) 69:11
 coordinate (1) 21:8
 coordinated (2) 27:22 125:1
 coordination (1) 141:19
 cope (5) 11:25 43:6 55:23 57:22 61:14
 coping (1) 159:15
 copies (1) 67:11
 coproduced (1) 90:10
 core (3) 8:21 20:8 91:21
 coronavirus (1) 157:16
 correct (21) 1:16 2:8,14,15,21,22,25 3:3,6 4:1,18 9:11 35:21,22 36:1,2,6 40:2 88:13,17 131:7
 cosla (1) 48:13
 cost (2) 34:3,4
 couldnt (23) 24:4 30:19 49:25 50:3 56:15 57:22 58:21 61:14 63:17 65:5 71:2,3,7 74:22 79:21 116:17 120:3 121:12,24 122:7 144:17 148:20 155:7

council (2) 110:24 117:2
 councils (8) 36:8,16,18,20,22 37:4 38:20,23
 counsel (1) 158:1
 country (7) 7:13 8:10 25:10 90:23 94:4 97:14 118:5
 couple (2) 126:13 158:17
 course (20) 1:8 12:7 17:8,11,16 21:1 30:7 37:18 40:7,10 53:16 57:16 70:24 95:12 97:9 125:25 146:14 147:9 155:22 159:16
 courses (7) 8:4,5 16:22 17:3 30:6,9,10
 coursework (3) 74:10 75:5 84:13
 cover (4) 38:1,5,11 85:4
 covered (1) 86:8
 covering (1) 108:11
 covid (45) 6:10,11,14 7:21 10:23 15:16 17:22 23:15 25:3 32:13 50:15 52:16,16,17 53:3,4 54:5-9 70:1,13 72:1 75:9 77:21 78:24 84:16,19 85:17,20 93:21 111:1,1 113:16 120:16,19,25 122:5,5 139:1 142:5 147:1 153:20 158:15,16,23 162:20
 covid19 (10) 6:3 7:12 26:15,15 30:22 31:9,22 51:13 144:9 147:22
 create (2) 90:19 91:4
 created (4) 47:18 104:19 150:6 157:2
 creating (1) 115:17
 creation (1) 4:3
 creative (2) 56:22 58:17
 crisis (9) 93:9 95:5 97:13 104:4,15,25 105:3 148:17 151:5
 criteria (7) 63:23 64:1,16,16,19 66:1 68:3
 criticism (2) 14:25 164:10
 crosses (1) 110:20
 crossection (1) 135:10
 crosssector (1) 147:3
 crucial (1) 69:13
 crux (1) 104:20
 culmination (1) 122:15
 culture (1) 16:12
 cup (1) 162:17
 cured (1) 6:21
 current (3) 29:7 33:6 110:10
 currently (5) 2:23 6:10 22:16 29:6,16
 cursus (1) 14:5 9:6,22 12:5 16:23 18:22 20:16 21:1,3,4 26:12 29:12 30:6 104:3
 cut (1) 92:25
 cuts (2) 162:25 163:4

D

dad (1) 143:4
 daily (2) 61:13 72:23
 danger (2) 23:21 31:17
 dash (1) 82:23
 data (4) 54:20 55:6 57:17 96:22
 date (2) 47:11 86:25
 day (3) 59:4 137:7 162:4
 days (7) 7:21 48:4,6 75:10 93:15 137:4 158:13
 daytoday (2) 102:9 117:5
 deal (2) 42:11 136:3
 dealing (4) 42:10 96:13 119:20 147:7
 dean (1) 163:16
 death (2) 79:19 113:10
 december (1) 50:25
 decide (3) 64:3 76:23,23
 decided (10) 19:14 65:8 66:11 76:24 84:20 93:23 94:2 95:14 97:1 128:21

deciding (3) 31:19 64:5 105:22
 decision (4) 19:14 84:14 93:11 140:8
 decisionmakers (1) 116:8
 decisions (7) 43:8 92:24 93:4 143:4,6,10 159:9
 deemed (1) 65:4
 deep (1) 90:18
 define (2) 68:5 104:3
 defined (1) 92:2
 definite (1) 21:23
 definitely (3) 73:20 127:8 128:8
 definition (3) 64:2,7 133:12
 degree (5) 3:14 4:1,25 32:17 78:17
 delay (2) 76:7 100:17
 delighted (1) 79:15
 deliver (14) 7:15 8:21 13:5 17:8,11 19:10 33:4 37:10 38:4 58:10 74:18 114:8 148:20 159:4
 delivered (6) 6:19 16:5 21:4 22:10 98:7 158:11
 delivering (14) 5:6 8:9 9:17 10:10,19 11:19 13:17,22 15:7 16:21 20:17 39:12 56:20 77:1
 delivery (1) 56:18
 demand (3) 11:18 28:23 29:19
 demographic (1) 134:23
 demonstrate (1) 17:15
 den (1) 21:22
 department (3) 3:20 17:19 71:8
 depended (1) 14:19
 depending (3) 83:11,22 149:17
 deploy (1) 17:7
 deployed (1) 10:6
 deprivation (1) 83:15
 deputes (1) 11:7
 deputy (3) 3:2 10:25 78:9
 der (24) 1:2,3,5,14,17,23 2:3,4 35:1,2,4,9,11,13,14 87:23,25 88:3,8 129:10,17 165:2,3,4
 describe (4) 12:18 27:7 95:7,10
 described (5) 11:17 23:11 33:5 53:16 79:1
 describing (1) 137:24
 description (1) 24:25
 design (2) 44:25 160:3
 designing (1) 45:1
 desire (1) 21:10
 desired (1) 26:6
 despair (1) 57:4
 desperate (1) 64:10
 despot (1) 43:12
 destination (3) 26:8 34:2 160:23
 detail (1) 36:13
 details (4) 59:19 67:19 86:25 102:13
 deterioration (1) 26:21
 determined (1) 128:13
 develop (2) 33:18 62:18
 developed (1) 6:13
 developing (5) 17:18,21 18:3 33:8 92:1
 development (7) 61:21 69:14 134:2,7 138:19 145:20
 device (2) 98:14 145:4
 devices (9) 14:11,14 49:19 51:1,7 56:13 57:1,11 59:2
 diagnosed (1) 72:6
 diagnosing (1) 70:14
 diagnosis (3) 25:16 31:4 70:4
 dialogue (1) 123:8
 didnt (68) 14:14,18 20:24 43:10 44:9 46:18 48:21 50:3,16 54:6 56:12,13,14 57:7 59:2 60:20

61:23,23,25 62:1 63:16
66:25 68:2,6 69:6 70:24
72:1 73:6 74:20 75:1 76:16
79:22 81:13 82:2,9,9,13
84:23 87:23 91:11 94:25
98:11,14 100:5,8,9 104:13
106:10 109:15 115:20,23
116:9,24 117:11 119:4
120:7,11 121:5 122:3
123:22,24 125:4 137:18
145:12 149:4 155:24 156:1
160:6
diet (1) 8:4
difference (3) 97:11 103:22
135:16
different (74) 7:5 12:8,12
14:12,19,19 21:3,4,5 34:12
40:25 45:22 47:16
48:4,5,5,17 55:25 56:5
58:14 60:19 76:5,5 78:22
83:10,24,25 89:19 94:6
95:22 96:1,4,5 97:16
98:21,22 102:13 104:16
107:8,9,17 109:22,22
110:1 112:3,6,18 116:7
117:11,20 119:11
125:3,6,6 127:9 128:10
132:14,15,25 137:21 142:2
145:13 146:7,23 147:11
148:10,11 149:16 150:5
151:5,11 153:25 158:23
162:2
differential (1) 57:18
difficult (23) 58:1 65:18
68:22 69:5 72:20,21 98:2
100:14,24 103:9 112:20
114:1,3,10,14,17 115:22
119:15,17 121:3 129:3
147:4,15
difficulties (4) 80:11 84:18
113:11 133:14
difficulty (2) 3:18 47:8
digital (22) 10:15,25 11:7
13:25 14:12,23 25:21 26:5
32:7,13 49:19 50:23 51:2
55:16 56:6,7 57:11 74:17
145:1, 149:4 151:10
digitally (1) 7:15
digressed (1) 87:10
dingwall (1) 110:21
direct (2) 30:22 31:8
directive (1) 50:1
directly (6) 6:14 52:18 102:6
103:10 111:12
director (1) 4:4
directors (3) 28:19 29:21
48:11
dis (7) 135:6,8,17 136:1
139:19 163:18 164:6
disability (6) 130:3 131:22
133:5 134:15 140:25
159:10
disabled (12) 131:23 132:5
133:6,7,9,12 140:3,23
145:2,25 149:3 162:6
disappeared (1) 103:5
discern (1) 57:18
disciplinary (1) 78:14
disconnect (3) 62:2 79:6,12
discontent (1) 84:1
discovery (1) 92:3
discuss (16) 12:16,17 28:15
37:17 40:3,13 54:16
55:3,17 63:18 68:14 81:17
86:7 99:13 103:24 104:22
discussed (5) 63:20 68:15
105:15 148:11 153:21
discussing (1) 55:14
discussion (3) 54:17 92:14
108:13
discussions (4) 48:8 89:10
104:2 107:3
disengage (4) 31:24 100:23
136:25 155:4
disengaged (6) 31:2 98:17
126:17,18 144:12 154:24

disengagement (3) 78:17
80:4 126:22
disengaging (1) 31:11
dispensation (1) 122:8
displaced (1) 15:23
disrupted (2) 113:13 119:3
disruption (3) 4:8 32:19
55:23
disseminate (1) 28:21
distance (1) 82:12
distressing (3) 116:20
118:19,23
districts (1) 4:21
divergent (6) 135:1,5,8
156:25 157:20 158:3
diverse (3) 94:3 98:23 99:11
diversity (3) 96:8 98:8
128:23
division (2) 5:4 23:18
doctorate (1) 88:19
documented (1) 31:21
does (15) 17:6 37:4,19,21
40:6 45:6 70:8 84:13 87:13
120:9 133:4 153:19 154:15
155:18 156:8
doesnt (1) 56:12 79:13 93:9
121:1 126:5 137:14,15
142:6,13 145:4 153:19
doing (40) 1:21 4:24 5:2 6:17
15:10 17:2 24:5 26:14 41:9
45:24 46:1,4,8,18 51:17
55:19 57:22 60:3 61:7 63:3
69:9,16 76:1 78:1 82:17
98:11 99:7 103:11 113:3
114:4 117:2 121:10 125:5
127:5,17 137:6 146:13
161:5 164:7,7
done (23) 14:7 18:19 20:10
21:2 42:2 53:18 73:24
82:16 83:11 89:19 90:1,25
91:3 94:3 95:16 99:16
100:14 101:17 106:13
109:10 112:9 129:15
138:13
dont (58) 38:25 44:19 47:23
48:24 51:10 54:4,7 55:1
56:13,25 57:16,16,17
64:16 65:24 67:20,20
144:2,10 145:8 154:25
dr (12) 88:3,5,9,11,16
122:14 124:13 129:6,7,8
165:4
draft (3) 45:3,4 123:12
draw (2) 86:20 138:18
drawn (2) 86:11 148:17
drawnout (1) 138:14
drill (1) 47:8
drive (1) 139:17
dropped (1) 77:20
ds (1) 128:19
due (12) 21:24 23:8 30:1
74:10 98:25 118:22 122:4
129:11 142:12 153:7,15
157:13
dugs (1) 21:22
dunede (1) 112:8
duplicating (1) 19:8
duplication (2) 7:9 21:13
during (55) 14:21 18:2 19:17
21:25 23:22 26:14

37:15,18,21,24
38:11,12,14 40:4,5,12
49:23 50:7 55:7,22
59:7,7,10 73:6,16,19
74:3,21 75:12,21 85:13
89:16 90:7 93:21 108:11
110:25 111:1 112:21
113:12 116:14 125:20
126:8 127:12 135:18
138:24 139:1 142:5 145:3
146:2 147:1 153:20,20
157:5,9,13
duties (1) 152:4
duty (3) 14:20 153:14,16
134:7 136:18
employees (1) 18:1
employment (3) 107:21
139:8 154:8
enable (5) 11:21 13:1 74:18
89:2 149:5
enabled (3) 8:19 11:16 12:23
enables (1) 33:25
encompasses (1) 134:13
encourage (3) 56:18 134:22
141:2
end (23) 8:3 22:13 30:5,6,14
47:10,11 69:8 82:24 83:24
87:13 92:2,21 94:13
105:24 109:6 128:25 137:6
154:13 158:19 162:4
163:18 164:16
ending (1) 52:2
energies (1) 121:24
enews (1) 43:21
enforced (1) 15:3
engage (16) 8:14 9:19 25:5
26:4 27:14,15 30:19 55:24
59:6 100:5 104:8 105:23
121:18 127:2 154:8 155:4
engaged (6) 5:24 77:13
120:16 128:7 148:10 155:3
engagement (9) 36:11
53:15,24 61:18 72:25
76:4,25 95:9 158:6
engaged (5) 25:14,23,25
26:19 105:17
english (11) 15:9 16:11
21:5,19 22:12,15 23:7
26:12 30:8 117:20,25
enjoys (1) 164:18
enormous (1) 78:24
enough (9) 14:18 25:17
37:23 56:13 57:14 98:15
133:2 141:23 142:7
enrichment (3) 4:23 5:2,8
enshrined (1) 33:23
ensure (7) 10:3 23:19 32:3
34:9,9 42:24 164:5
ensuring (1) 7:8
entails (1) 37:9
enterprise (1) 89:1
entire (1) 143:18
entirely (4) 22:10 59:12
82:11 93:20
entitlement (2) 22:6 32:25
entitlements (1) 141:4
environment (5) 13:24 18:25
91:9 101:3 123:9
environments (4) 89:11 90:5
121:10 126:24
equal (2) 137:19,20
equality (5) 123:8 133:12
140:19,24 159:11
equipment (9) 46:18
59:18,22,23 60:20 68:23
71:1,5 149:4
equips (1) 33:25
equitable (1) 32:24
equity (1) 5:1
equivalent (1) 30:9
esgoil (27) 2:13,21,24
3:2,5,11 4:3,7,13 7:20,21
8:21 9:23 10:24 11:4 13:13
15:12,13 16:19 17:7
19:4,23 20:8 21:16 24:4
32:2 104:18

emails (1) 55:11
embedded (3) 9:23 18:22
153:3
emerged (1) 106:24
emergency (2) 67:18,19
emma (2) 130:8,10
131:4,4,7,18 132:11
133:7,21 136:8 138:5,10
139:7,17 140:17,18 144:5
146:22 147:5 151:4 152:25
154:24 156:11 159:1,24
165:5
emphasised (1) 86:10
employability (4) 132:1,24
134:7 136:18
employees (1) 18:1
employment (3) 107:21
139:8 154:8
enable (5) 11:21 13:1 74:18
89:2 149:5
enabled (3) 8:19 11:16 12:23
enables (1) 33:25
encompasses (1) 134:13
encourage (3) 56:18 134:22
141:2
end (23) 8:3 22:13 30:5,6,14
47:10,11 69:8 82:24 83:24
87:13 92:2,21 94:13
105:24 109:6 128:25 137:6
154:13 158:19 162:4
163:18 164:16
ending (1) 52:2
energies (1) 121:24
enews (1) 43:21
enforced (1) 15:3
engage (16) 8:14 9:19 25:5
26:4 27:14,15 30:19 55:24
59:6 100:5 104:8 105:23
121:18 127:2 154:8 155:4
engaged (6) 5:24 77:13
120:16 128:7 148:10 155:3
engagement (9) 36:11
53:15,24 61:18 72:25
76:4,25 95:9 158:6
engaged (5) 25:14,23,25
26:19 105:17
english (11) 15:9 16:11
21:5,19 22:12,15 23:7
26:12 30:8 117:20,25
enjoys (1) 164:18
enormous (1) 78:24
enough (9) 14:18 25:17
37:23 56:13 57:14 98:15
133:2 141:23 142:7
enrichment (3) 4:23 5:2,8
enshrined (1) 33:23
ensure (7) 10:3 23:19 32:3
34:9,9 42:24 164:5
ensuring (1) 7:8
entails (1) 37:9
enterprise (1) 89:1
entire (1) 143:18
entirely (4) 22:10 59:12
82:11 93:20
entitlement (2) 22:6 32:25
entitlements (1) 141:4
environment (5) 13:24 18:25
91:9 101:3 123:9
environments (4) 89:11 90:5
121:10 126:24
equal (2) 137:19,20
equality (5) 123:8 133:12
140:19,24 159:11
equipment (9) 46:18
59:18,22,23 60:20 68:23
71:1,5 149:4
equips (1) 33:25
equitable (1) 32:24
equity (1) 5:1
equivalent (1) 30:9
esgoil (27) 2:13,21,24
3:2,5,11 4:3,7,13 7:20,21
8:21 9:23 10:24 11:4 13:13
15:12,13 16:19 17:7
19:4,23 20:8 21:16 24:4
32:2 104:18

esgoils (2) 3:10 19:13
especially (8) 33:21 94:11
97:17 121:16 148:25
152:12 153:3 154:5
essential (2) 61:1 87:8
essentially (10) 4:15 11:9
12:1 18:4,5 21:3 27:3
83:22 104:3 105:25
161: 21:10 32:11 51:20
69:1 71:25 73:14 86:17
90:15 91:6 94:9 97:11
100:24 102:8 114:1,11
128:23 133:8 135:13,14
139:23
establishments (1) 61:5
estate (2) 14:2 32:7
estimate (1) 82:3
estimates (1) 82:22
et (3) 102:4 134:15,16
evaluated (1) 16:13
even (23) 13:23 29:20 31:13
57:25 59:21 64:21 65:17
67:14 69:18 76:17 96:1
100:15 114:15 115:6 122:4
139:1 141:5 142:17 149:14
153:2 162:25,25 163:6
evenings (1) 16:8
evenly (1) 65:13
event (7) 4:7,8 20:21 32:19
138:3,12 164:8
eventbrite (1) 48:24
events (3) 4:24 53:14 76:8
eventually (2) 64:14 75:10
ever (3) 28:24 42:21 65:11
every (11) 8:25 15:17 26:15
27:12 30:25 59:23 99:8
112:10 124:9,12 149:16
everybody (6) 56:12 58:20
75:1 81:11 161:2,22
everyday (5) 32:16 61:5
72:16,17 115:19
everyone (19) 13:2 19:8,11
26:16 38:18 66:18 86:25
100:13 105:4 107:1 111:16
114:1 115:16,18 116:9
121:4,23 128:17 164:18
everyones (2) 14:18 162:17
everything (14) 13:3 15:12
38:5 66:9 67:1 98:1 104:13
111:12 119:7 142:22 144:9
158:18 159:6,25
evidence (12) 29:18 34:18
77:12 78:6,10 87:17 89:14
102:3 150:22 157:1
163:18,23
evident (1) 13:15
evidenced (1) 97:10
exacerbated (4) 26:18,20
31:12 70:14
exactly (2) 49:11 122:18
exam (4) 8:4 30:5,7,14
examination (2) 35:13 165:3
examinationinchief (6) 2:3
88:8 130:12 165:2,4,6
example (13) 21:6 24:17
26:2 37:25 38:9 45:15
55:22 73:16 78:13 138:3
145:11,21 154:23
examples (5) 99:17 145:14
146:20 150:17 157:9
exams (12) 81:3,18,21
82:19,20 95:20 121:25
122:2,12 126:3,4 157:11
exceeds (1) 34:4
exceptional (5) 43:13
84:5,9,12,15
excess (2) 22:21 29:17
excited (1) 139:23
excluded (2) 56:17 160:25
exclusion (2) 145:2 151:10
excuse (4) 6:1 19:2 65:16
123:5
exercised (2) 31:17 48:7
exist (1) 140:11
existed (4) 6:7 7:16 82:2
104:6
existence (1) 22:21
existing (3) 92:13 94:12,15
exit (1) 133:1

expand (2) 16:17 63:23
expect (1) 137:19
expectation (1) 132:17
expectations (2) 29:5 120:11
expected (2) 42:20 122:2
expecting (1) 48:21
expense (1) 99:7
experience (23) 13:22 14:18
16:1 21:10 32:11 51:20
69:1 71:25 73:14 86:17
90:15 91:6 94:9 97:11
100:24 102:8 114:1,11
128:23 133:8 135:13,14
139:23
experienced (10) 10:19 70:5
84:17 97:5,6 111:1,14
112:5 113:10 163:20
experiences (3) 41:1 40:19
41:19,22 42:13 49:22 50:7
51:21 96:8,10 98:23
108:10 109:15,21 110:17
111:2 112:3,4,14,18
114:6,12,22 115:1,10
116:16,20 118:12 119:19
121:5 125:9 157:5
experiencing (5) 41:2 93:7
112:15 120:22 162:25
expertise (1) 94:24
experts (2) 91:1,8
explain (13) 6:5 22:4 37:8
43:17 81:21 84:6 88:20
90:13 92:18 109:3 136:6
149:20 152:8
explained (2) 106:4 154:18
explaining (1) 3:9
exploratory (1) 25:19
explore (2) 18:16 91:22
exploring (1) 18:18
express (2) 102:10 149:23
expressed (3) 152:13,15
154:3
extend (1) 153:1
extended (1) 152:11
extensive (3) 29:3 109:25
122:19
extent (5) 96:2,10 123:23
145:18 161:6
extra (6) 114:3,5,7 118:23
129:12 160:16
extraordinary (2) 41:1 73:13
extreme (1) 84:17

F

face (2) 19:25 71:20
faced (1) 79:18
faces (1) 106:11
facilitate (1) 21:19
facilitated (1) 130:4
facilitators (1) 123:16
facing (1) 60:13
factor (2) 30:23 31:22
fair (1) 126:5
fairly (2) 15:7 69:20
falkirk (1) 95:25
fall (2) 137:2 160:22
falls (1) 141:18
familiar (3) 32:9 78:8 150:1
familiarisation (1) 63:11
families (62) 15:20,23 16:7
22:7 24:2 32:18 41:2,22
42:1,11 43:5,8 49:22 50:4
55:3 56:1,9 57:25 58:9,11
59:12,19,21
60:2,3,6,7,11,14,17
61:4,6,11 62:3 64:9 65:6
67:12 68:14 69:6 71:18,20
72:18,19 74:3 79:21,23
85:21 86:12,12,16,24
87:1,2,5 113:9 122:13
136:10 137:3 149:8 151:12
154:10,20
family (15) 16:5 36:11
57:2,3 79:9 99:18 110:25
118:11,13,16,20 137:9
143:18 145:8 149:2
families (1) 50:7

far (10) 14:13 34:4 53:3
65:15,17 70:22 80:5 99:5
110:8 130:23
fast (1) 98:1
fatal (1) 158:16
fault (1) 7:14
fear (1) 137:12
fears (1) 99:1
feature (1) 156:10
february (1) 51:18
fed (2) 61:1 124:3
feedback (1) 72:4
feed (2) 43:23 50:8
feedback (7) 60:25 72:4
100:8,10,16,18,18
feeding (1) 54:2
feeds (1) 91:20
feel (28) 57:7 63:14 69:18
79:22 80:2 94:16 100:9
101:21 103:10 116:24
119:4 121:11 122:3 124:10
125:20,22
126:2,11,15,17,18 127:22
147:12 154:10 157:19
158:4,20 161:17
feeling (10) 52:8 63:5 66:3
67:2 100:7 102:19 103:6
118:9 147:10 161:9
feelings (1) 85:10
feels (3) 81:11 102:10 103:13
fell (4) 142:5 149:7 150:14
felt (60) 8:1 14:16,17 15:21
19:15 20:22,24 21:6 25:19
26:21 42:2,12 49:24 50:2
51:25 52:3 54:22 60:4
61:11,13 64:8,14 66:23
68:16,17 73:21 76:24
77:3,11 79:19,22 84:25
93:6,19 94:17,23 95:1,15
103:3,4 105:1,17 109:16
111:10 113:7 116:9
117:1,3,8,12,14
121:2,3,13,21 122:9 126:7
147:5 157:13,15
few (13) 4:10 6:12 15:6
23:11 46:2 65:3 89:22
105:3,5 107:17 128:8
146:11 150:18
field (1) 18:4
file (2) 112:8 132:4
fifth (1) 51:12
fifties (1) 137:17
fight (1) 155:5
fighting (2) 113:2 159:2
fill (4) 96:23,25 104:20
106:17
final (5) 85:3 108:1 111:17
157:10,12
finalise (1) 111:8
finally (5) 17:17 84:3 86:18
124:13 156:24
financial (1) 143:10
financially (1) 105:21
find (13) 34:13 61:9 66:12
68:5 81:2 93:14 96:4 97:2
103:19 142:15 146:24
154:5,13
finding (2) 80:23 98:19
findings

flat (2) 159:4,5
flicked (1) 13:4
flow (1) 149:19
fluency (1) 24:7
fluent (1) 22:13
focus (16) 15:8 42:16 43:10
49:24 69:4,9 73:4,8 75:4
112:2 134:11,16 136:1,4
143:17 153:3
focused (1) 91:12
focusing (3) 21:5 86:1
148:15
follow (2) 116:7 143:2
followed (1) 65:10
following (2) 9:5 147:25
food (1) 158:11
footing (1) 34:8
forces (3) 107:8,11,17
foresaw (1) 4:9
foresee (1) 104:14
forgot (2) 128:4 134:1
form (6) 27:11,14,18 44:3
63:12 150:24
formally (1) 42:22
formats (1) 151:5
formed (3) 42:23 133:19
135:19
forms (1) 44:7
forties (1) 137:17
fortunate (1) 25:17
forum (7) 54:12 130:4
133:19,23 134:3,4 138:12
forward (13) 24:10 79:14
81:2 103:25 107:15 109:18
111:11 118:5 131:23,25
155:22 156:4 161:11
found (8) 2:9 15:2 73:11
105:11 131:2,8 141:17
145:12
four (8) 19:6 20:12,15,18,21
21:8 22:9 32:11
foureareold (1) 14:5
frankly (1) 163:17
free (1) 161:17
frequently (1) 138:23
friction (1) 162:12
friday (1) 29:11
friends (3) 115:4,7,8
front (2) 6:1 123:1
frustrated (3) 116:2 122:4
160:7
frustrating (2) 147:12 161:7
frustration (2) 100:21 128:12
fulfilling (1) 24:16
full (15) 2:5 15:7 35:15
77:4,5 79:2,3 88:10 123:24
130:13,17,18,19 131:3
138:7
fuller (1) 161:13
fully (11) 5:8 13:16 42:24
43:9 76:25 77:8 138:24,25
141:7 142:25 160:1
fun (1) 115:17
function (3) 8:18 39:17,18
fundamental (4) 91:17
112:25 126:1 149:10
funded (2) 5:8 6:3
funding (5) 5:9,10 140:9
145:21 163:1
fundraising (1) 38:8
furious (1) 116:5
furlough (1) 147:4
furloughed (1) 144:14
furloughing (2) 93:3 146:10
further (14) 34:16 90:17
104:3,7,8 105:14 109:17
129:7 131:25 139:14
152:18 154:9,25 155:20
furthering (1) 139:21
fuse (2) 79:18,20
future (14) 32:6,18 95:21
101:25 103:2 105:22
111:14,16 117:24
123:3,7,22 124:6,20

G

gaelic (25) 5:2,3,9 21:23,25
22:2,4,6,11,12,15,18,20,22
23:2,3,4,8,9,11,16,18,20,24
24:11
gaelicspeaking (1) 24:17
gain (2) 18:8 25:17
gained (1) 88:22
galvanized (1) 159:8
game (2) 134:9 138:20
games (1) 99:19
gap (5) 18:9 24:16 42:12
68:10 106:18
gaps (2) 3:25 104:20
gaslighted (1) 158:21
gateways (3) 61:3,3 87:7
gather (1) 63:14
gathering (1) 111:7
gave (4) 3:22 26:16 52:12
76:21
gender (1) 96:1
general (6) 38:19 47:23,24
97:22 126:18 141:22
generally (7) 39:22 51:25
58:8 78:16 124:17
132:12,13
geographic (2) 15:14 109:14
geographies (1) 112:7
get (6) 14:18 25:7 42:17
46:2 58:10 59:22 60:4,5
61:12,25 62:1 63:14 64:22
65:5,14,18 66:11,13
68:9,22 73:1 76:14 77:22
82:22 90:3 92:13 93:24
96:1 99:4,5 100:12,16
101:4 103:16 104:5 105:5
106:16 107:7 108:16
110:15 113:12 114:18,18
115:20,23 119:7 120:10
121:20 123:17 128:19,25
132:21 145:3 147:14
148:23 153:10 155:7,18
160:24 161:2 164:12
gets (5) 82:7 109:17
125:16,16 162:9
getting (25) 42:19 46:17,22
47:10 53:7 60:7 61:8
75:3,11 78:2 90:4
100:8,10,18 101:7
105:9,13 114:7 117:4
118:1 122:7 128:17 141:20
148:19 153:24
ghost (1) 85:24
gidhlig (1) 3:23
give (18) 3:7 4:13 13:12 16:1
24:25 32:1 34:19 40:14
54:23 76:20 94:7 95:17
105:18 112:13 137:9 138:7
146:20 161:13
given (9) 2:7 20:17 33:21
35:17 78:19 81:10 88:12
128:19 158:14
gives (2) 45:7 133:2
giving (4) 84:13 88:9 132:14
138:7
glasgow (5) 7:2 22:24 95:24
117:10,15
gleamed (1) 55:7
global (1) 4:8
glow (10) 7:16 8:16 10:20
11:16,21 12:19,24 13:6
32:21,25
goal (1) 92:2
goals (5) 22:11 79:8 83:21
137:13 160:9
going (75) 12:16 20:3,25
21:15 25:20 27:6,9,12 35:8
37:17 39:10 40:22 42:1
43:5 46:15 48:5 49:17
51:24 52:14 62:15,18
63:4,4,15 69:11 70:9 72:9
78:20 79:14 80:9,21 93:25
94:6,19,20 95:18 98:3,18
99:12 101:18 102:14,15
106:17,22 110:4 113:14
114:2 115:2 119:2,4,5
120:10,13 122:3,11 125:3

126:4,6 127:11,13,24
132:6 135:17,22 136:21
140:11,11 144:5 146:18
155:16,22 157:15 160:5
164:5,9
gone (10) 50:4 79:11 85:21
123:25 127:7 135:11 159:3
163:3,3,4
good (48) 1:2,3,8,10,24 2:1
14:23 35:2,6,6,7 44:21,21
56:14 57:14 77:23 82:22
87:23,25 88:5 91:19 95:17
96:9,15 98:12,15,20,24
100:10,15 108:8 115:10,11
116:24 129:8,19,23,24
130:6,6,8,9 137:22 141:9
148:22 151:19,20 164:15
government (35) 3:21,21
76:21
4:5,12 6:3 10:1 23:17 34:7
38:22 41:18 45:11 48:18
49:3,10,25 54:1 64:1
68:4,10 76:21 85:14 86:1
89:23 94:10 101:16,23
103:17,19,23 104:12
107:13,14 108:16 120:25
141:14
governments (1) 5:3
grade (2) 83:24 84:14
grades (4) 82:3 83:5,10,21
grading (2) 83:23 84:2
gradual (1) 22:19
gradually (1) 22:12
graham (17) 1:6,8,10,19,25
2:2,4,6,11,18 3:9 12:18
19:2 24:21 34:15,17 165:2
grain (1) 160:9
grandmother (1) 58:15
grandparents (1) 99:24
grant (1) 5:9
granted (1) 162:17
grateful (2) 44:22 87:17
great (9) 15:16 22:25 34:19
96:22 122:10 131:18
132:11 133:16 144:25
greater (9) 3:25 4:25 7:1
26:13 29:20 32:15,17 34:9
83:9
ground (1) 74:5
group (28) 6:11,15 16:4
30:11 38:6 39:20 54:5,9
95:17 100:25 105:17
109:12 110:21 114:19
115:14 116:11,13
118:10,25 119:14
120:5,15,16,18 135:8,19
141:16 160:24
groups (33) 16:15 36:15,18
37:6 38:3,5,16
39:2,3,5,9,18 55:9
56:19,20 57:19 62:21
101:5 107:4,5,8 109:22
110:13,14,16,18 111:21,24
112:14,15 118:21 135:14
146:2
grow (1) 26:24
grownup (1) 69:2
guarantee (1) 160:21
guardianship (1) 143:13
guess (21) 42:3 46:20 49:23
51:19 52:17 59:25 66:7
68:10 72:5,21 74:20 78:3
82:12 86:22 110:6 120:3
131:22 134:5 146:5 158:25
160:4
guests (1) 108:15
guidance (6) 28:2 68:6
76:21,22,22 132:18
guide (1) 7:3
guilt (1) 113:18
guys (1) 152:12

H

hadnt (9) 57:12 69:25
72:6,6,6,8 82:21 83:21
112:9
half (5) 29:10 52:21 75:24
80:9 137:7
halted (1) 144:7
hand (3) 104:13 110:2
120:14
handful (1) 7:22
handson (1) 17:2
hang (1) 127:21
happen (24) 62:20
63:10,16,17 64:13 68:12
71:7 81:13 89:7 93:22
96:17 109:8 138:23
142:7,11,13,14 144:13
146:12 151:6 153:19,19
159:25 160:6
happened (14) 15:23 73:16
74:24 79:9 97:5 101:24
106:16 107:25 108:22
111:13 116:19 122:15
128:8 129:4
happening (24) 40:19 50:17
70:18 73:6 74:4,7 96:20
105:18 106:22 107:4,22
110:11 116:5 117:18
122:10 125:13 128:11
138:24,25 140:9 153:20
157:2
heres (1) 103:12
heritage (1) 16:3
hes (2) 78:23 138:6
happy (2) 87:15 129:13
hard (7) 22:1 84:21 101:10
115:13 146:14 148:24
163:23
harder (4) 86:2 109:21 112:5
114:8
hardest (3) 33:13 71:25
161:1
hardly (1) 65:11
havent (3) 48:23 82:15 137:5
having (49) 3:15,18 19:8,23
23:8,23 31:9 32:14 34:6
38:17,21 42:8 43:13 46:23
49:9,24 66:20 75:15 76:18
77:25 83:2 90:25 92:24
93:3 95:16 97:13 98:20
129:2,2 143:3 150:15
153:22 154:11 160:9
head (9) 2:24 3:2 19:23
28:22 29:21 76:22 78:8,9
144:20
heading (4) 15:12 55:14,15
123:2
headings (1) 108:3
heads (1) 10:25
health (50) 25:15 26:21
31:5,11 38:8 44:17 49:24
50:1 52:17,19 70:11
73:4,5,8,8 79:7 84:19
85:1,16,18 87:1,3,5 113:11
124:11 127:5,19 128:1
133:14 134:7,15 136:20
138:18 139:15 142:15
144:17 146:20,24
148:4,12,14,24 149:6,6
152:4 153:9 157:15 162:24
163:2,7
healthcare (3) 113:12 141:16
142:22
hear (21) 1:9,10,11,13,19,20
14:9 38:16 41:15,16 54:6
58:24 94:11 101:17
102:2,5,6 110:10 115:11
119:24 129:19
heard (19) 21:17 41:5
42:17,19 56:4 58:9 62:5
63:19 65:25 78:8 81:15
90:12 101:22 103:6 110:14
119:10 158:2 164:2,3
hearing (16) 40:18 41:13
42:3,4,5,5,12,13 55:1 56:9
64:9 68:19 125:12 131:12
158:22 164:20
heart (3) 81:7 86:23 161:4

heavily (2) 138:6 156:10
heightened (1) 119:21
heights (1) 126:21
hello (1) 35:1
help (25) 10:7 18:10 41:3,5
44:14,23 58:16 66:13
68:7,22 69:7 70:16 71:22
100:12 121:11 124:10
134:9,22 139:6 140:7
141:15 143:4 149:25 150:8
153:23
helped (4) 24:6 44:17 60:13
70:13
helpful (9) 81:1 87:17 105:12
140:15 143:22 147:16
159:17 161:15,20
170:13
helping (4) 42:17 62:19
138:20 140:5
helpline (6) 67:9 132:5,6
145:10 155:6 156:8
helplines (1) 64:12
helps (2) 62:17 152:19
here (8) 3:20 19:23 22:16
55:20 63:8 99:22 141:21
152:7
heres (1) 103:12
heritage (1) 16:3
hes (2) 78:23 138:6
high (4) 38:25 71:8 85:13
158:19
higher (5) 19:8 30:6,8,10
139:14
highlands (5) 22:23 110:20
114:8
highlight (4) 29:22 32:1
61:17 93:25
highly (1) 16:13
highstakes (1) 30:14
hired (1) 36:3
historically (1) 79:23
history (4) 2:19,19 42:24
43:3
hit (6) 6:3 8:25 22:1 71:25
74:5 161:1
hold (1) 150:8
holds (1) 149:13
home (45) 8:14 14:4,7,22
22:3 23:4,9,22 25:8 27:5
31:16 40:21 41:14
46:13,24 49:17 50:15
55:18 56:2 57:6,23 58:11
59:8,10 62:3 67:1 68:21
69:5,9,10,12 72:15
73:12,22 75:11 76:2
77:1,25 80:22 99:3,9
132:21,23 154:2 155:25
homeeducated (1) 86:3
homeless (2) 56:14 98:16
homeschool (2) 63:3,5
hope (2) 164:13,18
hoped (2) 78:3 101:12
hopefully (1) 27:16
hoping (4) 101:22 103:18,19
118:6
hour (1) 14:19
hour (1) 115:18
house (1) 57:24
household (2) 58:12 113:17
households (1) 58:15
houses (1) 56:25
housing (3) 136:19 139:17
142:23
hubs (3) 14:21 66:18 67:13
hub (11) 52:6,7 61:16 63:19
64:14 65:13,14 66:4
67:25,25 86:16
huge (29) 1:14 44:22 48:6
53:10 96:6 101:8 103:5
114:4 118:17 120:22,23
121:6 123:10,24
124:7,18,21 125:10
128:22,22 129:3 140:21
143:2,15 149:3 158:17
162:16,20 163:2
hugely (1) 122:12

hundred (2) 48:9,23
hundreds (1) 44:20
hurt (1) 73:21

I

idea (6) 19:7 94:9,20 100:20
123:13 146:22
ideas (1) 106:20
identified (8) 24:13,20 31:22
72:7,11 111:22 114:19,20
71:7 81:13 89:7 93:22
identity (2) 133:10 140:21
ie (2) 51:21 55:25
ignore (1) 33:14
ill (11) 1:12 2:18 50:18 75:25
76:1 84:10 85:4 89:15
135:25 138:5 159:22
illhealth (1) 42:10
illness (1) 121:19
im (30) 1:15,15 4:3 11:15
29:19 37:17 38:25 59:17
63:7 65:21,21,24 67:10
75:18 82:4,11 87:15,17
120:10 129:13 136:3
140:22,23 146:14 148:15
149:18,24 155:13 164:5,7
imaginative (1) 58:17
imagine (3) 138:25 142:4
151:1
immediate (1) 13:18
immediately (2) 55:24
114:25
immersed (1) 23:22
immersion (2) 23:12 79:2
immunocompromised (1)
12:10
immunosuppressed (1) 31:16
impact (20) 23:6 33:16
49:20 52:15 67:22 87:9
102:23 143:24 147:22
148:6 150:20,21 151:12
152:5 154:18,20,21
157:14,21 160:12
impacted (6) 8:25 16:18
23:10 68:17 121:8 150:23
impactful (5) 23:25 119:13
137:11 147:10 161:8
impacts (24) 21:17 32:3
54:16,18,21 55:3,15 57:18
58:6 61:16 67:22 68:14
71:18 85:8 86:6,11 99:13
102:4 112:14 137:7,15
144:7 159:21,22
impairment (1) 133:13
impairments (2) 133:14,15
impartial (1) 156:12
implemented (1) 81:20
implications (1) 13:17
importance (4) 32:22
62:9,10 87:1
important (30) 28:6 41:8
90:9 91:15,18 93:10
94:14,16,17 97:1,3
102:2,5,5 107:10,16
119:6,11 121:15 123:19,20
135:1 136:7,11,23
137:1,3,3,21 155:22
importantly (1) 92:19
impossible (3) 58:1 66:10
128:20
improve (3) 91:6 134:23
157:12
improved (4) 47:6 61:2 94:8
106:21
improvement (3) 7:1 11:2
53:16
improvements (1) 123:3
improving (3) 46:23 47:25
90:14
inaccessible (3) 34:14 149:2
153:22
inception (2) 3:23 4:14
inclass (1) 145:6
include (2) 89:23 92:7
included (2) 69:8 121:11
including (4) 78:13 134:15
143:18 164:4

inclusion (2) 145:1 159:11
inconsistencies (3) 65:25
76:8,15
inconsistent (2) 70:19,21
increase (4) 22:19 28:15,17
78:11
increased (1) 30:20
incredibly (6) 69:5 113:4
116:1 118:19 121:5 128:24
independent (1) 152:19
index (1) 165:1
indication (2) 67:2 112:13
individual (7) 53:6,9,12
75:21,23 107:22 127:25
individuals (1) 7:23
industry (3) 17:25 18:8,13
infinitely (1) 162:7
influence (1) 135:4
influencers (6) 135:1,5,8
156:25 157:20 158:3
information (27) 37:24,25
38:14 39:2,6,12,13 40:1
46:17 52:17 54:4
55:4,6,8,9,16 57:10,12
131:9 141:19 150:8,9
153:13,14,16,18 164:6
informations (1) 164:1
informed (4) 4:3 77:13,23
136:14
initial (1) 59:7
initially (6) 3:12 15:8,13
96:14 107:5 144:11
initiated (1) 31:10
injection (1) 19:21
injury (1) 116:10
inkling (1) 64:23
innovation (2) 9:7,22
innovative (1) 115:11
inperson (2) 107:6 155:18
input (7) 2:12 3:17 5:25 17:6
18:6 35:19 71:23
inputs (1) 18:8
inquiry (10) 2:7 35:17 62:8
76:6 88:12 130:25 131:6
134:16 157:5 163:25
inquires (1) 86:21
inside (1) 158:13
insight (3) 54:23 64:23 95:18
insights (3) 103:20 111:6,7
insolaf (1) 131:16
instance (5) 97:18 125:24
148:18 149:11 150:10
instead (1) 118:7
instruction (1) 109:19
integrity (1) 85:1
intention (1) 19:18
interact (2) 94:5 118:1
interacting (1) 103:11
interactions (1) 80:4
interactive (8) 6:20 7:18 8:2
9:14 16:9 24:5 27:2 29:11
interest (6) 30:20 38:9 73:24
90:18 101:19 108:6
interested (3) 63:4 90:16
131:12
interesting (2) 4:2,11
interests (1) 107:1
interface (1) 9:24
interim (4) 47:9,12,14 110:5
internet (7) 32:21 51:1,6,8
56:14 57:14 98:15
interrupt (1) 100:20
interrupt (1) 149:18
interrupted (14) 12:15 18:20
24:22 25:2,9 26:16,24
27:6,13 28:1 30:25 31:2
33:7,12
interruptions (1) 155:21
intersection (2) 149:3 151:11
intersectional (1) 135:10
into (76) 3:17 16:9,16 17:13
18:5 21:23,25 22:11
26:13,24 28:5,5,12,13 47:8
49:1 54:23 59:16 61:25
62:1 64:23 69:24 70:9
71:11 72:9,10 73:5 74:2,8

76:7,14,16,17,19 89:10
91:23 92:22 93:24 94:15
95:19 97:10 101:4
104:14,17 107:7 112:23,23
117:14,19 123:25 127:13
131:25 132:13 134:10
135:11 136:9,17 137:6,20
139:6,11,25 143:5,20
145:5 146:8 147:11
148:7,17 150:10 151:5
155:20 156:13 158:23
159:17 163:4
intranet (2) 7:17 8:17
introduction (1) 81:19
inundated (1) 84:24
investing (1) 127:18
invite (3) 39:19 65:8 85:4
invited (9) 47:16,16
48:11,14,16,16,20 76:12
108:7
invitees (1) 48:23
involve (6) 70:8,25 124:9
152:20 160:1,3
involved (24) 14:20 22:8,17
42:25 43:16 44:7 54:19,20
56:19 77:1,8,13 87:5 90:13
101:21 105:14 106:4 110:1
112:7 133:1,18 138:4,6
161:25
involvement (12) 39:21
45:13,14 48:15 49:10 54:1
60:15 72:11 77:5,5,6
involves (4) 37:12 131:16
133:23 153:4
involving (1) 109:20
ipads (1) 98:12
ironed (1) 12:20
ironically (1) 53:19
irrespective (2) 18:23 21:11
isgoll (11) 15:5 19:3 21:16
24:22 25:1,2 27:8 28:5
30:18,22 33:17
island (1) 147:6
isles (5) 3:12,20 19:22 20:13
22:16
isnt (6) 93:10 98:18 102:20
138:12 143:7 152:24
isolated (1) 41:14
isolating (4) 11:6,12 76:1
118:9
isolation (1) 120:22
issues (24) 4:22 10:21 14:20
25:15 26:18 55:19 56:25
57:25 59:8 60:13 62:25
63:18 71:16 72:13,17
81:4,6,17 85:9,16,18
106:23 107:22 127:23
its (135) 1:5 4:2,14,19
13:13,18 15:1 16:12,14
21:1,21 24:8,15 28:6 32:21
33:6,7,8,11 34:4,5 39:7,19
40:9 44:5 51:12 52:14
55:14 56:6 58:19 63:10,10
64:15,18 66:24 68:20
73:25 77:24,24
80:6,12,13,23,24
81:1,2,9,10,15 82:10 83:22
86:4 89:14 91:17,18,19
92:5,6 94:17 97:1 99:7
100:25 102:2,7,19
103:9,12 108:12 111:13
115:21 121:1 122:23,24
123:25 128:20 129:12
130:20,22 131:15 132:24
133:13,23 134:20
136:10,17,22,23,24
137:2,3,13,21
138:12,13,14,14,15,16
139:7,9 140:19,21
141:9,12 144:3 145:8
146:14 147:8,9,12 149:25
150:13 151:3,11 152:15
153:8 154:3 156:12,23
158:21,24 159:14
160:12,13,14,19,20 161:6
162:5,7,17 163:3,4

itself (2) 7:13 18:25

J

january (1) 135:20
jenny (3) 88:7,11 165:4
job (2) 13:15 109:10
jobs (1) 131:19
john (3) 47:20 50:12,21
join (2) 18:7 27:3
joining (2) 1:6 20:18
journey (3) 14:13 18:10 91:2
journeys (2) 90:25 132:25
juggle (2) 43:14 66:9
july (1) 108:4
june (6) 38:19 47:12
48:12,14 49:7,8

K

keen (2) 77:15 94:11
keep (3) 8:11 96:19 155:2
keeping (4) 39:9 40:17 77:23
87:1
kept (2) 106:21 110:2
key (15) 6:15 7:22 32:1
61:16 66:6 95:4 99:13
102:13,22 103:1 126:13
136:15 149:13 159:19
161:16
keywords (1) 45:18
kicked (1) 114:24
kids (3) 111:1 120:16,16
kind (73) 17:1,3 39:8,9 40:17
41:7 44:12,20 45:8,9 46:14
47:4 48:15 51:8,11 54:5
56:15 58:10 59:14 61:20
63:11 64:12 66:6 67:18,19
72:7 74:24 79:13,18
82:6,23 83:18,23 85:19
90:24 91:1 93:4 94:12
96:16 98:17 100:16 101:9
103:8,13 105:1,24 106:17
108:13 109:15 110:3
111:17 114:6 119:8 126:3
128:10 132:12 137:14
140:1 141:16 143:2 144:15
148:11 149:1,23 150:2
152:18 153:25 154:11,13
155:2 159:14 160:9 162:12
kinds (4) 36:18 60:19 67:6
99:8
kit (2) 57:14 70:15
knew (10) 19:15 61:7 68:4
77:10 91:10 93:2 96:3
100:11 107:6 117:13
knockon (1) 75:6
knock (140) 11:9 12:16 13:12
14:3 19:24 20:2,3,9,24
21:1 23:25 25:8 27:25
32:13 38:25 39:4 41:21
43:13 44:9,20 45:10,18,19
46:12 49:1,21 50:3,4
53:3,4 54:7,7 56:15 57:17
58:18,20 59:14 60:2,12,18
61:6,24 64:16 65:24
66:7,10 67:5,8,20,20 68:2
69:1,5,6,10,16,21 70:11,15
72:3,5,5,14 73:6,14,15
74:3,17 76:1 77:1
79:2,10,24 80:13,18,24
82:5,9,10,14,15
84:11,22,24 85:13,17,25
91:8 92:24 93:1 94:19
97:7,13 100:9,15 101:20
102:8,19 104:6 105:16
107:5,14 112:8 114:12
115:10 117:4,11 119:7,12
120:9 122:24,25 125:18
126:1 127:14 128:18
129:11,14 133:15 135:21
136:20 140:8,11,12,13
144:6,9,15 145:1,4,14,16
146:3,15 150:12 154:24
159:6 160:4 161:4 162:24
knowing (6) 72:22 79:5
86:24,24 102:20 132:17

knowledge (6) 6:9 57:15
60:21 94:21 102:7 131:21
known (7) 7:13 9:3 30:11
86:3,13 88:24 149:25
knows (1) 65:21
kristina (3) 35:12,16 165:3

L

label (1) 133:10
lack (21) 63:22 64:20,22
68:1,1 70:19 84:5 100:4,25
118:15 132:17
141:19,19,19 146:5,11
148:4 156:16,17 161:23
163:1
lacking (1) 132:16
lag (1) 100:21
language (14) 15:10 16:11
21:18,24 22:2 23:7,13,22
141:5 148:13 149:10,13
150:8,13
languages (2) 8:12 22:14
large (4) 25:4 39:20 40:23
43:23
largest (1) 25:10
last (10) 22:20 32:11 46:2
52:13 70:7 94:15 105:5
120:16 152:17,21
late (3) 3:1 81:25 82:1
later (6) 4:10 61:24 75:8
136:1 145:17 155:18
latest (1) 73:2
latter (1) 53:11
latterly (2) 67:14,15
launch (2) 10:16 12:23
launched (1) 6:17
lay (1) 124:21
lead (13) 7:20 10:6 28:22
29:5 82:22 130:2
131:15,19,22 133:18
134:4,19 153:1
leaders (2) 76:23 78:6
leads (2) 18:4 132:8
learn (9) 62:20 71:22 74:21
91:21,24 92:3 117:20
145:5 156:19
learned (10) 19:6 51:22
86:6,19 124:14,16,19
160:2,10 161:3
learner (5) 26:16 27:13 28:1
30:25 31:2
learners (22) 6:21 10:12
12:3,13,15 15:6 17:14
18:20 21:24 22:1 23:7,7
24:22 25:2,10 26:11,25
33:7,12 132:13 154:19
155:25
learning (103) 5:13 6:20 8:14
9:14 14:2 15:7,9 16:5,9
17:18 19:9 24:18 26:5 27:2
28:13 32:7,16,18 42:9,25
43:3 46:14 50:16,19 51:23
52:19 53:5,8,11
55:17,19,25,25 56:17,23
57:7 59:16 60:16 61:17
62:6 68:22 69:9,12 71:9,14
72:14 73:10,12,17,18
74:1,4,6,14,18,19,25
75:2,12,21 76:2
77:9,10,14,17,24
79:6,11,22 82:19,21 90:19
92:11 98:21,22 100:1,23
103:9 104:15,17 115:15
117:24,25 119:13 121:17
125:10,11 131:25
132:2,2,23,23 138:16
139:15,17 145:20 146:9
152:3,18,23 153:3 155:3
156:20
learnings (1) 124:22
learnt (2) 152:22 162:14
least (5) 27:19 118:17
142:11,13 153:7
leave (8) 75:9 129:15
142:12,20,20 153:8,15
158:5

leaving (2) 139:24 158:11
led (6) 26:20 31:11,18 47:15
84:1 100:21
left (6) 29:18 59:15,17 60:18
154:22 160:7
legacy (3) 17:22 24:9 78:24
legally (1) 143:14
legislation (2) 138:15 162:3
lend (1) 18:25
less (10) 46:22 53:25 64:25
98:25 121:21 145:18,19
156:21,21 160:18
lessened (1) 148:23
lessening (1) 148:21
lesson (6) 13:23 19:9 20:19
87:11 160:2,10
lessons (2) 7:18 12:8
13:5,13,18 19:5 20:17 24:6
29:11 32:2,10 33:11 51:22
86:6,19,20 124:14,15,18
159:19 161:3,17,21
162:13,20
let (5) 84:11 104:6 140:8
144:12 163:19
lets (3) 155:15 158:2 164:2
letter (1) 138:14
letters (1) 43:21
level (11) 11:20 18:4 24:7
26:13 41:6 17:16 114:14
127:11 156:19,20,21
leveled (1) 126:20
leveller (1) 15:16
levels (1) 29:3
leverage (1) 7:23
leveraging (1) 32:7
lived (2) 54:18 95:6
logical (1) 26:22
loneliness (1) 127:11
lonely (1) 127:15
long (19) 1:19 12:19 20:2,24
15:15
42:23 43:3 70:7 72:1 82:1
84:8,18 85:17 98:18
111:1,1 120:16,19 122:5
145:22
longer (1) 12:11
managed (4) 73:21 104:16
152:22 159:6
manager (2) 2:13 37:9
managing (4) 39:22 58:6
66:23 67:1
mandate (1) 3:22
manifesto (9) 11:9
122:14,17,19
123:2,13,21,24 124:20
28:4 43:18 44:4,24 45:20
61:15 67:16 69:21 86:2
89:9 90:21,24 91:7 92:17
104:4 105:22 109:24 120:9
127:13,14 109:24
111:9,13,15 112:6,8,23
113:24 115:12,16,18,21,22
116:10 117:6,12
120:8,10,12 121:4,5,21
122:9,21 123:7,7
124:2,5,25 125:12,23
134:4,19 138:3,13,15
140:13,20 141:14,17
143:12,16 144:12
148:12,17 149:23,25
152:20 153:24 163:20
liked (2) 99:18 139:24
likely (3) 110:18 113:10
161:2
limited (2) 73:9 144:18
link (2) 1:7 39:23
linking (2) 130:3 133:5
links (3) 53:22 67:17 107:6
lips (1) 113:24
list (5) 15:7 29:3,16 85:3
109:6
listen (2) 102:21 159:13
listened (3) 89:6 137:22
162:23
listening (2) 72:23 102:22
list (1) 53:20
literacy (1) 55:16
literally (4) 46:8 59:15 60:18
153:10
literature (1) 21:6
little (17) 21:19 40:11 46:15
55:13 63:7 84:6 95:10

120:4 126:12,20 129:12
133:22 135:25 136:1 147:5
154:11,19
live (22) 3:17 6:19,19 7:18
8:2,17 9:3 13:5 16:9 20:17
24:5 27:2 29:11 72:23
89:11 93:13 98:10 99:5
105:18 126:6 128:18,22
lived (3) 113:11 128:20
135:14
lives (4) 36:11 42:25 121:8
122:8
living (2) 58:14 157:9
loads (1) 150:17
local (38) 3:13,13 5:7 9:16
23:1 28:9,10 36:19,21
9:24 14:4 15:3 19:17,21,24
20:2,25 22:3 23:23 24:8
26:19 41:12 50:7
51:13,16,20,22 59:7 61:8
66:6 73:7,16,19
74:11,14,21,23 77:2 92:22
93:15,25 97:5,14,15
105:25 147:22 155:14
157:5,9,13 159:25
lockdowns (1) 71:23
locked (1) 144:9
lodged (2) 54:18 95:6
logical (1) 26:22
loneliness (1) 127:11
lonely (1) 127:15
long (19) 1:19 12:19 20:2,24
15:15
42:23 43:3 70:7 72:1 82:1
84:8,18 85:17 98:18
111:1,1 120:16,19 122:5
145:22
longer (1) 12:11
managed (4) 73:21 104:16
152:22 159:6
manager (2) 2:13 37:9
managing (4) 39:22 58:6
66:23 67:1
mandate (1) 3:22
manifesto (9) 11:9
122:14,17,19
123:2,13,21,24 124:20
28:4 43:18 44:4,24 45:20
61:15 67:16 69:21 86:2
89:9 90:21,24 91:7 92:17
104:4 105:22 109:24 120:9
127:13,14 109:24
111:9,13,15 112:6,8,23
113:24 115:12,16,18,21,22
116:10 117:6,12
120:8,10,12 121:4,5,21
122:9,21 123:7,7
124:2,5,25 125:12,23
134:4,19 138:3,13,15
140:13,20 141:14,17
143:12,16 144:12
148:12,17 149:23,25
152:20 153:24 163:20
looks (2) 29:9 92:12
loop (2) 39:10 68:11
lordship (2) 87:13 163:12
lose (2) 94:25 154:7
losing (1) 63:7
loss (2) 60:20 70:2
lost (6) 59:4,12 126:12,25
129:1 157:13
lot (93) 14:6 21:17 25:13
26:20 42:3 43:7 48:2
50:12,18 52:17,22 56:4
69:17 80:10,10,10 91:3
92:3,25 93:2 94:12,25
96:21 98:2,4,5,7 100:21
101:10,11 103:4 108:5
112:17,21,22,24
113:6,8,8,18,20,22
114:6,15,23 115:2,4,22
116:3,6,20,23 117:2,7,20
118:14 120:12 121:13
122:5,7 124:4 125:8,22

126:7,17,22,24
127:4,16,17 128:12 129:1
132:16 133:15 135:23
136:15 137:12 139:10
140:3,20 141:4 151:12,14
152:18,21,22,25
153:4,8,21 155:4 159:2
160:7
lots (15) 57:15 61:3,3 89:13
106:18 132:25,25,25
136:21,21,21 141:9,13
142:5 145:13
lottery (1) 14:25
louder (1) 1:12
loudly (1) 28:25
loved (1) 113:10
lower (3) 85:19 156:19,20
lunch (2) 87:19 149:24
luncheon (1) 87:22
lunchtime (1) 58:13

M

magazine (2) 157:3,3
mail (1) 53:20
main (8) 25:13 32:10 33:11
62:13 86:11 89:2 92:15
117:16
maintain (1) 24:6
maintaining (1) 139:21
major (1) 157:11
majority (6) 5:23 23:2 31:4
50:5 79:15 159:7
maker (1) 149:15
makes (2) 45:3 135:16
making (8) 30:22 32:8 43:8
86:24,25 91:25 125:14
126:14
manage (11) 43:12,12 56:15
58:10,21,23 60:18 68:6
77:9 79:21 153:23
manager (4) 73:21 104:16
152:22 159:6
manager (2) 2:13 37:9
managing (4) 39:22 58:6
66:23 67:1
mandate (1) 3:22
manifesto (9) 11:9
122:14,17,19
123:2,13,21,24 124:20
28:4 43:18 44:4,24 45:20
61:15 67:16 69:21 86:2
89:9 90:21,24 91:7 92:17
104:4 105:22 109:24 120:9
127:13,14 109:24
111:9,13,15 112:6,8,23
113:24 115:12,16,18,21,22
116:10 117:6,12
120:8,10,12 121:4,5,21
122:9,21 123:7,7
124:2,5,25 125:12,23
134:4,19 138:3,13,15
140:13,20 141:14,17
143:12,16 144:12
148:12,17 149:23,25
152:20 153:24 163:20
looks (2) 29:9 92:12
loop (2) 39:10 68:11
lordship (2) 87:13 163:12
lose (2) 94:25 154:7
losing (1) 63:7
loss (2) 60:20 70:2
lost (6) 59:4,12 126:12,25
129:1 157:13
lot (93) 14:6 21:17 25:13
26:20 42:3 43:7 48:2
50:12,18 52:17,22 56:4
69:17 80:10,10,10 91:3
92:3,25 93:2 94:12,25
96:21 98:2,4,5,7 100:21
101:10,11 103:4 108:5
112:17,21,22,24
113:6,8,8,18,20,22
114:6,15,23 115:2,4,22
116:3,6,20,23 117:2,7,20
118:14 120:12 121:13
122:5,7 124:4 125:8,22

mean (17) 6:5 14:3 25:23
55:1 58:19 66:22 67:4 69:7
72:6 84:13 93:9 124:18
126:10 128:16 142:13
144:3 145:4
meaningful (1) 78:1
meaningfully (1) 160:3
means (6) 61:8 128:22 146:5
150:12 159:11 161:19
meant (19) 5:23 14:25 18:11
31:12 79:3 91:24 99:6
102:25 103:3 114:15
116:8,25 144:4,15,20
146:10 148:21 160:6,7
measures (1) 143:13
mechanisms (1) 39:16
media (5) 37:11,14 43:21
108:6,25
medium (9) 21:25
22:4,6,10,10,20 22 23:2
24:11
meet (11) 11:14 20:23 28:11
29:6 33:20 34:10 54:2
62:16 63:12 114:17 124:11
meeting (6) 20:1 21:7 28:3
135:20 139:3,5
meetings (6) 38:2,20 49:9
69:20 76:8 143:1
meets (2) 33:24 104:4
member (6) 35:25 59:23
110:25 118:13,16 145:8
members (8) 36:16 37:13
38:3 39:5 40:9 134:21
137:9 138:11
membership (6)
36:7,14,22,25 37:5 134:19
memory (1) 47:22
mental (17) 25:15 26:21
31:5,11 52:19 70:11 84:18
127:5,19 128:1 133:14
134:15 144:17 148:14,24
149:6 157:14
mention (16) 21:21 40:3
42:14 51:13 73:9 76:4 83:4
84:3 85:6 124:14 134:25
141:6 145:16,17 148:4
157:17
mentioned (47) 5:12 8:16
9:5 20:5 21:18,20,23 31:3
39:11 40:5 45:13,16,22
48:9 51:14 53:14 58:4
60:22 66:14 67:24
70:2,3,19 86:22 94:14 95:8
99:16,19 101:12 108:19
112:7 122:14 128:6 140:18
141:13 146:18 147:3
150:21 155:8 156:8,16,25
159:16 160:13,17 161:3
164:4
messages (1) 158:18
messaging (1) 98:4
met (2) 10:3 110:19
methodology (4) 43:15,18
106:4 109:5
microphone (1) 26:4
microphones (2) 39:19
130:16
microsoft (1) 8:18
midway (1) 155:12
night (48) 24:17 50:3 64:23
65:4 68:8 78:15 85:5
94:9,11,20 96:10,11,11,12
98:22 100:10,12,18,19,19
101:19,25 102:16 104:1,4
105:4,5,12 106:20 110:16
112:4 113:22 114:18 115:1
132:15 134:14,16 136:19
139:13 140:10 143:19,21
144:11 150:1,11 152:23,25
160:1
mind (7) 3:9 10:21 28:16
88:9 101:14 103:16 119:23
minicraft (1) 11:16
ministers (1) 53:15
minute (1) 160:17
missed (6) 53:5 74:10 75:2,5

82:19 110:18
 missing (5) 98:8 102:21
 115:3 121:21 123:19
 mitigate (1) 159:20
 mitigated (1) 32:5
 mix (4) 95:25,25 96:4 117:17
 mixed (1) 158:18
 mixing (1) 107:11
 mixture (4) 5:20 44:5 111:3
 157:8
 mobile (2) 57:3 115:5
 mobility (1) 150:21
 model (9) 34:7 81:4,19,24
 82:15,24 83:12 125:11
 128:5
 modeling (1) 83:5
 moment (9) 12:17 29:2,4,23
 34:7 43:23 54:17 122:10
 128:3
 momentum (1) 156:3
 monday (1) 29:11
 money (4) 25:17 93:24 94:15
 96:16
 month (3) 12:7 46:21 163:5
 months (9) 6:12 27:19 39:1
 40:24 49:23 70:1 76:17
 105:5 153:14
 moral (1) 116:10
 more (79) 18:22 19:3 20:4
 21:16 22:23 31:13 34:8
 36:13 46:23 51:25
 52:2,3,3,4,17 53:10,25
 56:22 67:19 68:17 69:18
 74:24,25 77:3,14 78:1,15
 81:12 84:1,7 90:13 92:1
 97:8 98:24 99:17,18
 105:6,15,23 107:21 108:6
 109:20 113:9,22 114:21
 117:2,25 121:17,22,23
 124:8 126:19,19,22
 127:4,17 128:2 129:13
 135:25 140:3 142:17
 146:15,22 147:4,5,12
 151:2 154:22 156:18 159:9
 160:11,14,17 161:1,3
 162:8,25 163:1,11
 morning (13) 1:2,3,8,10,24
 2:1 35:2,6,7 58:12
 108:8,12 134:21
 most (20) 27:5 29:7 36:16
 40:17 41:1 57:11,11,11
 71:21,21,23,25 77:10
 84:17 89:20 107:3 118:7
 133:7,11 160:25,25
 mostly (4) 54:3 104:15
 106:10 117:21
 motivated (1) 124:10
 motivating (1) 91:5
 motivation (2) 91:21 107:18
 motivations (1) 69:3
 move (25) 14:10 19:3 21:15
 26:7 32:18 38:13 61:15
 63:18 67:22 68:13 81:3
 109:17 131:24 133:1 134:9
 137:5,20 139:6 145:19
 146:8 147:13 156:4,22
 160:23 161:10
 moved (2) 34:8 135:11
 moves (1) 83:9
 movies (1) 99:18
 moving (12) 24:10 58:15,16
 132:23 136:8,17,19
 139:10,25 143:3 144:23
 153:17
 ms (56) 1:2,3,5,14,17,23
 2:3,4
 35:1,2,4,5,6,9,11,13,14,14,19,23
 86:5 87:11,16,23,25 88:3,8
 129:10,12,17,23,24
 130:1,2,6,12,13 131:3,14
 136:6 137:25 138:2 143:23
 146:19 151:19,20,21 152:2
 154:16 159:23 163:14
 164:17 165:2,3,4,6
 msp (1) 53:22
 much (41) 9:23 14:9,16

15:25 19:2,22 24:21 26:13
 28:9 33:8 34:15,17 37:21
 55:1 61:22 73:23 74:1,7
 79:5 86:8 101:17 103:7
 104:13 105:1 113:17 114:8
 115:20,24 117:14,21
 120:24 121:18,22 124:8
 126:10 128:2 129:6,8
 140:9 163:10,14
 multiple (4) 27:23 72:20
 142:1 162:2
 multitude (1) 96:24
 mum (1) 143:3
 must (1) 116:17
 myriad (1) 42:11
 myself (3) 8:8 14:4 23:23

N

na (1) 3:22
 naive (1) 27:11
 name (13) 2:5 35:15,16
 51:14,17 88:10,11
 130:13,17,18,19 131:3
 135:6
 names (1) 46:3
 narrative (1) 31:6
 nat (2) 30:8,8
 national (22) 3:22 4:13
 6:9,13 7:6 8:8,24 9:3 11:20
 16:5 23:19 24:9 26:12
 28:18 30:10,10,11
 32:23,25 41:6 54:12 132:5
 135:6
 nationals (1) 21:20
 nations (1) 33:22
 naturally (1) 91:21
 nature (1) 5:22
 nearly (3) 44:16 46:16 124:1
 109:20 113:9,22 114:21
 117:2,25 121:17,22,23
 124:8 126:19,19,22
 127:4,17 128:2 129:13
 135:25 140:3 142:17
 146:15,22 147:4,5,12
 151:2 154:22 156:18 159:9
 160:11,14,17 161:1,3
 162:8,25 163:1,11
 morning (13) 1:2,3,8,10,24
 2:1 35:2,6,7 58:12
 108:8,12 134:21
 most (20) 27:5 29:7 36:16
 40:17 41:1 57:11,11,11
 71:21,21,23,25 77:10
 84:17 89:20 107:3 118:7
 133:7,11 160:25,25
 mostly (4) 54:3 104:15
 106:10 117:21
 motivated (1) 124:10
 motivating (1) 91:5
 motivation (2) 91:21 107:18
 motivations (1) 69:3
 move (25) 14:10 19:3 21:15
 26:7 32:18 38:13 61:15
 63:18 67:22 68:13 81:3
 109:17 131:24 133:1 134:9
 137:5,20 139:6 145:19
 146:8 147:13 156:4,22
 160:23 161:10
 moved (2) 34:8 135:11
 moves (1) 83:9
 movies (1) 99:18
 moving (12) 24:10 58:15,16
 132:23 136:8,17,19
 139:10,25 143:3 144:23
 153:17
 ms (56) 1:2,3,5,14,17,23
 2:3,4
 35:1,2,4,5,6,9,11,13,14,14,19,23
 86:5 87:11,16,23,25 88:3,8
 129:10,12,17,23,24
 130:1,2,6,12,13 131:3,14
 136:6 137:25 138:2 143:23
 146:19 151:19,20,21 152:2
 154:16 159:23 163:14
 164:17 165:2,3,4,6
 msp (1) 53:22
 much (41) 9:23 14:9,16

67:22 107:25 116:11
 122:11,16 136:9,14 137:6
 144:6 153:17 163:5
 ngos (1) 134:5
 nhs (1) 59:1
 nice (2) 99:20 117:22
 night (1) 46:2
 nine (1) 132:3
 nineties (1) 132:14
 nobody (7) 41:13 43:5
 142:1 162:2
 none (2) 70:17 72:10
 nongaelic (2) 22:3 23:8
 nonpandemic (1) 37:20
 nor (1) 73:17
 norm (1) 154:7
 normal (5) 62:16 105:6
 121:22 127:7,7
 normally (5) 37:19 40:6
 44:19,20 63:9
 north (2) 11:3 65:23
 northern (2) 11:1 25:18
 note (6) 4:2,11 99:14 157:6
 161:18,18
 noted (5) 78:17 85:10
 145:23 147:1 156:15
 notes (1) 128:11
 nothing (3) 80:2 128:16
 163:13
 noticed (1) 144:18
 november (4) 1:1 50:12,25
 164:20
 nowhere (1) 64:11
 number (17) 2:10 11:11
 15:20 22:20 23:1 25:4,9
 30:15 31:8,21 33:5 34:12
 59:20 96:7 101:8
 124:18,21
 numbers (10) 11:25 22:19
 28:15 29:7 36:14 38:24,25
 44:24 67:15 115:6
 nurseries (5) 37:3 43:2 60:5
 61:2 76:15
 nursery (9) 59:16 60:10
 61:23,25 62:15 72:8,9
 76:23 80:17

O

observe (2) 163:12,14
 observed (1) 78:10
 obviously (30) 16:20 30:17
 41:14 43:7,12,16 47:10
 53:10 54:18,24 55:23 56:1
 57:20 62:8 63:16 66:17
 69:22 75:5,24 77:16 80:12
 88:19 100:17 106:3
 113:3,13 124:15 128:25
 135:17 155:13
 occasion (1) 44:13
 occasions (3) 17:12 31:8,21
 occupational (1) 71:4
 occurring (1) 106:19
 o'clock (1) 29:9
 october (1) 36:1
 offer (26) 6:4,7,9,13 7:6,25
 8:7 9:4 10:1 12:1 19:12
 23:19 24:4,10 25:14
 28:18,21 29:12 30:7
 33:7,8,9 64:2 80:7 93:5
 158:4
 offered (2) 5:18,21
 offering (5) 3:10 5:18
 19:4,19 80:8
 offers (1) 32:23
 office (2) 19:23 110:15
 officer (2) 35:21 134:2
 officers (3) 28:22 48:15 49:8
 official (1) 133:25
 often (16) 27:5 56:1,25
 71:20 84:12 89:5,12 91:12
 92:9 96:23 102:14 113:6
 115:5 132:21 152:16 153:8
 oh (1) 159:5
 okay (18) 37:23 40:24 49:3
 51:6 52:5,9,9,10 67:6 67:3

83:4 84:3 104:22 129:4
 130:17,21 141:6 158:21
 old (1) 110:10
 older (5) 110:9 117:21
 121:16 125:19 128:9
 onboarding (1) 28:3
 once (5) 13:1 22:11 28:1
 55:17 125:3
 ones (11) 38:9,9,15,15,17
 66:4 82:20 94:19 102:9
 121:16 148:15
 onetwoone (5) 24:12 68:24
 70:9 71:2,14
 onetosmallgroup (1) 24:12
 ongoing (8) 30:12 50:13
 52:15 62:24,24 70:6 85:8
 159:22
 online (64) 3:11,24 4:15 5:13
 6:24 7:15,18 8:2 9:8,14
 10:16,19 11:9 12:1
 13:13,17,22,24 14:10 17:5
 18:5 19:1,4 20:5,7,17
 27:11,12 28:5 32:18 37:25
 38:2,13,17 43:19 44:1
 50:16 51:23 53:14 55:15
 74:14,18,19,25 90:23
 93:19,21 94:5,24 95:16
 96:14 101:2,3 110:21
 120:19 132:3 144:23,24
 146:13,14 152:3 153:23
 159:5 162:16
 onto (5) 8:23 28:4 73:1
 108:7 149:7
 onwards (2) 7:12 12:25
 opaque (1) 64:16
 open (10) 16:6,7 29:18 38:4
 40:8 43:2 46:10 80:18
 104:8 141:3
 opened (1) 39:3
 opened (1) 38:15
 openness (1) 68:1
 operated (1) 67:20
 operates (1) 82:8
 operating (2) 20:8 29:2
 operational (1) 131:21
 opinions (1) 105:18
 opportunities (16) 4:23 6:20
 8:13 18:16,24 63:14 75:1
 125:15 126:25 127:21
 132:2,3 136:13 137:20
 140:10 154:9
 opportunity (11) 17:23 32:1
 39:16 83:16 93:13 94:8
 95:2 104:7 105:16 147:14
 157:12
 opted (1) 34:13
 option (1) 21:9
 options (7) 18:18 44:5
 132:18 136:12 145:25
 156:21 160:18
 order (5) 3:25 21:4 74:1
 151:22 161:10
 ordinarily (1) 42:20
 organisation (10) 36:8 69:8
 74:25 130:2,5 131:22
 134:20 137:16 141:2 147:6
 153:10
 organisations (12) 8:11 36:9
 43:22 47:17 61:4 90:2
 92:23 93:2 134:4,6,19
 153:10
 organised (2) 51:25 52:3
 organising (1) 38:6
 original (4) 106:7 110:3
 111:5 119:25
 or (3) 71:4 139:16 148:13
 others (12) 14:21 20:5 56:5
 78:8 106:10 118:1 121:9
 134:19 135:15 139:20
 148:16 153:9
 otherwise (1) 78:14
 ought (1) 31:20
 ourselves (6) 6:19 2:24 8:6
 9:25 13:5 15:3 44:10,13
 outcome (2) 26:6 97:24
 outcomes (1) 77:15
 outdoor (1) 97:17

outdoors (3) 98:25,25 99:21
 outline (4) 3:10 27:24 43:15
 89:17
 outlined (2) 103:23 107:10
 output (2) 111:17,19
 outputs (2) 104:6 108:24
 outraged (1) 156:16
 outset (2) 80:14 157:1
 outside (4) 57:6 90:4 152:19
 158:13
 over (22) 12:6 17:5 22:17,20
 32:11 37:3 39:1 40:24,24
 46:21 47:7 49:1 52:21
 53:16 58:13 74:24 75:24
 97:9 106:24 134:20 145:22
 158:9
 overall (5) 40:23 54:25 96:7
 110:6 158:7
 overcome (1) 15:22
 overhead (1) 16:25
 overload (1) 125:21
 overloaded (1) 125:22
 oversee (1) 37:10
 overseeing (1) 39:8
 overseen (1) 6:24
 oversubscribed (1) 70:13
 overview (2) 40:15 133:3
 overwhelm (1) 66:18
 overwhelming (3) 44:16
 125:23 136:25
 own (27) 3:20 4:4 7:14 8:1
 18:19 19:15 20:20,22,23
 21:8 28:7 31:1 43:25 56:2
 69:1 74:6 91:3 94:1 113:2
 117:18,23 118:4 121:20
 125:13 133:24 142:25
 150:6

P

p1 (1) 62:1
 p2 (1) 62:1
 pace (1) 121:20
 pack (2) 120:8 123:16
 package (2) 16:5 18:15
 packages (1) 16:25
 packs (1) 56:18
 paid (3) 5:5,6 134:20
 palpable (1) 128:12
 palsy (1) 148:19
 pan (1) 133:13
 pandemic (63) 4:8 5:14,24
 6:10 17:23 18:2 21:25
 23:15 26:15 31:9,15,18
 32:6 37:15,18,21
 38:11,12,14 40:4,6,12
 55:7,22 78:16 86:14
 89:16,20,22 90:7 109:18
 110:25 111:2,11,13 113:13
 115:1 116:14,16,19 118:22
 125:20 126:8,21
 135:18,21,23 138:23,24
 139:1 145:3 148:18 156:23
 157:21,21 158:9,10,20
 159:5 161:22,24 162:11
 163:5
 panel (4) 94:3 95:8,12 130:1
 panicked (1) 46:23
 panicky (1) 46:20
 paper (4) 19:6 20:11 99:3,4
 papers (1) 56:24
 paragraph (40) 6:1 7:10 9:5
 10:14 12:18 13:9,10 19:5
 21:21 24:24 28:14
 30:17,21 36:7,24 41:24
 42:14,16 45:23 50:23 56:8
 59:9 62:7 68:16 73:9 74:12
 76:6 83:4 84:4 85:6,8
 90:6,9 92:16 99:25 103:17
 108:19 122:23 123:1
 143:24
 paragraphs (4) 40:3 63:21
 81:17 99:13
 parent (32) 23:4,23
 36:8,16,17,18,20,22 37:3
 38:5,6,16,20,23
 39:2,3,8,17 41:5 54:12,14

55:9 56:19 58:16 61:11
 76:12 80:19,20 100:12
 152:8,9 153:11
 parental (9) 36:10 48:14
 49:9 54:1,11 76:4,25 85:16
 143:11
 parentcarers (1) 120:20
 parenting (1) 58:14
 parentrun (4) 36:9,15 38:3
 39:5
 parents (113) 14:17 23:9
 28:4,11 34:11 36:8 37:6
 38:4,16 39:8,13,17
 40:8,18,25 41:13,22
 42:1,7,17,19,21,24
 43:11,24 46:16 50:19
 52:8,11 55:9 56:9
 57:10,11,19,20,21,24
 58:4,6,14 59:19
 61:19,20,22,25
 62:11,13,17,18 63:5,11,14
 64:14 66:2,3,15,15,16,19
 67:2,8 68:7 69:15,19
 72:3,25 73:4,11,20 75:6
 76:7,11,16,25 77:3,8,12,23
 78:12,13,18 79:1,24
 80:5,15,18,24 81:14,22
 82:1,9,13,19 83:6 85:10
 86:23 100:13 102:11 103:7
 115:3 143:11 145:9,15
 147:21 148:3 149:8
 152:14,25 153:22 154:22
 155:4 156:15
 parentschool (1) 78:4
 parliament (1) 48:19
 part (31) 6:12 9:11,17
 13:13,21 16:8 18:15 20:11
 23:19 27:2,23 28:18 31:7
 33:17 41:4 53:11 60:23
 78:18 84:8 87:8 91:5
 102:22 106:9,11 108:17,20
 109:7 120:20 133:20 135:1
 145:6
 participants (1) 120:5
 participation (5) 93:10 94:18
 95:5 96:21 104:24
 participatory (2) 89:21 94:12
 particular (39) 4:17,24 7:4
 9:18 15:6 16:4 17:3,16
 18:7 24:19 30:15 42:2
 47:11 55:12 56:9 57:18,19
 58:6 71:18 72:13,17 75:16
 6:10 17:23 18:2 21:25
 86:20 100:2 112:15 116:12
 129:1 131:10,24,24
 133:24 134:23 142:16
 150:7,12,13 157:17 161:16
 163:24 164:5
 particularly (23) 23:24 28:25
 31:17 39:15 59:3 61:22
 71:12 78:25 89:4 97:12
 102:18 103:20 104:1
 107:19 109:20 112:4
 119:11,13,18 121:3 122:1
 128:13 156:9
 parties (2) 48:18 116:4
 partly (1) 118:25
 partner (1) 43:22
 partners (9) 10:2 17:25
 18:5,8,14 38:10 48:16
 94:10 132:25
 partnership (10) 5:3 6:25 7:7
 8:10 11:1 18:17 28:10
 63:4,6 110:23
 parts (6) 15:24 41:1 42:6
 62:16 69:13 137:2
 parttime (1) 48:2
 pass (2) 138:5 153:16
 passage (1) 119:6
 passed (2) 79:25 153:13
 passing (2) 113:16 153:17
 password (1) 33:2
 past (6) 29:10 63:2
 129:11,20 163:3,4
 patchwork (2) 13:15 125:7
 patchy (1) 74:20
 pathway (8) 95:3 133:2

137:18 144:4,7 145:7
 146:2,23
 pathways (11) 132:1,24
 136:18 137:21 144:2
 145:14 146:6,6 154:17
 160:5,10
 pause (6) 46:6 93:1 122:9
 150:23 151:4,7
 pay (1) 57:3
 pe (2) 17:3 97:17
 pects (1) 150:1
 pedagogy (7) 13:24 90:10,11
 91:1,1,25 92:10
 penalise (1) 126:5
 pencils (2) 56:24 71:6
 penultimate (1) 111:19
 people (317) 5:13 7:4
 8:3,9,13 9:16,18 10:4,10
 11:6,10,10,14,23 12:9,9
 14:10,13,16,17 15:20
 16:6,15 17:19,24 18:23
 19:16 20:1,4,18,23 21:7
 22:17 23:3,12,21 24:1,11
 25:4,13,20,22 26:23
 29:8,24 30:16 31:4,23
 32:4,9 33:13,16,21 34:12
 39:22 43:7 46:8,22,22 47:7
 48:7 50:2,14 51:9,11,25
 55:10,11,23
 56:12,22,23,24
 57:5,5,7,13,16 58:17
 59:2,14 60:2 62:18 64:8
 65:18 66:22 67:9 70:12
 71:11,22 72:15,15 74:20
 75:2 76:18 78:25 79:17
 80:1,7 82:1,9 83:17,20
 84:17 85:2,18,22 86:12
 89:2,3,5,10,21,25 93:7,14
 94:4,7 95:18
 96:6,13,21,23,25 97:2
 98:1,11 99:2,23 100:7
 101:1,5,6,8,11,17,18,20
 102:1,3 103:10 104:2
 105:14 106:9 107

percentages (1) 54:25	144:7,8 145:7 147:23	presented (1) 26:6	111:3,18 124:16 158:2	135:25 137:24 140:15	105:11 106:25 107:10	131:13 154:17 158:2 160:4
percents (1) 67:6	153:5,12 155:8	presenting (1) 80:22	projects (13) 89:16,19,20,22	141:6,11 142:6,10 143:22	109:10,12 113:15,15,17	163:18 164:6
performance (2) 83:24,25	plans (1) 145:22	press (5) 37:14 64:1 120:25	90:1 92:1 93:12 94:2,12,20	146:18 147:3,16 149:18	114:1 115:3,3,11,13,13,25	relationship (2) 63:6 80:16
perhaps (24) 11:6 12:10 14:9	platform (4) 9:8,15 101:4	130:14 134:22	127:12 132:14 133:18	150:20 154:15 156:8,24	116:6 117:4,6,16,17,22	relationships (8) 60:2 78:4
16:16 18:10 31:15 40:11	104:18	pressed (1) 64:12	promoted (3) 28:19 53:19	158:2 159:15 161:15	118:5,15,24 119:9,22	79:14 80:7,14 81:8 116:24
46:6 54:22 55:17 56:8	platforms (1) 56:16	pressure (2) 69:17 154:22	66:14	120:3,7,9 121:1,8,15	120:3,7,9 121:1,8,15	139:21
63:18 84:23 92:14	play (21) 13:13 89:23,25	presumably (2) 70:25 102:3	proper (1) 135:20	122:3,4 123:13,19	122:3,4 123:13,19	relative (1) 127:15
112:12,15 150:21 156:19	90:2,4,10,11,11,16,16,25	presumptuous (1) 1:15	proposal (1) 20:12	124:11,21 125:14,16	124:11,21 125:14,16	released (3) 122:17,18
159:20,22 160:2,10,18	91:1,12,17,25 92:8,10	pretty (6) 37:21 40:23 44:16	propose (1) 95:6	126:1,8,9,10,13,16 133:15	126:1,8,9,10,13,16 133:15	123:12
161:13	99:19 108:17 127:21 142:3	86:8 104:12 139:23	proposition (1) 82:25	136:10,25 137:1,18 138:7	136:10,25 137:1,18 138:7	relevant (1) 17:10
period (20) 11:12 12:4,12	playful (1) 90:19	preventative (1) 128:2	prose (1) 157:4	126:10 155:24	126:10 155:24	reliable (1) 11:24
14:4 22:3 27:19 40:20 47:7	playing (1) 18:4	prevented (1) 150:14	prospect (1) 48:8	148:24,24 151:12 157:13	148:24,24 151:12 157:13	reliably (1) 4:3
50:16 59:7,21 66:6	please (29) 2:4 24:22,24,25	preventing (1) 25:25	protection (1) 64:17	158:8,19 160:8 162:11,20	158:8,19 160:8 162:11,20	relieve (1) 20:13
74:21,23 76:1 104:14	27:8 35:15 36:14 37:8	previous (4) 49:18,23 83:12	prove (1) 133:11	quarter (3) 29:10 129:11,20	quarter (3) 29:10 129:11,20	rely (1) 162:13
121:17 136:25 145:22	40:13 63:23 76:9 81:21	106:16	provide (14) 3:14,17 4:7	queries (1) 156:10	84:14 147:4	remaining (1) 93:23
146:2	84:6 88:2,19,20 89:17	previously (1) 95:9	8:13 11:23 33:1,23 36:13	question (12) 19:3 21:16	reasonable (1) 156:13	remains (2) 28:7,8
periods (6) 52:22,25 59:10	92:18 95:7,10 106:5 109:2	primarily (10) 4:20 39:25	37:23 53:11 70:23 132:1	38:15 100:16 132:11	reasons (6) 20:5 34:13 53:1	remember (8) 84:9
75:12,23 77:2	114:21 130:19 131:3,15	80:8 101:15 133:8	159:6 161:15	96:24 141:10,13	96:24 141:10,13	113:20,23 118:2 120:4
person (64) 8:25 15:17 17:2	133:22,22 161:17	138:10,18 138:16 141:17	provided (7) 2:16 10:8 31:6	156:7 159:9 161:16	156:7 159:9 161:16	122:17 140:1 151:9
18:12 21:11 23:16	plenty (2) 77:12 117:22	148:15	35:23 76:3 130:24 131:5	questions (14) 27:13 34:16	35:9 39:23 40:21 45:4	remembered (2) 112:19
24:1,15,19 26:15,25	plug (1) 3:25	primary (28) 5:19,21	provider (1) 3:11	46:10 87:14,15 96:19 97:4	46:10 87:14,15 96:19 97:4	115:3
27:14,18 28:4,6,12	plugged (2) 16:9 158:23	22:1,8,11,13,18,18 27:1	provides (1) 18:23	115:19 129:7 163:11	115:19 129:7 163:11	remitted (1) 4:13
31:14,19 32:24 33:1,24	plugging (1) 24:16	29:8,24 36:25 37:2 71:9,12	providing (3) 4:16,22 137:1	121:15 129:7 163:11	121:15 129:7 163:11	remote (1) 52:19
54:13 99:8 103:13 108:15	pm (4) 87:21 129:21 151:18	80:17 90:21 91:14 95:19	provision (27) 12:15 23:1,20	121:15 129:7 163:11	121:15 129:7 163:11	55:14,17,19,25 61:17
110:20 112:11 113:23	164:19	107:19 110:7 114:20,23	25:2 26:13,22,24 27:12	121:15 129:7 163:11	121:15 129:7 163:11	99:25 104:14,17 121:17
115:12 118:19,22 127:25	podcast (1) 159:13	116:1 119:2,12,13 120:1	28:5,19 29:4,9,22,25 32:6	159:25	159:25	125:11
132:24 134:9 136:9 137:8	podcasts (2) 157:2 159:15	133:17,19,20 47:24 51:23	33:17,19,20 47:24 51:23	quite (50) 38:17 44:9 46:1	38:17 44:9 46:1	remotely (5) 3:16 103:8
138:21 139:2,18,23 140:23	poetry (1) 157:4	72:2 74:9 75:16 145:19	72:2 74:9 75:16 145:19	52:22 53:6 56:4 65:15	52:22 53:6 56:4 65:15	114:9 115:15,23
142:12,14,18 143:3,14,17	pointed (1) 162:1	150:23 156:16,17	150:23 156:16,17	72:19 73:21 74:15	72:19 73:21 74:15	remoteness (1) 114:14
145:11 147:13,14	pointing (1) 150:2	provoking (1) 154:13	provoking (1) 154:13	81:25,25 82:1 91:23 94:11	81:25,25 82:1 91:23 94:11	removal (1) 152:3
149:14,17 150:20 151:2,6	points (3) 82:4 110:5 144:1	psychologists (1) 148:13	psychologists (1) 148:13	98:7,23 99:5,11 101:10	98:7,23 99:5,11 101:10	remove (3) 17:23 25:24 30:5
152:17,23 153:11,15,23	polarising (1) 80:24	public (5) 37:13 42:4 43:10	public (5) 37:13 42:4 43:10	107:17 109:25	107:17 109:25	removed (2) 64:11 68:25
155:11 156:18 162:5,9	policies (1) 37:10	pull (1) 8:12	pull (1) 8:12	112:6,17,20,21 114:14,24	112:6,17,20,21 114:14,24	removing (1) 15:13
personally (1) 151:13	policy (4) 35:20 132:7	158:21 161:7 163:22	158:21 161:7 163:22	116:6,20 117:8 121:10	116:6,20 117:8 121:10	rendered (1) 26:15
personcentred (1) 132:20	134:1,2	147:8,17 151:5	147:8,17 151:5	122:18 126:17,18	122:18 126:17,18	renegotiate (1) 155:11
persons (6) 28:8 108:10	policymakers (1) 89:13	157:3	157:3	127:9,16,16 128:8 133:15	127:9,16,16 128:8 133:15	reopening (3) 71:17 72:12,24
141:25 154:4 160:9 164:4	political (1) 48:18	publishing (1) 105:7	publishing (1) 105:7	137:13 141:11 145:13	137:13 141:11 145:13	repeat (1) 40:20
perspective (4) 102:12,13,17	poor (2) 51:6 52:5	pull (1) 8:12	pull (1) 8:12	147:15 155:6,12 156:3	147:15 155:6,12 156:3	repeatedly (2) 64:2 152:14
124:23	population (1) 80:9	pulled (6) 6:22 73:22 106:8	pulled (6) 6:22 73:22 106:8	158:21 161:7 163:22	158:21 161:7 163:22	replicating (1) 29:12
perspectives (1) 94:1	posed (1) 81:20	147:8,17 151:5	147:8,17 151:5	quote (1) 157:7	quote (1) 157:7	quote (26) 45:6 47:9,12
pharmacies (1) 112:24	position (2) 11:4 137:23	pupil (1) 140:22	pupil (1) 140:22	quoting (1) 152:9	quoting (1) 152:9	95:4,5 97:24 99:14 101:13
phase (1) 9:2	positions (1) 43:7	pupils (13) 55:18 72:16	pupils (13) 55:18 72:16			103:2,21 104:22 105:7,9
phased (1) 72:14	positive (11) 26:7 34:2 78:3	74:10 75:17,23 82:18,19	74:10 75:17,23 82:18,19			107:24,25
phd (3) 88:21 89:7,8	80:16 81:8,8 97:8 99:15,17	83:6,11 98:8 114:21,23	83:6,11 98:8 114:21,23			108:1,6,10,14,23 109:24
phone (4) 57:3 67:15 98:14	141:3 159:1	116:1	116:1			112:12 120:2 147:20 154:4
156:14	positively (1) 25:6	123:8	123:8			163:9
phoned (2) 145:9 155:6	positives (1) 157:8	123:8	123:8			reported (2) 145:9,10
phones (1) 115:5	possible (13) 10:8 13:14	123:8	123:8			reports (6) 53:17,22 54:18
phrase (3) 134:12 144:3	16:23 17:9,12 58:19 94:4	123:8	123:8			77:24 103:2 111:20
148:22	112:11 122:4,24 123:15,18	123:8	123:8			repository (1) 164:1
physical (1) 133:14	129:13	123:8	123:8			represent (2) 150:15 150:3
physicality (1) 148:22	possibly (2) 58:18 78:16	123:8	123:8			representation (1) 54:11
physically (1) 17:13	post (3) 136:25 158:11	123:8	123:8			representative (1) 112:10
physio (3) 71:4 139:16	postcode (1) 14:24	123:8	123:8			representatives (1) 49:5
148:14	postcovid (2) 30:21 85:20	123:8	123:8			represents (2) 78:8 123:21
physiotherapy (1) 148:19	posted (1) 9:19	123:8	123:8			request (2) 14:6 130:24
picture (6) 41:2,19 102:22	posting (1) 138:14	123:8	123:8			requests (1) 156:10
140:4 149:16,23	postschool (5) 131:21	123:8	123:8			require (1) 17:6
pictures (1) 150:2	142:10 156:9 160:20,23	123:8	123:8			required (7) 8:24 12:12
piece (2) 52:1 63:9	potential (5) 7:23 18:21	123:8	123:8			36:19 50:15 75:9 76:2
pieces (1) 140:4	66:17 104:10 137:9	123:8	123:8			149:5
pilot (2) 9:2 25:3	potentially (7) 103:24	123:8	123:8			requiring (1) 11:25
piste (1) 150:4	109:21 115:8 117:24	123:8	123:8			research (7) 80:10
pivoted (1) 34:8	142:20 143:19 146:1	123:8	123:8			89:7,8,13,21 90:1 93:19
place (31) 3:19 4:4 7:9	poverty (3) 149:2,4 151:10	123:8	123:8			resettled (1) 16:16
11:3,8 13:4,4 16:7 19:20	power (1) 143:12	123:8	123:8			resettlement (1) 15:19
23:20,24 25:12 27:23	powerless (1) 160:8	123:8	123:8			resilience (5) 3:14 4:1,6
28:21 32:6,8 51:24 63:15	practical (9) 16:18,20	123:8	123:8			32:17 156:5
88:4,17,23 93:18 96:11	17:4,7,11,14 38:17 89:9	123:8	123:8			resilient (1) 32:8
125:12 126:8 128:19,22	146:13	123:8	123:8			resistance (2) 87:4,5
136:16 139:25 142:22	practice (1) 81:15	123:8	123:8			resolved (1) 151:23
151:8	precarious (1) 139:10	123:8	123:8			resource (4) 2:11,13 67:8
placebased (1) 107:5	precedent (2) 93:8 152:16	123:8	123:8			123:23 125:2
placed (3) 11:19 14:10 20:22	precovid (1) 17:24	123:8	123:8			resourced (1) 33:20
placement (2) 18:21 19:1	prefer (2) 82:19,20	123:8	123:8			resources (10) 6:22 7:3 9:18
placementbased (1) 17:17	prepandemic (7) 3:10 4:15	123:8	123:8			10:7 12:6 39:24 70:24
placements (1) 18:16	5:18 8:22 89:18 138:2	123:8	123:8			98:12 99:9 100:6
places (9) 89:11 94:7 96:1,3	141:8	123:8	123:8			respect (2) 81:9 132:9
112:9 114:18 141:18	preparation (1) 50:20	123:8	123:8			respectful (1) 81:11
145:19 146:11	prepare (1) 10:7	123:8	123:8			respective (1) 131:8
plainly (1) 164:12	prepared (3) 2:12 20:11	123:8	123:8			respond (6) 11:4 39:23 100:9
plan (7) 19:8 27:22,23 97:13	119:4	123:8	123:8			101:2,25 162:1
124:25 125:1 140:6	preparing (3) 8:5 13:14,23	123:8	123:8			responded (3) 25:6 152:9
planning (20) 60:1,23,24,25	prescheduled (1) 18:7	123:8	123:8			161:22
86:22 88:22 101:24 137:24	present (1) 119:23	123:8	123:8			respondents (3) 50:6 57:11
138:3 141:20,23 142:8,17	presentation (1) 52:24	123:8	123:8			79:15

responding (1) 57:2	sake (1) 95:1	15:17,20,24 18:18 22:7,25	seldom (1) 110:14	152:8,11 153:6,13 159:20	93:8,13,20,24 94:10,21	stakeholders (3) 7:6 10:2
response (23) 6:13,14	same (16) 12:8,9 13:7 15:16	25:4,11 26:16,25 27:13	select (2) 44:5 96:8	163:15	99:6 101:1,7,23 103:12	53:20
44:21,21 48:6 54:5 66:16	18:13 51:11 74:23 78:22	28:20 32:25 33:4,13 36:23	self (1) 152:20	shoulders (1) 149:8	106:12 111:15 112:25	stand (2) 29:6 34:14
104:11,12,21 108:17,18	83:13 93:6 106:5,10,19	38:5 39:6 41:1 44:17	selfemployed (1) 36:4	shouldered (1) 28:25	115:15,17 122:10 123:25	standard (3) 63:16 89:25
130:24 134:25 138:1	110:9 114:6 125:8	49:7,8 54:12 65:7 78:7	selfesteem (1) 102:23	showed (3) 46:22 57:17	124:2,25 125:5 137:7	127:18
147:25 148:2 152:11,14,15	sara (4) 35:20 37:11 45:3,7	89:24 90:2,3,12,15,16	selfish (1) 75:15	85:12	158:4 161:19,24 163:14,22	standardise (2) 19:9 20:14
157:2,21 163:5	savings (1) 163:4	108:8,8,16 111:14 112:11	selfrefrer (3) 64:9,15 139:16	showing (1) 75:11	sometimes (10) 70:8 85:15	standardised (2) 149:15
responses (13) 40:25	saw (3) 15:18 23:5 61:7	117:5 118:6 120:16 122:21	selfreferral (2) 66:15 86:15	shown (1) 27:21	91:23 102:12 107:12	150:4
44:16,17,19 45:19	saying (11) 1:14 52:2,9 60:9	131:19 132:4 134:8,24	semblance (1) 105:6	shows (1) 108:25	137:13,13,16 142:19 150:6	standards (1) 141:17
46:22,25 47:3 50:8 51:4,5	61:11 67:3 75:24 120:12	135:12 138:19 145:24	semifluent (1) 16:3	shook (1) 145:18	somewhat (2) 107:7 119:21	stands (1) 6:10
52:12 64:24	128:16,20 163:17	163:8	semiregular (1) 118:17	shut (1) 77:4	someone (1) 92:8	start (1) 6:10
responsibilities (6) 14:22	scaffolding (3) 136:16	scotlands (7) 8:17 9:6,22	send (1) 100:11	sibling (1) 143:20	son (1) 61:12	1:20 13:13 14:24 24
20:6 36:21 43:14 113:1	144:16 160:14	10:5 12:24 18:3 132:5	sense (9) 45:3 73:20	siblings (1) 113:22	soon (3) 6:2 9:23 30:2	30:2 56:11 74:16 91:2 92:8
139:12	scale (5) 8:24 11:22 28:16	scots (3) 5:4 23:18 33:23	83:12,18 102:24 103:13	side (2) 78:13 158:25	sooner (1) 142:14	105:1 112:16 122:25
responsibility (8) 28:8 42:8	40:23 44:22	scott (27)	106:17 117:15 126:14	sight (1) 17:1	sort (23) 1:22 8:1 28:16,16	132:17 142:17 153:12
54:15 79:4 138:17 141:25	scaling (1) 8:23	130:9,11,14,17,20,20,22	sensecheck (1) 82:7	significant (4) 28:23 29:1	39:24 66:15,16,19,23	156:17 160:13
142:1,1	scarce (1) 67:8	131:1 133:25 135:5	senior (1) 133:15	59:20 163:25	76:13 96:18 110:6 112:14	started (13) 7:12 10:24
responsible (3) 79:6,7 146:25	scared (1) 98:5	138:5,9,11 140:16	sent (4) 53:19 55:18 82:7	significantly (1) 158:21	114:16 116:10 117:5 119:6	100:7 132:21 135:21 144:8
rest (3) 93:23 119:15 163:8	scenes (1) 1:22	141:9,12 142:9,11 148:9	117:11	signed (1) 67:12	122:6 126:4 136:25	155:8,18 162:18
restricted (1) 26:11	schedule (1) 129:10	149:22 151:1 152:15	sentiment (1) 163:21	signposting (1) 9:18	156:6,12,15	starting (6) 15:8 96:16
restriction (1) 151:22	schemes (1) 118:1	157:23 158:7 161:21	separate (1) 49:6	similar (6) 50:8 83:13,25	sorted (1) 67:11	100:23 137:23 143:24
restrictions (3) 70:1 71:10	scholar (3) 9:8,14,19	164:14 165:5	separated (1) 117:12	106:13 119:24 133:9	sooner (1) 142:14	156:6
114:16	school (177) 2:24 3:17 4:25	scottish (49) 3:21,21 4:5,12	series (6) 29:11 47:13 90:8	similarly (1) 126:3	sought (4) 18:2,15 30:4	statement (26) 2:7,9,11,16
result (5) 5:8,16 25:15	5:7 6:24 10:16,19 11:9,10	5:3 6:3 7:16 9:0,25	92:16 109:2 111:20	since (10) 2:23 3:23 26:24	38:21	24:23 35:17,23 54:21
111:11 154:20	11:11,11 13:6,7 14:8	16:11,16 18:22 23:17	serious (2) 73:25 121:19	36:1 97:5 106:16 124:3	sorted (1) 120:12	55:4,5 85:7 86:8,19 88:12
results (5) 50:9 53:17 75:19	17:6,9,13 18:9 21:17	32:21 34:6 36:8 38:21	seriously (1) 121:8	125:23 131:20 163:8	sound (1) 140:13	95:6 122:24 124:15
82:13 128:13	22:8,8,18 24:15,16	41:18 45:10 48:18,19	seriousness (1) 115:2	single (3) 58:16 128:1 151:14	sources (1) 55:4	131:5,9 137:25 143:23
reteach (1) 12:8	25:5,7,11,14,20,21	49:3,10,25 53:15 54:1 64:1	service (12) 4:6,16 5:5 8:21	sister (2) 113:24 114:2	space (10) 27:4 34:1	144:1 154:25 161:3,18
return (3) 12:10 48:1 72:14	26:1,9,17,19,24	68:4 76:20 86:1 88:22	51:6 132:9 133:6 141:21	sisters (1) 143:19	98:15,20 144:20 149:12	164:1
returned (2) 11:5,10	27:1,4,11,17,19,24	89:23 90:21 94:10	148:24 153:16 160:3 163:2	sit (5) 122:2 139:5,22 140:4	154:3,5 155:15 156:12	statesponsored (1) 117:3
returning (1) 81:6	28:3,7,10 29:13 31:3,13,20	101:15,22 103:17,19	services (27) 56:7 60:19 61:4	153:22	spans (1) 69:3	static (2) 65:19,19
revert (1) 161:4	32:16 33:1 34:13 36:11	104:12 107:13,14 108:16	64:10 70:11 86:14 87:8	sit (1) 17:9	speak (8) 1:12 15:4 19:3	statistical (1) 145:2
review (1) 145:23	37:7 40:21 42:25	110:23 117:1 130:4	93:4 102:25 127:19	sites (2) 138:17 142:1	41:5 80:18 130:15 144:1	statistics (4) 44:12 45:7
rhetoric (3) 138:6 139:2	46:12,19,24 47:10 48:1	134:3,3 138:12 141:14	131:11,11,13 132:2,4	sitting (2) 54:14 57:22	157:19	66:22 85:14
162:22	49:13,15,17,20 57:23	scotyouthandcovid (3) 90:8	133:17 136:20	situation (9) 15:2 58:3 79:19	speakers (1) 23:8	statutory (3) 28:7 36:18
richard (1) 2:13	58:10 59:4,5,9,17 60:10,16	92:20 104:23	139:11,11,13 146:25	103:9 113:7 120:13 154:2	speaking (5) 22:3 23:4,9	38:22
richardsonread (26)	62:1,3,14,22 63:13 64:11	scotyouthandcovid3 (1)	148:8,14 149:6 155:1,23	160:8 161:1	55:11 152:2	stay (5) 50:15 71:11 75:11
130:9,11,14,17,20,20,22	68:23,23,24	109:25	169:8	situations (3) 66:21 97:15	37:2 70:20 71:6	137:10 142:21
131:1 133:25 135:5	69:4,5,21,23,24 70:1,9	scrabble (1) 66:23	session (5) 48:12,13,20 49:6	148:18	72:2	steering (1) 110:3
138:9,11 140:16 141:9,12	71:9 72:10,12,16,16,24	se (1) 30:18	50:8	six (9) 11:7 40:17,24 45:23	specialist (1) 3:17 5:25	stem (1) 3:5
142:9,11 148:9 149:22	73:15 74:2,8,10 75:3 76:19	second (13) 15:10 44:15	sessions (15) 18:7 37:25	49:23 52:13 67:3 106:14	60:20 68:22,23 69:25	step (8) 4:12 26:22 122:16
151:1 152:15 157:23 158:7	77:21 78:1,6	46:4 47:11 48:13,20 51:19	38:3,14 39:12,14,15,21	153:14	70:8,16 71:1,3 72:11	132:22 140:12 143:2,20
161:21 164:14 165:5	79:8,10,16,21,25	74:23 104:23 105:25 106:6	47:15,18 48:22 49:2,12	sixyearold (1) 14:5	special (4) 37:2 70:20 71:6	147:11
riddle (1) 140:14	80:2,6,8,10,21 81:11,13	109:6 134:1	55:8 62:7	size (1) 106:1	72:2	stepped (2) 155:1 162:22
rights (8) 33:22 88:21 91:19	83:6,13,13 84:11 85:15,23	secondary (21) 5:19,21,24	set (21) 2:18 28:2 47:18	skills (10) 61:21 74:17 93:20	60:20 68:22,23 69:25	steps (5) 7:19 47:2 91:7
95:2 139:2 141:3 143:4,12	91:9,14 92:7 95:21 98:20	19:7 20:12 37:1,2 62:21	50:16 63:9 64:12 68:12	107:20 117:24 134:7	45:12 51:2 53:1 56:24	136:9 137:6
nightsbased (1) 89:20	99:23 101:8,10 107:18	63:13 74:9 75:17 80:17	103:21 106:10,24 107:13	138:19 152:22 153:4 154:7	55:14 58:7 62:8,11 63:24	steven (4) 1:6 2:2,6 165:2
rigid (1) 91:23	108:10 110:8 113:15,22	92:7 95:19 107:19,20	108:1 110:7 122:19,20	skin (2) 134:8 138:20	65:19 99:25 102:10	stewart (12) 129:12,23,24
ripples (1) 161:12	114:6,8,21,23 115:11,15	119:3,5,12 120:1,6	123:6 124:20 131:9 143:23	slightly (3) 13:20 106:11,12	107:1,2 109:13 110:16	130:1,12,13 151:19,20,21
risk (1) 157:15	118:3,4,6 119:2,3,5,7	secondhand (1) 164:10	157:1 159:18	slow (2) 56:11 74:15	111:2	163:14 164:17 165:6
rites (1) 119:6	120:1,6,9 121:2,10,13	secretary (3) 47:19 50:11	sets (2) 109:11 157:4	small (7) 7:22 12:3 26:10	specifically (9) 5:12 21:20	stick (1) 136:23
role (13) 37:9 38:21 41:5,7	126:18 136:2,5,17 137:4	53:23	setting (3) 97:17 148:3	97:16 103:21 140:21 141:5	38:12 42:3 49:21 66:5 76:6	stigma (1) 140:25
44:25 45:1 117:1 131:16	139:24 142:7,12,20 144:5	section (4) 86:18 143:22	153:24	smaller (2) 101:4 146:2	99:16 112:2	still (2) 1:12 38:2,23 52:4
133:24 142:2 143:20	149:11 152:11,18,19,21	152:1 163:9	settings (1) 143:25	smooth (1) 74:2	139:20 152:3 157:25	58:19 64:15 70:7 72:15
146:19 150:13	153:6,8,15,15 154:3,5,13	sector (9) 48:16 92:23	seven (2) 2:20 141:18	sneaked (1) 87:24	speech (5) 148:13 149:10,12	75:2 76:18 85:19 86:23
roles (3) 36:20 147:11,18	155:15,25 156:1	134:5,6 145:17,21 146:4	several (4) 57:4 62:21 66:3	soal (1) 23:13	150:7,13	87:3 93:5 114:17 115:14
roll (2) 28:7 32:23	schooling (3) 48:3 53:24	153:10 163:25	76:5	societal (21) 37:11 38:7 43:21	speed (1) 160:6	125:12 137:18,19 156:23
rollercoaster (3) 77:4	154:2	secured (1) 5:9	severe (1) 113:11	60:15 61:20 64:10 67:19	spend (3) 55:13 69:10 99:17	158:8,22
79:2,13	schools (98) 3:15,24	see (48) 1:22 9:20 12:6	shall (1) 87:19	83:14 86:14 89:1 124:11	spending (2) 98:24,25	stirling (1) 22:25
room (2) 136:12 158:12	4:17,20,22,24	21:10 22:8,22 27:11 28:12	shame (1) 113:18	134:7 138:19 139:13	spent (1) 155:4	stirlingshire (1) 95:24
rooms (1) 156:14	5:19,19,23,25 6:17,20	34:7 41:3,16,16 45:23	share (6) 28:22 41:17 43:25	140:25 142:23 146:20,24	split (2) 96:2 117:10	stood (1) 21:14
rotas (1) 48:3	7:14,17 8:17 10:4,9,13	46:15,21 47:6 48:25 54:25	54:7 111:2 116:21	162:24 163:2,7	spoke (7) 109:23	stock (3) 143:12 148:20
rotational (1) 12:5	11:5,13 13:12,17	61:5 62:14 63:5 66:24 68:9	shared (6) 53:21,22,24 58:14	socialise (1) 127:21	110:21,22,24 119:9	149:24
round (8) 105:22 106:13,16	14:3,9,12,21 15:1 16:22	70:22 87:24 94:6 95:3	98:14 125:9	societal (1) 78:15	120:18,20	stopped (1) 114:2
108:6,13 109:6,24,25	18:6 19:7,14,15	96:17,20 100:22 101:23	sharing (2) 110:17 111:5	society (1) 162:19	spoken (6) 109:7 111:10	stops (1) 73:23
route (1) 103:25	20:12,15,18,22 21:2,8	102:11,12,15,16 103:25	sheer (1) 11:18	socioeconomic (1) 96:5	139:20 152:3 157:25	stormy (2) 1:6,9
routine (1) 157:13	22:23 23:10 24:3,5,8	118:16,19 122:21 123:18	shielding (2) 11:6,12	software (1) 16:25	159:21	story (1) 31:1
rules (2) 112:21 116:8	29:14,19 31:7,8,21 32:21	124:5 127:10 128:23	shift (1) 58:25	solid (1) 25:22	spokespersons (1) 48:17	straight (1) 145:5
run (6) 21:1 45:21 50:25	33:19 34:11 36:17	129:15 141:2 154:25 155:2	shifts (1) 22:12	sole (1) 42:8	sponges (1) 23:13	strain (1) 114:4
105:2 132:5 155:1	37:1,1,1,2 42:4 43:2	161:11	shock (1) 143:15	solution (1) 3:13	sporadic (1) 53:12	strains (1) 158:23
running (2) 74:5 158:19	49:21,22 52:18 53:9 55:18	seeing (6) 32:4 40:1	shone (3) 33:11 162:11,21	solutions (2) 102:15 104:10	sporadically (1) 50:18	stranger (1) 127:15
rural (5) 4:20 57:5 95:24,25	56:16 60:5 61:2 66:18	115:4,8,9 126:19	shopwindow (1) 18:6	solved (1) 127:24	spot (1) 89:12	strategic (3) 131:20,23
117:14	70:20,22 71:7,8,17 74:2,16	144:16 156:2	short (6) 34:24 79:17,20	somebody (8) 17:9 31:16	spread (1) 65:13	141:15
	75:14 76:7,14,15 77:22	164:6	129:22 151:1,17	68:4,9 137:4 140:22	spring (1) 82:7	strategically (2) 135:13
	78:12 81:6,15 82:10 83:14	seekers (3) 110:23 116:11,13	shorter (1) 130:22	146:14 151:2	sq (14) 50:20 52:23 81:3,18	141:14
	85:14 86:14 87:4,7	seeking (5) 7:7 132:18 135:3	shortly (1) 90:7	someone (7) 71:5 84:10	82:7,13 83:5,9,20,21	strategies (1) 27:20

strokes (1) 128:2	45:10 46:20 66:7 142:21	teacher (25) 2:20 3:4,16	162:9,11 164:7,13	48:2 50:16 52:9,10,10,18	transport (4) 65:9,14 134:8	unseen (1) 121:4
strong (4) 42:16 115:25	supposed (1) 66:9	13:7,21 17:1,8,13 19:10	theirs (1) 112:4	53:25 55:13 56:21 57:15	142:24	until (5) 29:10 48:4 58:12
146:1 156:3	sure (24) 11:15 32:8	20:16,20 24:14,14 28:2	theme (2) 42:18 147:16	63:1 67:3 69:10 70:8 71:15	trauma (1) 113:19	142:21 164:17
strongly (6) 64:8 69:19 87:6	65:21,21 80:17 82:11	36:17 37:3 63:12,13	themes (5) 40:13 106:25	72:1,22 74:3 75:23 76:11	travel (5) 99:5 150:9 152:20	unusually (1) 131:18
106:25 118:25 152:13	86:24,25 94:22 112:10	71:9,14 82:5,23 100:11	107:9 108:19 111:21	77:9 79:25 82:1 83:3	155:14,16	unwilling (1) 141:1
structure (5) 52:4 59:4	114:23 115:14 118:13	115:13 120:6	themselves (14) 3:24 12:25	84:16,21 93:7 96:18	trial (1) 58:8	upending (1) 122:12
61:13,13 70:2	125:14 126:14 142:19	teachers (33) 4:16 9:20	25:5 64:4, 6 68:2 82:12	98:24,25 99:17,18 104:15	tried (7) 7:24 13:13 27:21	upon (8) 7:24 8:6 9:24 10:23
structures (1) 91:23	146:14 153:2 155:9 156:7	10:10 14:6,20 15:1 16:2	83:16 111:24 154:11,12	105:10 106:14,24	96:1,18 103:16 155:1	11:19 16:18 104:18 105:7
struggle (4) 8:23 31:5,10	160:5,11,15 164:7	19:12,25 20:22 28:23	157:24 159:13 164:12	108:6,9,11 110:6 115:8	trigger (1) 30:15	upsaling (1) 13:25
69:4	surprise (1) 43:4	29:22 32:9 36:9 50:14	theory (1) 17:8	116:3 119:9 120:2,2 125:8	triggers (2) 25:25 30:4	upset (2) 80:19,20
struggled (2) 69:6 118:15	survey (30) 37:12 40:4 41:11	53:10 66:8 70:23 74:17	therapist (1) 71:5	129:12 136:15,22,23	trivial (1) 120:13	upshot (1) 56:11
struggles (2) 99:23 102:10	43:19,20 44:15,15,25 45:4	76:22 78:9,9 82:3,15,16	therapists (1) 150:8	137:23 142:17 155:5 160:1	trivially (1) 121:5	upskilled (1) 32:9
struggling (6) 11:18 38:18	47:11,13,14 48:7 49:13	83:3 90:22 91:5 102:4,11	thereby (1) 34:22	times (10) 8:8 31:18 33:14	trouble (1) 80:16	upstairs (1) 129:18
51:10 66:12 67:5 126:23	50:9,23 53:17 55:6 57:2	103:7 125:21	therefore (3) 9:23 104:19	121:9 147:6	trust (3) 67:7 129:1 161:10	uptake (4) 44:10 64:20,22
students (2) 15:9 16:18	60:9 63:3 75:18,19 79:15	teaching (9) 2:19 13:25	105:20	121:9 147:6	trusting (1) 161:9	67:21
study (2) 9:8 33:6	96:25 123:16 147:20 148:3	21:13 23:24 42:5 55:15	theres (51) 18:20 24:12	timetable (2) 3:16 25:8	try (12) 38:8 41:16,18 56:1	urban (2) 4:20 22:24
studying (1) 16:18	152:10,14	66:8 98:10 115:20	27:15 30:13 34:3 39:15,17	timing (1) 14:26	58:18 59:5 68:5 91:23	used (15) 16:14 43:18 44:14
stuff (3) 80:3 162:4,24	surveymonkey (2) 43:19	10:15,25 12:2,13,24 20:8	43:3 51:10 56:23 63:12,13	tiny (1) 65:1	94:24 96:4 141:2 160:11	55:5 56:16 69:20 89:14
style (1) 13:25	44:11	28:13 49:10 54:1 106:12	66:17 69:17 70:7 77:11	title (4) 130:17 133:5,25	134:1	90:17 115:15 118:16,21
styles (1) 98:21	surveys (22) 40:7,12,15,24	108:5 156:15 164:7	79:20 80:2,3,10,15,21,22	134:1	56:2 57:25 68:7 69:4	144:3 147:7 149:20 162:23
subdivision (1) 6:25	41:8,9,24 43:16,18 44:9	82:5 83:1,11 87:3 89:13	92:5 83:1,11 87:3 89:13	today (6) 1:6 21:18 33:6	92:11,12 93:24 103:8	useful (5) 100:19,19 101:23
subject (3) 5:1 17:7 81:3	45:12 49:18 57:9 61:18	98:8 103:10 117:21 124:18	103:7 103:10 117:21 124:18	37:20,21,24 46:2 81:12	125:21,24 146:8 155:5	103:20 120:8
subjects (9) 3:5 4:17	62:23 64:24,25 85:12	125:10,14 126:16,24 127:6	102:9,19 113:5 126:9	121:9 147:6	106:8 107:12,13 109:11	username (1) 33:1
16:19,20 17:4 19:10	96:21,22,23 147:24	11:15,20,20 12:23 13:8	135:3 136:7 140:7,8,24	together (31) 6:22 8:12 18:5	111:8 115:17,19 117:10	users (2) 132:9 133:6
74:16,22 80:8	suspect (2) 1:14 65:7	32:13 151:9	143:2,8 146:5,15,22 149:3	23:19 25:12 28:11 58:15	131:12 134:17 136:4	uses (1) 149:17
subsequent (1) 62:23	sustainable (2) 33:20 34:8	tease (1) 54:22	150:17 153:13,14 157:17	69:10,11,11,12 80:24 92:1	125:21,24 146:8 155:5	using (12) 2:9 8:19,20 11:17
succeed (1) 138:21	sustrans (1) 90:2	technical (1) 38:7	theyre (33) 30:10 33:24 40:8	94:3 95:8 96:14 101:9	106:8 107:12,13 109:11	20:7 26:5 39:16 44:18 90:4
successful (1) 136:16	switch (3) 47:20 50:12,21	technicalities (1) 143:9	41:16 54:13 63:9,9 77:23	106:8 107:12,13 109:11	111:8 115:17,19 117:10	101:3 145:5 151:9
suddenly (3) 103:4 157:14	switch (2) 13:4 138:13	technically (2) 99:6 139:4	80:19 85:24 86:2 87:8	106:8 107:12,13 109:11	123:16 134:18,22 135:24	usual (2) 77:3 78:20
159:6	switched (1) 73:1	technicians (1) 1:21	91:24 94:18 100:7	106:8 107:12,13 109:11	138:18 141:16	usually (7) 44:10 45:2,5,7
suffers (1) 84:10	symbols (4) 149:16,23	technology (3) 16:24 25:21	102:9,19 113:5 126:9	106:8 107:12,13 109:11	138:18 141:16	70:16 141:18 142:21
sufficient (2) 7:17 136:12	150:5,6	149:1	135:3 136:7 140:7,8,24	toilet (1) 149:24	142:21 147:25 149:22,23	
suggesting (1) 122:6	symptoms (1) 75:10	telling (3) 99:2 110:4 113:23	142:21 147:25 149:22,23	toilet (8) 41:25 59:15 85:14	150:4 153:7,17 154:10	V
suit (2) 18:13 27:12	sync (1) 142:3	ten (1) 110:10	150:4 153:7,17 154:10	106:18 109:9 115:3 144:24	157:10	validation (1) 82:6
suitable (2) 13:23 155:10	system (19) 3:14 4:1,7 9:14	tend (2) 45:8 135:6	156:1	157:10	157:10	value (4) 34:4 105:19 138:7
suits (1) 92:3	31:3 34:13 42:6 82:2 83:23	tended (1) 5:8	theyve (1) 85:22	too (8) 14:16 39:19 58:1	45:19 46:10 96:4	146:9
summarise (3) 15:11 90:6	84:1,2,8 88:22 104:5 126:4	tendency (1) 127:6	thing (22) 1:20 15:25 19:15	114:3 137:3 143:15 149:7	typical (1) 14:1	valued (7) 16:13 101:21
157:18	129:2 150:16 162:8,25	tends (1) 82:20	46:13 51:12 52:3 60:5	154:4	typically (2) 5:22 27:4	102:24 103:6 127:22
summarised (1) 147:23	systems (6) 92:13 103:3	term (1) 47:11	74:23 96:23 100:7 115:25	took (8) 3:19 8:6 16:7 19:20		137:22 161:9
summary (1) 124:23	123:11 124:11 139:15	termed (1) 78:12	117:16 118:24 121:15	23:15,24 154:1 161:8	U	van (24) 1:2,3,5,14,17,23
summer (1) 76:18	161:23	terms (41) 7:10 8:5 11:22	126:15 138:13 140:1	114:3 137:3 143:15 149:7	ugh (1) 82:15	2:3,4 35:1,2,4,9,11,13,14
sunday (1) 135:6	T	13:25 20:1,9 25:23 29:7	145:13 150:12 155:12	154:4	ukraine (1) 15:19	87:23,25 88:3,8 129:10,17
supermarkets (2) 56:21	table (5) 96:9 139:6 140:5	31:10 44:25 45:6,12 46:13	160:13 162:16	157:10	ukrainian (4) 16:3,4,9 21:20	165:2,3,4
112:23	148:12 153:11	46:13 47:23,24 58:4,6 63:6	thinking (10) 19:24 20:13	too (8) 14:16 39:19 58:1	ultimately (1) 26:5	variations (1) 58:9
supervised (1) 17:5	tackling (1) 15:14	66:1,20 67:1 72:12 73:24	43:5 54:23 105:13 124:7	114:3 137:3 143:15 149:7	unable (2) 4:17 59:6	varied (2) 74:17 114:11
supply (7) 3:25 4:16,16,22	tagging (1) 43:22	78:4 81:1 85:3,9 102:2	133:4 140:24 147:16	154:4	unaccompanied (2) 110:22	various (14) 7:5 14:11 34:12
5:6,13,25	tail (1) 158:19	111:19 114:16 125:13	163:22	took (8) 3:19 8:6 16:7 19:20	116:23	44:14 49:20 76:24 90:1
support (116) 3:15 4:6 5:13	tailored (3) 69:7 70:23,24	133:4 139:16 141:6,22	third (10) 6:24 48:16 49:13	23:15,24 154:1 161:8	119:20	99:1 110:1,16 117:5
6:16 8:3 10:8,12	taken (17) 4:12 7:19	142:6,22 150:20 155:10	51:12 109:1,3,24,25 134:5	23:15,24 154:1 161:8	118:18	128:11 137:2 144:1
11:8,23,25 12:13 15:21	26:2,3,4 60:17 61:14 69:22	156:8	153:10	23:15,24 154:1 161:8	118:18	vast (5) 5:23 15:19 31:4 50:4
16:15,22 18:10 19:12 20:4	71:23 84:15 101:10 111:11	test (3) 43:20 46:15 124:1	thirties (1) 137:17	23:15,24 154:1 161:8	118:18	79:15
24:6,12,15,15,17,20 25:8	119:8 123:20 125:25	tested (1) 123:14	thorough (1) 109:10	23:15,24 154:1 161:8	118:18	verification (1) 82:6
27:22,23 30:16 33:6 34:11	132:22 151:3	testing (1) 47:22	though (3) 19:14 143:17	23:15,24 154:1 161:8	118:18	versions (1) 89:24
35:20 36:19 39:2,6 41:4	141:24 151:25	thank (68) 1:23 3:7 4:15	149:15	23:15,24 154:1 161:8	118:18	vestibule (1) 158:11
47:25 52:19 56:1,22	141:24 151:25	5:18 7:10 10:14 13:9 15:4	thought (13) 41:15 78:14	23:15,24 154:1 161:8	118:18	via (3) 1:7 13:7 132:7
57:6,9,12,22 58:18	141:24 151:25	16:17 17:17 19:2 21:15	84:23 96:15 97:3 98:18	23:15,24 154:1 161:8	118:18	video (7) 1:7 8:18 12:22
60:14,16,18,21 63:1 64:10	141:24 151:25	23:5 24:21 27:10 28:14	101:18 104:1 105:4 109:10	23:15,24 154:1 161:8	118:18	99:19 149:1,5 153:20
65:6 67:12,23 68:15,24	141:24 151:25	30:17 31:25	116:7 123:19 144:23	23:15,24 154:1 161:8	118:18	various (14) 7:5 14:11 34:12
69:2,7,18,20,21 70:4,20,23	141:24 151:25	34:15,17,17,19,22 35:8,11	thoughtprovoking (1) 34:18	23:15,24 154:1 161:8	118:18	44:14 49:20 76:24 90:1
71:8,9,14,19,21 72:7 73:22	141:24 151:25	37:8 55:13 68:13 81:17	thousands (2) 44:19 164:3	23:15,24 154:1 161:8	118:18	99:1 110:1,16 117:5
74:9 75:4,17 100:16	141:24 151:25	87:16,17,18,18,20 88:9	thread (1) 63:7	23:15,24 154:1 161:8	118:18	128:11 137:2 144:1
102:25 105:13,21,21	141:24 151:25	92:14 101:12 103:15	three (12) 6:15,18 8:8 15:18	23:15,24 154:1 161:8	118:18	vast (5) 5:23 15:19 31:4 50:4
113:22 114:7 118:21	141:24 151:25	114:19 118:10 120:15	27:19 29:10 53:6 69:1	23:15,24 154:1 161:8	118:18	79:15
123:12 127:4 131:23,24	141:24 151:25	122:14 124:13 129:6,8,17	96:15 110:12 122:11	23:15,24 154:1 161:8	118:18	verification (1) 82:6
132:7,20 134:13,14 135:9	141:24 151:25	130:21 131:5,18 132:8	158:13	23:15,24 154:1 161:8	118:18	versions (1) 89:24
136:24 137:1,10 138:16	141:24 151:25	133:4,18 134:25 135:25	threeweekold (1) 14:5	23:15,24 154:1 161:8	118:18	vestibule (1) 158:11
140:2,19,22 141:20,22	141:24 151:25	143:22 151:25 154:15	through (45) 5:9 7:4,14 12:6	23:15,24 154:1 161:8	118:18	via (3) 1:7 13:7 132:7
143:14 144:16,17 145:6,9	141:24 151:25	156:24 159:15	13:6 22:10 24:9 28:19	23:15,24 154:1 161:8	118:18	video (7) 1:7 8:18 12:22
146:12 147:7 149:6	141:24 151:25	163:10,10,10,13,15,16	32:4,5 40:12 43:20,21	23:15,24 154:1 161:8	118:18	99:19 149:1,5 153:20
150:11,18 151:3,3	141:24 151:25	164:14,15,17	45:21,22 50:10 54:3	23:15,24 154:1 161:8	118:18	various (14) 7:5 14:11 34:12
156:18,21 160:16,17,18	141:24 151:25	thankful (1) 79:17	55:10,10 71:25 72:25 92:2	23:15,24 154:1 161:8	118:18	44:14 49:20 76:24 90:1
162:20	141:24 151:25	thanks (1) 138:9	93:6 101:18 104:24 106:23	23:15,24 154:1 161:8	118:18	99:1 110:1,16 117:5
supported (14) 6:21 12:11	141:24 151:25	thats (65) 2:15,22,25 3:6	108:2 110:4 117:25 118:24	23:15,24 154:1 161:8	118:18	128:11 137:2 144:1
20:15,19 29:8 41:17 79:22	141:24 151:25	5:16 9:11 14:25 17:12	119:2 124:10 126:16	23:15,24 154:1 161:8	118:18	vast (5) 5:23 15:19 31:4 50:4
90:18 105:23 136:11 137:5	141:24 151:25	27:10 29:19 33:20 35:22	127:			

walk (1) 69:11
 wanting (2) 66:17 162:5
 war (2) 15:19 20:9
 wasnt (30) 8:19 16:6 31:14
 43:4 53:21 59:23 62:20
 65:9 67:13,13 68:4 70:13
 73:13,23 74:7 82:17 98:4
 101:16 105:7 113:24,25
 121:13 126:8 138:23,25
 145:7 146:3,4 160:1
 161:13
 waste (1) 137:8
 watch (1) 99:18
 watching (1) 72:22
 way (24) 11:5 14:7 21:6 24:5
 28:13 32:20 39:7,9 40:22
 43:11 55:25 81:2 82:13
 91:19,25 92:3 98:6 104:16
 131:14 132:20 141:3 143:4
 150:15 161:8
 ways (9) 16:15 76:24
 91:20,24 94:25 103:7
 121:18 125:19 162:17
 wayside (1) 142:5
 wearing (1) 113:25
 weather (1) 99:20
 webinar (2) 9:11,17
 webinars (4) 5:12,13 10:7,11
 webpage (1) 67:17
 webpages (1) 67:18
 website (1) 148:1
 websites (1) 67:16
 week (5) 8:9 48:4 90:12
 137:4,7
 weekend (1) 164:18
 weeks (2) 11:13 12:4
 welcome (1) 138:10
 welfare (1) 143:10
 wellbeing (16) 38:8 49:24
 50:1 73:4,5,8 79:7 85:2
 87:2,3,6 91:18 93:10
 102:18 107:20 125:14
 went (8) 19:6 53:25 56:21
 77:20 85:15 92:22 115:7
 121:22
 werent (37) 23:22 25:20
 46:17 54:4 57:7 58:2,23
 59:2 60:3 62:14,15
 65:6,16,16 66:23 68:3
 69:15,24 72:9 75:3,3,3
 76:18 86:13 94:22 114:24
 118:3,20 122:7 144:10,20
 145:25 146:7 150:18
 153:24 155:9,10
 west (2) 6:24,25
 western (5) 3:12,20 19:22
 20:13 22:16
 westhuizen (24)
 1:2,3,5,14,17,23 2:3,4
 35:1,2,4,10,11,13,14 87:23
 88:1,3,8 129:10,17
 165:2,3,4
 westminster (1) 116:4
 weve (20) 17:12 29:18,23,25
 56:4 62:5 63:19 65:25
 89:19 90:12 93:12 119:10
 132:14 133:16 141:17
 148:10 159:6 161:2,18
 162:21
 whatever (3) 71:6 84:14,20
 whats (19) 38:20 93:15,25
 94:6,19 95:18 102:14,15
 105:18 106:22 122:15,16
 125:13 126:6 132:8
 144:4,6 156:13 163:7
 whereas (2) 14:12 121:22
 whereby (4) 3:14 8:2 20:16
 26:25
 wherever (3) 16:23 17:6
 150:9
 whichever (1) 153:16
 whilst (9) 1:20 96:7 98:13
 109:9 111:7 113:25 114:8
 115:15 160:2
 whiteboard (1) 101:4
 whitelock (32) 130:2,6,8,10

131:3,4,4,7,14,18 132:11
 133:7,21 136:6,8 137:25
 138:2,5,10 140:18 143:23
 144:5 146:19,22 147:5
 152:2 154:16,24 156:11
 159:23,24 165:5
 whole (13) 14:19 46:21
 53:11 65:23 80:3 83:8
 97:14 111:18 122:8
 139:9,22 145:12 160:13
 whom (1) 137:17
 whos (5) 2:13 93:17 138:4
 139:23 146:25
 widely (1) 29:4
 wider (3) 37:13 101:19
 133:12
 willing (4) 27:14 68:3,5
 103:24
 willingness (1) 27:15
 wish (2) 67:25 86:20
 wished (1) 13:7
 wishes (1) 148:1
 withdrawn (1) 25:5
 witness (13) 1:4 2:7,9 34:22
 35:3,17 55:5 78:10 88:1,12
 129:25 131:5,9
 witnessed (1) 127:12
 witnesses (1) 163:11
 witnessing (1) 127:13
 wonder (1) 43:15
 wondered (1) 157:18
 wont (3) 1:14 21:22 98:19
 wood (12) 88:3,5,7,9,11,16
 122:14 124:13 129:6,7,8
 165:4
 woolnough (11)
 35:5,6,12,14,16,19,25 86:5
 87:11,16 165:3
 wore (1) 162:12
 work (96) 1:21 5:23 6:16 7:8
 8:21 9:5,7 17:14
 18:2,9,16,19,21,21,24
 20:11 21:2 24:19 25:19
 26:14 28:11 34:10
 37:11,12,14,17 40:4,5 42:2
 46:19 56:2,12 57:23
 58:6,11,12 59:5 69:5 70:9
 71:2 75:1 80:9,11 89:22
 90:2 91:3,10,13,15,25 92:6
 93:1 95:3,7,9,15 98:13
 99:4 100:8,25 101:19
 104:9 105:11,13 108:17
 109:16 112:9 115:11 117:6
 122:15 123:25 124:3,4
 126:16,19 129:3 131:10,15
 132:1,7 133:7,13,23
 134:7,22 135:2,12,15,23
 137:10,16 138:19 139:13
 141:13 146:20 151:5
 worked (11) 8:22 23:18
 27:21 57:5 65:2,12 90:20
 107:12 110:15 115:13
 116:14
 worker (1) 134:2
 workers (3) 25:8 59:1 66:7
 workforce (4) 17:19,21 18:3
 33:9
 working (25) 5:3 7:8 10
 10:2 28:9 42:10 57:24 58:5
 59:1 71:14 80:23 93:13
 98:16 101:9 102:20 108:4
 111:8 124:24 135:18 142:4
 146:21 147:3 150:16
 151:15 161:5
 workload (1) 53:10
 workplace (1) 18:11
 works (4) 89:1 91:9 92:5
 134:4
 workshops (10) 90:23
 96:15,18 97:10 105:3
 106:14 110:2,12,13 111:4
 world (2) 18:9 143:5
 worried (7) 80:19 99:24
 113:15 119:9 126:9 154:6
 155:6
 worry (1) 137:11

worrying (1) 127:16
 worse (4) 52:5 139:1 145:2
 163:6
 worsen (1) 147:3
 worsened (1) 147:1
 worth (2) 110:17 122:12
 wouldnt (11) 10:9,21 29:5
 58:5 60:2 71:13 82:25
 115:5,6 157:10 158:14
 write (3) 45:2,8 54:6
 writing (5) 45:6 47:19 54:19
 71:6 115:23
 wrong (1) 77:22
 wrote (3) 50:11,20 145:24
 wt0111 (1) 35:19
 wt0197 (1) 131:8
 wt0381 (1) 2:10
 wt0571 (1) 88:15
 wt0792 (1) 35:24
 wt0820 (1) 2:17

Y

year (19) 8:6 21:1 30:5,13
 39:1 62:21 82:4 83:23,25
 142:12,13 152:11,17,21
 153:2,5,7,8,18
 years (19) 2:20 4:10 15:18
 22:9,20,22 23:11 32:12
 84:16 85:20 91:12,14,16
 92:6 110:10 122:11,12
 128:9 135:23
 yesterday (2) 47:9 78:6
 yet (1) 116:8
 youll (2) 78:7 154:25
 young (276) 7:4 8:3,9,13,25
 9:16,18 10:4,10
 11:5,9,10,14,23 12:8,9
 14:10,13,16,17 15:17,20
 16:6,15 17:2,19,19,21,24
 18:3,12,23 19:15
 20:1,4,18,23 21:7,11,24
 22:1,17 23:2,12,16,20
 24:1,1,11,15,19
 25:4,13,20,22 26:15,23,25
 27:14,18 28:6,8,12 29:8,24
 30:15 31:4,14,18,23
 32:4,9,24,25
 33:9,13,16,21,24 34:12
 50:2,14 55:23 56:23 70:12
 71:22 74:20 75:2 78:25
 80:1,7 82:9 83:16 84:17
 85:2,18,22 86:12 87:2
 89:2,3,5,10,21,25 90:3
 93:7,14 94:1,4,7,18
 95:5,13,18,23
 96:6,13,21,23,25 97:2,25
 98:11 99:2,8 100:7
 101:1,8,17,18,20 102:1,2
 103:13 104:2,8,24
 105:14,24 106:7,9
 108:2,7,10,15
 109:8,12,14,20
 110:3,8,9,19
 111:5,9,10,13,21
 112:3,11,16,17,18,19,24
 113:1,5,9,21,23
 114:4,15,20,24
 115:5,12,21 116:22
 117:18,23 118:10,13
 119:25 121:7,11,12 122:6
 123:2,13,14,17
 124:1,5,9,19 125:3,8,13,19
 126:5,7,15,17,22
 127:1,4,10,12,20,25
 128:7,9,15 129:1
 134:9,9,10,12,14
 135:9,10,12,14,15
 136:8,10 138:21
 139:2,4,6,8,18,23,25 140:2
 142:12,14,15,18
 143:3,5,14,17,20
 145:10,11,25 148:7,10,25
 149:5,14,17
 150:5,5,9,14,20 151:2,6,15
 152:17,23 153:5,11,15,23

154:1,4 156:18
 162:5,6,7,7,9
 younger (4) 57:20 61:22 92:9
 113:21
 youngest (1) 95:15
 youre (23) 1:16 35:8,9 47:22
 62:4 79:3 88:5,16 96:24
 100:14 137:24 138:10,13
 140:11,11,19 146:13 148:2
 151:1 152:9 155:17
 156:6,20
 yours (1) 143:6
 yourself (1) 163:19
 youth (1) 104:23
 youthandcovid (1) 92:16
 youve (12) 54:18 75:5 86:18
 88:19 95:8 106:3 108:19
 144:3 146:18,20 157:1
 159:21

Z

zoom (3) 39:17 101:3 151:9

1

1 (3) 22:18 41:11 47:13
 10 (6) 29:9,10 95:14,14,17
 164:20
 100 (1) 47:16
 10000 (1) 43:24
 105 (1) 15:8
 11 (2) 152:1,7
 1100 (1) 34:23
 1115 (1) 34:22
 1117 (1) 34:25
 1120 (1) 134:20
 11500 (1) 40:24
 12 (2) 90:6 164:20
 1234 (1) 87:21
 13 (6) 36:24 66:24 90:6,9
 142:19 148:2
 130 (4) 13:10 165:5,5,6
 135 (1) 19:5
 13yearold (1) 127:14
 14 (3) 92:16 134:11 142:19
 145 (2) 87:20,20
 15 (2) 30:1 110:8
 1503 (1) 36:25
 1578 (1) 46:25
 16 (8) 26:11 95:14,17 118:3
 120:19 132:13 140:19
 142:20
 17 (3) 2:20 6:1 37:1
 170 (1) 29:8
 18 (4) 39:1 40:24 70:1
 142:22
 18month (1) 40:20
 19 (3) 7:11 9:5 52:4
 1947 (1) 42:23
 1st (1) 46:4

2

2 (8) 27:1 29:8 47:14 49:7,8
 104:23 165:2,2
 20 (6) 29:24 40:3 41:12,24
 51:6,9
 2000 (1) 36:15
 2000odd (1) 39:4
 2015 (1) 131:20
 2016 (3) 3:12,23 88:22
 2017 (1) 36:5
 2018 (2) 3:7 145:22
 2019 (5) 3:8 25:18 126:11
 135:19 163:6
 202 (1) 29:14
 2020 (20) 3:1,1 6:12,18 7:12
 10:24 11:8,11 12:20,22,24
 13:14,22 36:1 47:2 50:25
 53:12 92:21 96:18 163:6
 2021 (7) 51:16,18 76:17,18
 85:13 108:4 145:23
 202122 (1) 29:14
 2022 (1) 2:23
 2023 (1) 36:25
 2024 (4) 1:1 36:25 126:11
 164:21

219 (1) 29:15
 22 (2) 42:14 99:13
 2223 (1) 29:15
 23 (2) 10:14 99:14
 2324 (2) 29:8,15
 24 (1) 45:23
 242 (1) 129:21
 25 (5) 36:21 50:23 95:12
 96:7 109:12
 254 (1) 37:1
 25yearold (1) 134:11
 26 (3) 42:16 50:12 99:25
 28 (1) 24:24
 286 (1) 29:16
 29 (1) 47:1

3

3 (2) 129:11,20
 30 (10) 9:16 22:21 29:25
 30:1 40:3 41:11 47:12
 48:22 49:1 51:9
 30s (1) 118:8
 30th (1) 46:4
 31 (3) 51:18 55:3 56:8
 32 (5) 9:16 36:23 47:3 48:15
 59:9
 337 (1) 151:18
 34 (9) 103:17
 108:1,19,20,22,23 109:7,9
 124:20
 35 (3) 22:22 165:3,3
 356 (1) 164:19
 38 (2) 24:24 76:6
 39 (1) 28:14
 3rd (1) 48:12

4

4 (3) 26:12 30:10 48:14
 40 (4) 28:14 30:17,21 68:16
 400 (1) 44:21
 40s (1) 118:8
 419 (1) 51:5
 44 (1) 68:16
 45 (1) 81:17
 46 (1) 75:21
 48 (1) 83:4
 49 (2) 81:17 84:4

5

5 (5) 8:8 22:11 30:8,8,10
 50 (2) 22:17 63:21
 500 (1) 44:21
 5050 (1) 22:14
 51 (1) 63:21
 52 (1) 74:12
 54 (1) 75:20
 55 (1) 52:8
 57 (1) 37:2
 58 (1) 73:9

6

6 (4) 30:3,6 52:10 75:19
 60 (1) 46:16
 62 (2) 37:2 62:7
 66 (2) 62:7 73:18
 67 (1) 85:6
 69 (1) 52:11

7

7 (3) 1:1 22:13 51:18
 70 (1) 52:2
 75 (1) 123:1
 7858 (1) 47:3
 79 (1) 50:5

8

8 (9) 120:19 130:24 131:9
 134:25 138:1 148:2 152:1
 157:2 163:9
 80 (1) 30:2
 8000 (1) 44:16
 86 (1) 21:21
 88 (2) 165:4,4
 89 (1) 122:23

9

9 (3) 36:7 143:24 147:25