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Scottish Covid-19 Inquiry

Day 65

November 20, 2024

1
          Wednesday, 20 November 2024

2 (10.00 am)

3 MS VAN DER WESTHUIZEN: Good morning, my Lord.

4 THE CHAIR: Good morning, Ms van der Westhuizen. Now, you

5   have a witness for us, I believe.

6 MS VAN DER WESTHUIZEN: I do, my Lord. It's Mr Frew, who's

7   the chief executive officer of YouthLink Scotland.

8   MR TIMOTHY FREW (called)

9 THE CHAIR: Good morning Mr Frew.

10 A. Good morning.

11 THE CHAIR: I'm sure Ms van der Westhuizen will have some

12   questions for you so I'll ask her to start now. Thank

13   you.

14   Questions by MS VAN DER WESTHUIZEN

15 MS VAN DER WESTHUIZEN: Thank you, my Lord. Mr Frew, please

16   could you confirm your full names?

17 A. So my name is Timothy Frew.

18 Q. You gave a witness statement to the Inquiry, and, my

19   Lord, for reference, that statement can be found using

20   reference number SCI—WT0267—000001.

21   So Mr Frew, you are the chief executive officer of

22   YouthLink Scotland; is that correct?

23 A. That's correct, yes.

24 Q. You have been in that role since 2018?

25 A. Yes.

1

1 Q. Would you outline perhaps your background prior to

2   taking on that role, please?

3 A. So I had actually been working at YouthLink Scotland

4   before that in a number of different roles, and I have

5   had experience across the youth work sector before that,

6   working in local authorities and in voluntary

7   organisations.

8 Q. Thank you. Please could you outline briefly what your

9   role as chief executive officer entails, just in general

10   terms but also specifically in relation to the time

11   during the pandemic?

12 A. So my role is the day—to—day operations and management

13   of YouthLink Scotland, which is the national agency for

14   youth work. I have a role in supporting the

15   organisation, but also representing the sector more

16   broadly in terms of the —— YouthLink Scotland's role

17   connecting to voluntary youth work organisations and

18   local authorities who are delivering youth work across

19   Scotland.

20 Q. Thank you. Could you please provide an overview of

21   YouthLink Scotland, what its aims are, what it does and

22   the make—up of its membership, please?

23 A. Certainly, so YouthLink Scotland, as I said, is the

24   national agency for youth work. We're an independent

25   company and charity, but we're recognised as the key

2

1 intermediary and the collective voice of the sector. So

2 there are about maybe 50 or 60 national voluntary youth

3 work organisations like the Prince's Trust and uniformed

4 youth organisations, and local authorities that deliver

5 services, youth work services across Scotland as well as

6 regional and other partners. And each of those are part

7 of the membership of YouthLink Scotland, and we

8 represent their interests. We do things like workforce

9 development, we do innovation, we provide funding or

10 seek funding for the sector. We do research and policy

11 work, communications, workforce support, those kinds of

12 things.

13 Q. Thank you. Then could you please explain what youth

14   work is and in particular how it relates or supports

15   education?

16 A. So, yes, youth work is informal education practice with

17   children and young people. It's about supporting their

18   personal, social and educational development. It very

19   much comes from a rights—based approach to children and

20   young people, supporting the broader general education

21   of young people, and also thinking about their voice and

22   their participation in society.

23   So we have an outcome and skills framework as a

24   sector in Scotland that the whole sector has worked

25   together to sort of recognise the outcomes that young

3

1 people achieve, and also the skills and attributes they

2 pick up from coming through the youth work process.

3 Q. What sort of skills, what role does youth work play in

4   supporting children in terms of developing those skills?

5   Perhaps you could give an example of the types of youth

6   work that's carried out?

7 A. Yes, so it looks different in different places, so youth

8   work takes place in community centres, in schools, it

9   can even happen in prisons and in hospitals, and it's

10   very much about —— I suppose there's targeted youth work

11   intervention. There's also universal provision. It

12   could be digital youth work, it could be face—to—face

13   contact, relationship building. It could be very

14   specific educational and accreditation—type

15   opportunities through things like the Duke of

16   Edinburgh's Award and youth achievement awards.

17   So it's quite broad based, but it's all in that

18   space of informal education and supporting young people

19   to develop their skills, their understanding and the

20   opportunity to achieve and realise their full potential.

21 Q. You have mentioned there's quite a diverse range of

22   types of youth work; are there any particular groups of

23   children or cohorts of children and young people that

24   it's particularly beneficial for?

25 A. Yes, so 12 to 25 is the age spread. I suppose

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1   predominantly 12 to 18 in terms of youth work, so that
2   adolescent period is quite important. There are,
3   through many of our uniformed youth organisations and
4   bigger charities like YMCA, they're also working with
5   children as well from 8 to 11 years old.
6   So I think one of the key aspects of what we do is
7   probably around transition points, P7 into S1, also from
8   school into career and employability, college and
9   universities . So, yes, but predominantly 11 to 18, but
10   we look at the full 12 to 25 spectrum.
11 Q. Thank you, and the Inquiry has heard quite a lot about
12   the importance of transition points and transitions and
13   support offered then. What role does youth work play in
14   relation to those transition points?
15 A. So a variety of roles . It could be kind of residential
16   opportunities for children and young people to support
17   them in the transition ; it could be connecting with
18   schools and working alongside them to build young
19   people's confidence and their skills in and around those
20   spaces.
21   At the other end, in terms of employability and
22   skills , it 's very much part of that wider careers
23   support and advice from Skills Development Scotland and
24   others, thinking about ways that young people can
25   understand their own personal and professional journey,

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1   and how they're supported into the next steps around
2   that.
3 Q. Thank you. You've touched on just the types of youth
4   work that there are, but in general terms could you give
5   an overview of what pre—pandemic youth work looked like,
6   in terms of how it was delivered and where. You've
7   touched on schools etc but if you could give more detail
8   on some of the spaces that youth work was delivered in
9   and how it was delivered face—to—face, digitally etc
10   outdoors?
11 A. Yes, so predominantly face—to—face delivery through
12   youth work, through —— often group work exercises and
13   activities . It's in youth centres, in schools, in
14   community buildings, and also in specific targeted
15   programmes as well. So, yes, it kind of looks different
16   in different places, but it 's that common thread around,
17   as I say, the outcomes that we're trying to achieve for
18   young people and with young people.
19   It's very much about putting young people first,
20   sort of working with them and their own learning
21   journey, and kind of understanding what their needs are,
22   and matching the programme to them. So a lot of youth
23   work activity is codeveloped and coproduced with
24   children and young people.
25 Q. What is the relationship then between the youth workers

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1   and children and young people?
2 A. Yes, so that is —— I think the relationship—based aspect
3   of that is quite important. It is very much about
4   understanding young people and what their needs are, and
5   having the time to do that. You know, quite often youth
6   work is —— as well as some youth work taking place in
7   the school day in schools and also outside of schools,
8   predominantly it's in the evenings and weekends and in
9   holiday periods that a lot of youth work takes place.
10   So the relationship first aspect is really
11   important, so we're part of a wider —— youth work in
12   Scotland is part of a wider profession around community
13   learning and development. It's very much —— the values
14   and ethics of what we're about is about putting
15   communities first, listening to the needs, auditing the
16   needs of the community.
17   So from a youth work and young people point of view,
18   that is very much listening to what young people's needs
19   are, what they're looking for and trying to adapt our
20   programmes to meet their needs.
21 Q. You mentioned that some of your members are local
22   authorities , and that they provide youth work. Then you
23   mentioned other organisations that are not —— more
24   private ones like —— I think you mentioned Scouts, we're
25   certainly hearing from them later, Scouts Scotland.

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1   What is the relationship between those private youth
2   work organisations and local authorities ? Do they work
3   in the same way that you've described there?
4 A. Yes, so there's a lot of collectivism around working
5   together to get the best needs for children and young
6   people. In a local community, obviously we have the
7   national Scouts, but in terms of local and regional
8   bodies, there would be a real interest in working
9   together to make sure that activity is planned around
10   each other, so that services are not clashing with each
11   other, that they're providing the right kinds of
12   activity at different times of the day.
13   At a national level , YouthLink's role is to bring
14   people together and be a collective voice, and to make
15   sure that networks are working with each other
16   strategically . So in each local authority, there's a
17   community learning plan where the local authority will
18   consider where it needs to target its resource and need
19   for children and young people, but often that is done in
20   partnership with the voluntary sector and the other
21   agencies that are supporting children and young people
22   through different methods.
23   I mean, I have said, you know, face—to—face, group
24   work, but there's also digital activity , detached youth
25   work as well, going on to the streets and meeting young

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1　people where they're at, and a range of different
2　outreach services as well.
3　Q. And does detached youth work, could you explain a bit ——
4　you mentioned it's going out to meet children in the
5　street or where they are. Could you explain what that
6　looks like and what types of support are offered through
7　that?
8　A. Yes, so that's very much about just again making
9　connections, making relationships, but also signposting
10　young people to maybe services, there might be —— where
11　there might be need. Quite often detached connects
12　to —— services connect to local intelligence from police
13　and other agencies about where some young people who are
14　maybe facing difficulties, or who, you know, may be at
15　risk of antisocial behaviour or so on.
16　　　It's kind of a way to sort of dispel those things
17　and make sure that young people are supported and
18　signposted into youth centres and other places where
19　support can happen.
20　Q. The organisations that provide that specific type of
21　support, do they provide other youth work services, or
22　are they specific organisations that deliver that?
23　A. So there's —— at both ends, there's some organisations
24　that will work specifically with young people at the
25　margins, organisations like Rock Trust working with

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1　young people that are —— and young adults, young people
2　that are homeless. So there are some targeted
3　specialist provision, but there's also generic youth
4　work. Organisations will also do some detached youth
5　work at weekends or in the summers.
6　　　I have to say, this looks like quite varied in terms
7　of budget and in terms of what the financial constraints
8　are on the sector as to how much that happens or doesn't
9　happen.
10　Q. Thank you. So we have got an idea of what youth work
11　looked like pre—pandemic or generally. We're going to
12　discuss the matters related to the move to digital
13　provision, but could you please describe in general
14　terms what youth work looked like during the pandemic?
15　A. So I think during the pandemic, clearly youth work was
16　unable to attend —— young people were unable to attend
17　youth work in schools or community centres. So there
18　was a real importance that —— you know, that youth work
19　pivoted and repositioned its offer. One of the good
20　things about youth work, because it's needs—led, and
21　very much working with young people, is that it acted
22　very quickly in that regard.
23　　　So there's a lot of, you know, creative offers for
24　children and young people; things like, you know, again,
25　we talked about detached youth work, but actually youth

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1　work is getting on bicycles and going and taking maybe
2　either food provision or activity packs to the homes of
3　children and young people, so they could engage in those
4　services that were being offered.
5　　　The biggest change, of course, was to online and to
6　digital. We as an agency have led on digital youth
7　work. We have got a number of programmes that run
8　across the EU, at YouthLink, and we also had —— we set
9　up a website called digitalyouthwork.scot, and that was
10　very much about sharing resources and intelligence
11　across the sector, so that we could provide that digital
12　youth work for young people, and also youth work
13　outdoors.
14　　　I would say there's some other aspect of this,
15　though, where the agility of the youth work service,
16　because maybe it wasn't —— you know, it's not so set as
17　formal school, where you have a day—to—day curriculum,
18　and you have subjects you're teaching —— did mean that
19　youth workers were pulled into things like food banks,
20　community hubs in terms of where they were being ——
21　supporting, you know, young people from key workers
22　during that period. They also were sometimes supporting
23　residential care, if there was too many numbers of in
24　terms of social workers, and connecting with vulnerable
25　children and young people in lots of different ways.

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1　　　So I think there was more targeting of the support
2　and provision, but at the same time youth work was quite
3　stretched. There was people taken into lots of
4　different activities to cover for other staff,
5　especially in the local authorities I'm talking about.
6　Q. Okay, so you said "pulled into", I was going to ask you
7　about that; so that was more in relation to local
8　authorities redistributing their staff?
9　A. Yes.
10　Q. Then what about the non—local authority youth work
11　sector; what other work did they do beyond traditional
12　youth work during the pandemic?
13　A. So I think, yes, the online and digital resources and
14　packs were quite important, matched with activity packs,
15　it was quite creative in terms of connecting with young
16　people as well, in terms of detached, and that —— I
17　mentioned also outdoor experiences, so especially in
18　those —— when we were permitted to do things outdoor but
19　with social distancing, all kinds of youth work
20　activities to make those social connections and create
21　opportunities for fun and connection, was very much to
22　the fore.
23　Q. Thank you. We'll come on to discuss that in a bit more
24　detail.
25　　　If we could turn now just to consider the role of

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1   YouthLink Scotland during the pandemic. You discuss
2   this at paragraphs 22 to 26 of your report and then
3   again up to paragraph 47.
4   So if we could start first looking at —— you say
5   that as the national agency for youth work, you played a
6   role in leading the sector's approach to THE COVID—19
7   response and recovery.
8   Then you go on TO describe at paragraph 23 that
9   YouthLink Scotland quickly established a national youth
10   work recovery group that met regularly in connection
11   with specific themes.
12   Could you please explain who was included in that
13   group?
14   A. Yes, so that was representatives from the voluntary
15   sector and from local authorities. It included a mix of
16   managers and senior practitioners, so it had a good
17   granularity in terms of mixed understandings of what was
18   actually happening, and it was pulled from all across
19   Scotland.
20   When I said that we responded quickly, we had
21   already been doing hybrid things with Zoom, and so on,
22   so we were ready as an agency very quickly to move to
23   that, and to encourage the sector to get on to those
24   platforms and communicate if they weren't already.
25   So we had a weekly meeting initially that went to

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1   fortnightly and then monthly of that recovery group, and
2   it was just a fantastic source of intelligence. I think
3   we were able to get the full spectrum from rural places,
4   from Highlands and Islands, and also urban areas, and
5   the different challenges that were occurring in
6   different places. So it was a great funnel for
7   intelligence sharing, but also for support for youth
8   workers and leaders and managers to share understanding,
9   to share resources that were working in certain places
10   really well, and we used that then also to feed into
11   Scottish Government.
12   Q. Was that the purpose of setting it up, was this
13   intelligence gathering, sharing of information?
14   A. Yes. Yes, it was. And I guess as an agency, networks
15   were quite important for what we do, so we have a local
16   authority managers network, a voluntary organisations
17   network, we have a digital youth network, we have a
18   research network.
19   So these opportunities for practitioners to come
20   together were there previously, but for this we wanted
21   to bring together groups specifically focused on COVID,
22   and pulling together, as I said, those that had
23   different sort of understandings and skill sets in that
24   space, so we had a kind of a rich mix of understanding
25   and intelligence.

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1   Q. Are you able to summarise some of the key topics and
2   issues that were discussed?
3   A. So that's quite a broad range. I think it would be
4   looking at, you know, the agenda would —— I think it's
5   probably in the witness statement, but it would look at
6   what kind of guidance was there, was one of the key
7   things, I suppose, what was government saying, and how
8   did we understand and make sense of that in a youth work
9   context. You know, where was the financial support on
10   offer.
11   There was a number of programmes that government
12   were looking at to develop, whether community—based
13   funding for third sector or maybe funding for, you know,
14   staff being furloughed. We would look at mental health
15   issues for children and young people.
16   The priority was the impact on children and young
17   people, because that's what our job is, to support and
18   think about how youth work is supporting young people.
19   So where were the challenges, what were the specific new
20   barriers that were coming in, and how could we overcome
21   those barriers and challenges.
22   So that was a continual discussion. Over time it
23   became more and more specific around the nuances of
24   guidance and helping people to really understand that,
25   and to communicate clearly, because although we had, you

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1   know, overarching guidance, given that youth work sat
2   across a number of different places, it was important to
3   communicate that.
4   You had facilities—based guidance, you had guidance
5   for faith communities, you had guidance for schools and
6   guidance for play. And so youth work was actually
7   inhabiting a number of different spaces, so it was quite
8   important that we were able to give clarity as to what
9   that meant in the context of youth work.
10   Q. Thank you, and you mentioned —— well, first of all, to
11   what extent did that group enable YouthLink Scotland to
12   influence Scottish Government and public health guidance
13   in the youth work sector? I think you mentioned you fed
14   in; what was the nature and extent of that feeding in
15   and collaboration?
16   A. So that was very regular, and I think it was well
17   received, and we —— certainly government were very keen
18   to hear, they were keen for us to do surveys for the
19   sector as well, and to kind of understand what the
20   sector was grappling with, and what some of the issues
21   were.
22   There was a community learning and development
23   leadership group that we fed into initially, and then
24   actually that was directly feeding into the advanced
25   learning and science recovery group as part of COVID.

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1   So we had that chance to speak directly to the minister
2   and to the others that were leading on this. In terms
3   of public health and the engagement back and forward,
4   that was the ability to kind of have conversations about
5   what might be —— you know, what the government was
6   thinking around what could be in the next iteration of
7   guidance and what would that —— so it was an opportunity
8   to sort of test things out, and for us as a sector to
9   say what kind of would and wouldn't work, and what would
10   work better and how we could communicate that. So it
11   was a very much a back—and—forward conversation with our
12   government colleagues.
13 Q. And I think you mentioned something about it improving
14   over time; did that get better as —— that communication
15   and that collaboration improve over time, or was it
16   continuously the same throughout?
17 A. Yes, I think it did, you know, I think as —— you know,
18   I think there was a regular and open opportunity for
19   feedback and communication. Over time as well, I think
20   government tried to sort of limit the numbers of
21   guidance going out into more —— fewer, you know, aspects
22   of guidance, so that there wasn't too many overlapping
23   or potentially kind of maybe slightly confusing mixed
24   messaging across some of those communications.
25 Q. We'll come on to discuss later on in the discussion some

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1   of the issues or the impacts for YouthLink Scotland in
2   relation to guidance and timing and ability to respond
3   meaningfully, but if we could move on next to discuss
4   some of the key resources that you think Scotland was
5   involved in providing. You mention at paragraphs 26 to
6   30 that that group allowed you to develop resources, and
7   that included guidance through the youth work sector.
8   Could you please describe or explain what some of those
9   key resources were?
10 A. Yes, so it is things like for, you know, mental health
11   and wellbeing resources, you know, sharing learning
12   around some of the activity there, and detached youth
13   work guidance. So quite often, people had things in
14   different places, and, you know, part of that is
15   preparatory, so part of that is different people owning
16   different aspects of what they were doing, or training,
17   so it's very much an opportunity to share those
18   resources and make sure that everybody had the latest
19   kind of knowledge and intelligence.
20   We developed a lot of training around digital and
21   how to do digital well and safely, and also around, as I
22   say, mental health and wellbeing resources, but also
23   around education resources as well.
24 Q. You then also describe at paragraphs 31 to 47 some of
25   the funding programmes that YouthLink administered on

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1   behalf of the Scottish Government to support young
2   people. Broadly, what was YouthLink's role in
3   administering the funds? We will come on to discuss
4   impacts in more detail, but if you could please outline
5   what YouthLink's role was in administering funds, and
6   then perhaps explain what some of those funds were aimed
7   at addressing, what impacts those funds were aimed at
8   addressing?
9 A. So, you know, providing funding to youth work is
10   something that we were doing pre—pandemic, and it was ——
11   I think we had a good model of often peer assessed and
12   also with young people involved in making assessments
13   for where funding was distributed to. And quite often,
14   you know, small grants—based programmes and projects,
15   things like, you know, CashBack for Communities is an
16   example of the sector doing that well, pre—pandemic.
17   So those were the key things, I suppose, the fact it
18   was peer assessed, the fact that the money went quickly
19   to where the need was greatest, and, you know, strong
20   outcomes came with those funds as well. So there was
21   never a case where we saw money that, you know, was
22   coming back the way —— into us because people were able
23   to see the need, identify it clearly and spend it.
24   So a lot of that was based on a history of
25   understanding and trust and, you know, peer assessment

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1   is actually quite robust, I would say, as a model,
2   because people can, you know, who know exactly what
3   money can be spent of, can see the best use and best
4   allocation of that resource.
5 Q. In terms of who it was being distributed to, was that
6   being distributed to your members?
7 A. So it's for the sector, so it's not exclusive to
8   YouthLink members. Most of the sector is represented
9   through YouthLink Scotland, either directly or through
10   some of the national bodies. So you might be —— a local
11   YMCA is connected to the national YMCA and then YMCA is
12   represented in YouthLink Scotland, but it wasn't
13   exclusive to our members, no, it was to anyone in the
14   youth work sector.
15 Q. Just in terms of YouthLink's role in administering the
16   funds, were you distributing those funds or just
17   involved in negotiating them?
18 A. Yes, no, we were involved in distributing the funds.
19 Q. Thank you. If we could just have a look at some of the
20   funds, please, and just give an indication of what
21   impacts they were aimed at addressing. So, for example,
22   I'm assuming the clue is in the name, but the CLD
23   digital inclusion fund, what was that?
24 A. Yes, so there was a wider Connecting Scotland support
25   and fund for —— around devices for children that I think

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1   SCVO were involved in running, but there was a specific
2   kind of gap for younger adults that we were noticing,
3   young, kind of community adult learning, sort of 16 plus
4   age range. That's what the fund was dedicated to. So
5   we worked along with Lead Scotland and the Workers'
6   Educational Association to make sure that again the ——
7   kind of the technology went to young adult learners.
8   Lead Scotland in particular had experts in devices
9   for young people that need assistance with certain
10   disabilities . So that was really helpful, and we made
11   sure that again —— it was just a gap that we were
12   picking up in our part of the world where young people
13   were missing out on some of the devices. Not every
14   young person was going to school, so the school
15   programmes were not working for every child and young
16   person, so finding other ways to get devices to young
17   people who were not maybe yet registered in a college
18   but in an in—between place was quite important.
19   Q. Then you mention specifically the social isolation and
20   loneliness fund in your statement. Could you please
21   explain what that was aimed at addressing?
22   A. So certainly that was for —— you know, I guess we were
23   recognising that young people were facing loneliness and
24   isolation . Sometimes traditionally that perspective is
25   that maybe it was older people who were being more

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1   isolated , but actually young people themselves were also
2   experiencing that, and I guess that's shown as well
3   through some of the findings we have around the mental
4   health and wellbeing of young people more broadly.
5   But that specific fund was again targeted to those
6   that knew about, you know, families in —— really at risk
7   in terms of poverty, or, you know, in terms of, you
8   know, clothing, it was a very flexible fund to meet sort
9   of needs in local communities that those that were
10   working closely with communities and families would know
11   about, and would be able to really target that need and
12   support.
13   Q. Thank you, and perhaps if we could just touch on one
14   more before we move on, the Outdoor Education Recovery
15   Fund?
16   A. Yes, so that was a really important fund. I guess what
17   we noticed was that outdoor centres, we were getting
18   feedback that they were in a particularly difficult
19   place. They were not able to access some of the ——
20   either the business funding or the community support
21   funding that was available. It just didn't work for
22   them because they had an income generation aspect of
23   what they did, in terms of bookings for residential
24   centres, you know, an element of income there. They
25   were not—for—profit agencies so they weren't private

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1   businesses. And there was a sense in which those
2   outdoor centres were at real jeopardy and threat of
3   closure during this period, which was going to have a
4   significant impact on the educational offer for all
5   children and young people.
6   I think over time that there had been, you know, a
7   pressure already in terms of school groups and visits,
8   maybe not having as many visits to residential and
9   outdoor centres. And then during COVID, this really
10   came home as an industry, if you like, that was under
11   thread.
12   If you put that alongside the fact that outdoor
13   opportunities was actually one of the few things that
14   could happen for children and young people in a safe
15   way, there was an opportunity to invest in that, and
16   government saw that opportunity through the Outdoor
17   Education Recovery Fund.
18   And again, it was about young people having those
19   opportunities to, you know, develop their wider
20   educational skills and opportunities through outdoor
21   experiences. It was very well —— it had a really big
22   impact in terms of —— I think again schools and others
23   maybe who have not been doing so much of that, seeing
24   the impact on young people's confidence, their
25   wellbeing, and generally their happiness and energy to

23

1   come back and return to school as well; because I think,
2   you know, the experiences of school for many young
3   people through digital only, especially during lockdown
4   periods, was quite a lonely process, and for some young
5   people they completely disconnected.
6   So having outdoor centres to support young people's
7   wellbeing and then help them re—enter education, formal
8   education, was really important.
9   Q. Thank you. If we could touch on then —— you mention at
10   paragraphs 40 to 47, you describe some of the work
11   YouthLink did with the Scottish Government to deliver a
12   national food insecurity pilot. You refer to a national
13   insecurity pilot, and then you also refer to a pilot
14   programme in the school holidays. Was that the same
15   programme or are those two different programmes?
16   A. So it was the same programme, but just to be clear, this
17   was something that was agreed before the pandemic hit,
18   and so it was moved into the summer, you know, period
19   because of the pandemic, and so there's a readjustment
20   to the sort of nature of the delivery . I guess there
21   was a wide recognition that food poverty affects
22   learning and learning loss. This came very much from a
23   learning loss point of view.
24   What happened especially during the summer periods
25   where —— that was again something that we recognised

24

1   that some young people who —— from, you know, maybe
2   impoverished backgrounds are facing food insecurity;
3   what was the impact of that on their learning.
4   So we worked along with a number of different
5   partners. It was a government—funded project. We
6   worked with regional improvement collaboratives, and
7   there was an opportunity for flexibility again, in terms
8   of the leadership; it was very much voluntary
9   organisations and statutory working together, a mixed
10   model. And the approach was again looking at how we can
11   build young people's skills, their health and wellbeing,
12   but also there was an opportunity for that connection
13   with trusted adults, people who already knew some of the
14   families and communities that were struggling around
15   this in their local area, and to tailor the need and the
16   provision for that.
17   It was really successful. About 92% of young people
18   improved their mental wellbeing through the pilot, and
19   80% expressed that they were keen to return to school as
20   well, when they were off school through lockdown. So it
21   had a really good impact.
22 Q. You mention at paragraph 42, your evaluation of the
23   pilot programmes underline the effectiveness of the
24   youth work approach to tackling food insecurity and
25   learning loss among young people and their families,

25

1   which I think you have discussed some of there:
2   "This included purposely designing activities to be
3   fun, engaging, and responsive to participants'
4   interests; having fun was essential for drawing and
5   maintaining interest."
6   So was that all part of that delivery of that
7   programme?
8 A. Yes, yes, it was and I think —— yes, that approach, the
9   different, maybe, pedagogy of an approach in terms of
10   relationship first, and then the education and the
11   support around food, comes as part of the process, and
12   is absolutely the approach that was taken.
13 Q. Thank you. You then mention at paragraphs 48 to 52 the
14   role that YouthLink played in relation to surveys. At
15   paragraph 48 and following, you mention the work done
16   with the Scottish Youth Parliament, Children in
17   Scotland, and the Children's Parliament, in hearing
18   directly from young people on the pandemic as it
19   affected them, and you refer to the key survey being the
20   LockdownLowdown.
21   We'll come on later to discuss some of the impacts
22   and issues highlighted in that survey when we discuss
23   impacts on children and young people, which you then
24   describe at paragraph 113 and following, but for now,
25   would you please explain how YouthLink became involved,

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1   and what that survey involved, what was it looking at,
2   and how was it carried out?
3 A. Yes, so it was —— that particular survey was Young Scot,
4   Scottish Youth Parliament and YouthLink Scotland, and it
5   was very much: what are young people thinking, what are
6   young people feeling right now. There was a sense maybe
7   at the beginning as well of the process that some of the
8   progress around young people's voice and young people's
9   rights, and building from a Year of Young People,
10   which —— in Scotland, which was all about codeveloping
11   activities and services with children and young people.
12   But during this period, in the rush, the emergency
13   rush to get things established and organised, is that
14   young people's voices could be left behind. So that
15   was, I suppose, very much in the DNA of Young Scot and
16   YouthLink and the Youth Parliament to reach out and hear
17   exactly what young people were saying. We have the
18   success of having done —— having those connections
19   through many of the youth organisations as well to
20   support that as well as —— you know, setting the
21   questions to support that in terms of encouraging young
22   people to fill it in.
23   You know, young people —— there's other sources of
24   intelligence, I suppose, through Public Health Scotland,
25   quite often are based on studies that happen in school,

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1   during the school day, and national studies to sort of
2   capture some of that data, and that was maybe
3   de—prioritised a little bit, I'm not sure, but —— in
4   terms of that period, in terms of some of the emergency
5   response.
6   So this was very much welcomed as an opportunity to
7   speak directly to young people. And I think we had
8   about 2,500 responses to the first one in April 2020,
9   6,000 in November 2020, and another 2,500 young people
10   responding in June 2021. So there was different phases
11   and stages of the lockdown process.
12 Q. Thank you. Further in relation to surveys, you refer at
13   paragraph 51 to a survey which —— in relation to access
14   to facilities, and again, we'll come on later to discuss
15   some of the findings and particularly the impacts and
16   issues experienced by members in relation to access to
17   facilities. But could you please explain for now what
18   that survey involved, and what YouthLink's role was in
19   relation to that survey?
20 A. So, yes, again, this is where sort of building
21   intelligence from those COVID recovery groups was
22   recognising that this was an area that we needed to
23   survey and get more data on, because we were recognising
24   that young people and youth work activity was not taking
25   place in the way that it could and should have been in

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1   terms of the —— you know, the permission as part of an
2   educational offer to be there for children and young
3   people. Sorry, what was your question specifically?
4 Q. Sorry, it was just what was YouthLink's role and what
5   was the purpose of that survey, what it involved?
6 A. So it was just to be finding out what access was to
7   community facilities across the country, for youth work,
8   and to see what some of the barriers were that were
9   preventing safe indoor working which was permitted.
10   So we did four different surveys between 2020 and
11   2022, and I think you said we'll go on to that in a bit,
12   but it was —— yes, again, working with the sector to get
13   that intelligence, and, again, to do that in a rich way,
14   as well as the stats, to get some of the qualitative
15   information about what some of the nuances of different
16   types of barriers to open access to youth work.
17 Q. Thank you. Then finally, you mention at paragraph 52 a
18   survey that YouthLink carried out, called Scotland's
19   youth work sector. Again, we'll come on later to
20   discuss some of the findings, which you describe in
21   paragraph 117, but please could you explain again what
22   the purpose of that survey was, what it involved and
23   what YouthLink's involvement was?
24 A. So, yes, again, it's just to understand fully how it was
25   impacting the youth work sector, and how the youth work

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1   sector was ready to respond to the needs for children
2   and young people. So the questions went through all of
3   those aspects, and I think we were, you know,
4   discovering some of the challenges that the sector was
5   facing, you know, maybe in terms of funding, but also in
6   terms of volunteer numbers, in terms of, you know, how
7   many people were coming back into the profession.
8   So there was a kind of —— just gives a holistic view
9   of a number of the different issues that the sector was
10   facing around funding, around facilities, around mental
11   health support, how they were accessing or not accessing
12   some of the support and provision that was being
13   provided.
14 Q. Thank you. If we could move on now to discuss the move
15   to online and digital youth work provision which we have
16   touched on already. We've already discussed some of the
17   benefits of face—to—face youth work. But there was
18   something you mentioned in the earlier discussion which
19   is quite an important point about not all young people
20   and children are in education. Could you please explain
21   the importance of youth work and in particular
22   face—to—face youth work for children who've perhaps
23   either —— and I'm not talking about children who have
24   left education, but perhaps have disengaged or don't
25   engage as well with education as some of their peers?

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1 A. Yes, well, that's absolutely vital. I think youth
2   work —— and there is some funded work from government
3   around this in terms of closing the attainment gap
4   between those who are doing —— from —— more deprived
5   compared to other young people. There's a quite a gap
6   in Scotland. So in terms of at the Scottish attainment
7   challenge, that's a big driver.
8   And of course to be engaged, it's also to actually
9   attend school first of all, so attendance rates, you
10   know, drop quite considerably. But there's always been
11   a —— very much a youth work in schools approach to that,
12   and working closely with schools to provide alternative
13   opportunities to connect with young people and have
14   educational opportunities to maybe look at some of the
15   other ways that they can get credit and achievement if
16   they're not going to school.
17   But the focus is to support young people back into
18   the formal education system, that's clearly what youth
19   work wants to do. What you will see especially in some
20   areas is that there's kind of funding and support from
21   different sources, as you said, private charity
22   organisations, to work along with young people to
23   provide youth workers.
24   There's also youth workers in school or home school
25   support workers as well in some local authorities where

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1   there's that connection to the family, and to understand
2   why a young person is not attending, and to give support
3   and other opportunities for them to re—engage in
4   education; but also sometimes provide that education as
5   well, or provide some education while they're not
6   getting the full school experience, or providing
7   pathways into college and other partnerships.
8 Q. And what sort of education would they be providing?
9 A. So that again is hugely varied. Some of it is about ——
10   at some stages, it's not direct —— it's maybe just
11   mental health and wellbeing support, and connections,
12   but in other cases, it can be all the way to a fully
13   SQA—approved programme that can be run in a youth centre
14   rather than in a school.
15   So, yes, there's a range of different —— the awards
16   network provides —— there's about 40 different award
17   providers. If you look at even —— in some of our
18   uniformed organisations, there's accreditation and
19   possibilities through that, through organisations like
20   Cadets.
21   So there's other places that young people are able
22   to create achievement, to get on the Scottish credit and
23   qualifications framework, and have a kind of way into
24   their development in terms of their learning and
25   pathways. So there's the aspect of direct stuff that

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1   they can do, but also —— and it's educational in and of
2   itself in terms of some of the youth work activity, is
3   then given credit to that, so things like Youth
4   Achievement Awards. I can name a whole lot of them, but
5   again that's very much part of the youth work DNA, to
6   support young people who may not be thriving or are
7   vulnerable or not achieving in the formal education
8   system.
9 Q. Thank you. Just in terms of pivoting to online digital
10   youth work, how easy or difficult was that for members,
11   and could you describe what sort of things they
12   experienced and had to do to deliver that online youth
13   work during the pandemic or during lockdown, certainly?
14 A. Yes, so it was difficult, but I think, you know, by May,
15   92% of the sector were delivering online, in the early
16   part of the lockdown, but that would look very different
17   in different places, and there were significant barriers
18   to that.
19   One of the things that we —— in terms of one of
20   those surveys that was discussed earlier, youth work
21   sector survey, we discovered that 60% of local youth
22   work services were identifying digital barriers to
23   accessing activity with young people. And that was
24   something that we flagged, maybe you'll come on to that,
25   in terms of we did write to the Deputy First Minister at

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1   the time about that issue.
2   There was a lot of data poverty as well, so young
3   people in some places through schools and some of the
4   programmes might have access to a device, but they
5   didn't necessarily have the broadband and coverage for
6   that. So there's a real focus on digital inclusion and
7   ensuring that young people had access to those
8   activities.
9   Specifically for youth work, I think one of our
10   challenges was that, you know, we could see, again,
11   because we have both sides of the sector feeding into
12   us, we could see that the voluntary sector had tapped
13   into some of the platforms and —— that young people were
14   using in terms of Discord and Zoom quite quickly. In
15   terms of the local authorities, some of the kind of the
16   corporate —— there was a bit more of a corporate
17   lockdown, understandably, around some of those tools,
18   but actually for those that were engaging directly for
19   children and young people, and couldn't do it through
20   the corporate local authority offer, they needed to be
21   able to be on these platforms.
22   So I suppose youth workers were facing that dilemma
23   of using some of their own devices, and we felt this is
24   not something that's sustainable, we want to ensure that
25   these devices are used and fully accessible for support

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1   in terms of youth work.
2 Q. Thank you. We'll come on to discuss in a bit more
3   detail in a minute the digital inclusion issues, and
4   also those issues you touch on in relation to local
5   authorities restricting certain platforms. But were
6   there particular concerns amongst youth workers about ——
7   despite the successful move to online relatively
8   quickly, about loss of face—to—face youth work per se?
9 A. Absolutely, you know, the dynamic changed significantly,
10   and so not having that in—person contact. And it wasn't
11   a case of online or nothing, I suppose, because there
12   was still that opportunity for some outdoor or, you
13   know, detached sort of connection with young people.
14   But, yes, that did obviously have a big bearing because
15   the nature of activities and group work and some of the
16   fun icebreakers and things that you associate with
17   traditional youth work, they just become more difficult
18   to do online.
19   I think there was a recognition as well that for
20   young people, especially for —— looking for evening or
21   other activity, they maybe had to be online through
22   school during the day, so it turned into a different
23   platform for them in terms of —— maybe they had, yes,
24   they had —— I think we all had Teams and Zoom and
25   digital fatigue at some times in terms of that

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1   connection.
2   However, I would say that there was a lot of ——
3   there was a significant amount of creativity in that
4   space as well, in terms of using the technology well,
5   and certainly we were trying to support and drive that
6   with some of our knowledge from what was going on across
7   Europe, in terms of some of the interesting ways that
8   you can use digital technology to engage young people.
9 Q. Thank you. Just coming back to digital, or before we go
10   on to digital inclusion issues, safeguarding issues,
11   were there any particular safeguarding issues
12   highlighted by your members in relation specifically to
13   the use of online platforms to deliver youth work?
14 A. Yes, I mean, absolutely. There is that thing about, of
15   course, the professional and personal boundaries of
16   that, and ensuring that young people weren't —— you
17   know, there was a kind of —— there was a clear guideline
18   about what was appropriate, what was not appropriate
19   around —— so a number of guides that we already had were
20   being shared and developed as well, so that
21   organisations could look at best practice in that space;
22   and, you know, I suppose, trying to avoid young people
23   having —— you know, I suppose seeking out the individual
24   Facebook and other social media platforms that people
25   were on, and making sure there was a separation of

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1   professional boundaries.

2   A lot of this stuff had been written, but I suppose

3   the fact that everybody is on digital and online and we

4   were using it more meant that that needed more focus and

5   more attention, so we were doing a lot around guidelines

6   in that space.

7   On the other side, and from a young person point of

8   view, there was understandably caution about, you know,

9   youth workers coming into their own space, into their

10 own personal space. You can do amazing things with your

11 camera to make sure that —— you know, if you have

12 backgrounds that you're not seeing what the home is like

13 and so on, and, you know —— of what a young person might

14 want to show or not show.

15   So all of those things were considered in a lot of

16 detail and depth, and there was a kind of learning

17 around all of that as well, in terms of —— we also

18 watched the technology improve, I suppose, as we went to

19 sort of ensure privacy and to have different ways of

20 connecting.

21 Q. Thank you. Just in relation to digital inclusion

22   issues, could you please just explain what some of

23   those —— you've already touched on them but both in

24   terms of devices and data poverty, could you explain how

25   widespread those issues were amongst the youth ——

1   children and young people that your organisations were

2   engaging with, and if there were any particular groups

3   that were —— faced problems more than others, just in

4   terms of location or demographic?

5 A. Yes, so in terms of certain demographics of young people

6   where they have less access, it can seem that maybe they

7   do —— they're given —— I mentioned before, maybe they're

8   given an iPad from school, but they don't have maybe the

9   full —— didn't have maybe the full data support

10 initially at least, and/or how an understanding of how

11 to use the technology sometimes. We can make a sweeping

12 assumption that young people are tech—savvy, but

13 actually there's a lot of difference in terms of how

14 young people are understanding that. We say every young

15 person has a mobile phone, but not every young person

16 has a smart mobile phone.

17   So again, it could sort of reintroduce divides in

18 terms of what young people were willing or not willing

19 to share, because they didn't have quite the same access

20 as other young people, who maybe had much better

21 equipment and were able to use that. So that again was

22 why the sort of digital poverty and some of the funding

23 around that was really helpful and really useful,

24 because it was focused on getting devices and giving

25 extra support to young people who didn't have good

1   access.

2 Q. Thank you, and then you've also touched on the issues

3   with local authorities, and I think you have mentioned

4   this at paragraph 119, with councils preventing or

5   restricting access to social media, probably

6   understandably, but restricting access to social media

7   and other digital platforms, so youth workers couldn't

8   access these, which undermined vital connections with

9   young people.

10   Could you please just elaborate a little bit about

11 some of those difficulties and how they were overcome?

12 A. So, yes, so I guess we did —— we did want to sort of

13 identify that issue, and I think as I said, I wrote a

14 letter to the Deputy First Minister about that, because

15 we were starting to see this as being a pattern of

16 potential disengagement, and we did see progress over

17 time in terms of local authorities starting to, you

18 know, take away some of the restrictions that they had

19 on certain platforms specifically for this process of

20 engagement.

21   There may well be reasons at the corporate level to

22 protect corporate information from state players or

23 cyber incidents and attacks, but actually for children

24 and young people, some of these technologies was the

25 only way that they were connecting, so it was really

1   important that youth workers, if they had no other way

2   of connecting with them, had access and opportunity to

3   use those platforms and devices.

4   And I think we did —— as I say, we did see that over

5   time that it was better certainly by the second

6   lockdown, in terms of the access that local authorities

7   had as well as the voluntary sector. The voluntary

8   sector was more flexible, I think, in terms of some of

9   those tools and technologies.

10 Q. Thank you. Then at paragraph 115, you talk about the

11 fact that digital youth work, in fact, benefited some

12 others —— some children and young people, but was a

13 barrier to others. Could you please just broadly

14 outline some of those? We'll come on to discuss

15 challenges with return to face—to—face in a minute, but

16 if you could just outline some of the benefits —— some

17 of the groups that benefited and some that did not

18 benefit or were disadvantaged?

19 A. Yes. I mean, I'm aware, as I say, there were —— it's

20 really hard to generalise because it's very specific,

21 but I did get feedback from Deaf Action that some of the

22 opportunity for young people to see everybody on screen,

23 and be able to lipread and to also have a transcript of

24 the conversation; some of that technology actually

25 brought young people into the room more with their

1   peers, and there was a real —— great opportunity to sort

2   of make connections and to share information and to

3   build relationships.

4   So I think there was opportunities for positive —— a

5   reimagining of how we work, a real consideration of ——

6   quite often with group work activity, it can be —— in a

7   youth work and an in—person setting, there can always be

8   dominant voices and other young people not being heard

9   so much. So youth workers have got to work hard to make

10   sure everybody is part of that group, and that everybody

11   is able to engage.

12   So I think digital and online platforms did provide

13   some of that space, but at the same time, as soon as we

14   say that, I think there's other young people, depending

15   on specifically what their own support needs are, would

16   equally have been turned off by the digital and digital

17   screen only opportunity for engagement. So it's a kind

18   of mixed thing that we started to sort of learn and

19   understand more about as we went through the process.

20 Q.   Thank you. If we could now turn to consider other

21   impacts beyond sort of digital poverty related impacts

22   on children and young people. You've already provided a

23   description of some of the surveys that you undertook,

24   including the LockdownLowdown survey, which discusses

25   some of the impacts on children and young people. Could

41

1   you please just outline some of the impacts in relation

2   specifically to mental health and wellbeing that were

3   outlined both in relation —— by that survey but also

4   just in terms of general engagement with your members

5   through the group you mentioned earlier and otherwise?

6 A.   Yes. Yes. So I think the first survey, perhaps not

7   surprisingly, young people were very concerned about,

8   and this was an opportunity through the survey, the

9   LockdownLowdown to express that, what their concerns

10   were. 96% of young people were worried about COVID's

11   impact on their future, 77% were worried about their

12   mental health, and 40% were moderately or extremely

13   concerned about their mental health and wellbeing, and

14   that's in the first couple of months of the pandemic.

15   There were also —— about half of the young people were

16   also concerned about the impact on their exams and

17   coursework from not being in school.

18   So that was from our first lockdown survey, and I

19   think the concern in and around that area was that we

20   were aware that through the health behaviour in schools

21   study that Scotland, in terms of its mental health and

22   wellbeing, was not doing so well compared to some of its

23   other European colleagues. And this extra, I suppose,

24   you know, pandemic that —— all that came with that,

25   hearing about their concerns was really important for

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1   the youth workers to hear and kind of consider what are

2   we doing about that, and how might the social isolation

3   and the lack of connectedness, how might that affect

4   young people, how are they getting the chance to express

5   that, to talk to other trusted adults, with their kind

6   of small family unit, where's the opportunity for that

7   to happen.

8 Q.   Thank you. In terms of —— you had mentioned previously

9   social isolation in the context of one of the funds.

10   Again, how widespread was that, or to what extent was

11   that identified as an issue in and of itself?

12 A.   It was, yes. And I think, yes, so small steps of any

13   sort of interaction or activity, things like youth

14   workers actually maybe coming to your door to provide

15   some activity pack and then leave it for you, all of

16   these small interactions made a huge difference in terms

17   of young people's sense of —— that they were being

18   listened to, they were being connected, and everything

19   wasn't just about, you know, their school day, kind of

20   school and, you know, home.

21   I mean, home life can be very mixed for different

22   young people, it can be —— for every young person, there

23   can be good days and bad days being at home, so being in

24   a place, especially for young people that were shielding

25   and so on, it was clearly a very isolating period, and

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1   this was an opportunity to sort of target provision to

2   young people in particular that we were concerned about.

3 Q.   You touch on, in paragraph 105, and I don't think it's

4   necessarily with reference to the LockdownLowdown

5   report, but issues with behaviour or antisocial

6   behaviour. Are you able to explain a bit what those

7   issues were, and who was raising them?

8 A.   So, yes, I think this is at different points then, when

9   we came out of lockdown, there was a kind of recognition

10   that some of the anti —— there was some antisocial

11   behaviour. I mean that in the broadest sense of the

12   word, just slightly not what was expected in terms of

13   children and young people's behaviour.

14   So there was a sense that maybe young people had

15   missed key transition points in particular, and that

16   they were —— that was having an impact on their

17   behaviour. There was maybe a social immaturity as well

18   in terms of when they did come into spaces again, so

19   there was either a kind of —— some young people who were

20   maybe content to wear facemasks when that was a choice,

21   that happened throughout society as well, where they

22   maybe didn't need to do that and that was maybe about

23   covering up their own insecurities sometimes and

24   anxieties around the pandemic.

25   But equally, you know, it's kind of —— unruly

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behaviour is the best way to decide it in terms of, you
know, you're always going to get that on and off with
children and young people, but when you're listening to
practitioners who are seasoned youth workers, who have
spent years doing this, when they actually noticed this
being a bit more than normal and difficult to manage,
difficult to control; and they're able to maybe specify
certain year groups as well, where, as I say, the
transition age range in particular, when we came out of
lockdown and recovery, just their re—engagement in some
of the process of what was expected in a secondary
school classroom versus a primary school classroom, just
the nature of that change was there.

I think some of this as well, in terms of antisocial
behaviour, probably plays out more broadly in society,
and also young people not attending school, and then,
you know, finding other ways and not always positive
ways to channel their energies. That's something that
we've probably seen as well since the pandemic.

Q. Thank you. And then in relation to attainment and lost
learning, what were the concerns, if any, raised by the
children and young people that you surveyed in relation
to impacts relating to that?

A. So, yes, young people were —— again, the second
LockdownLowdown survey where young people were

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particularly concerned about their, you know, employment
opportunities and future education pathways, there was
obviously a lot of change. They wanted more information
about, you know, the school and the exam procedures.
Many of these things were changing quite regularly, and
so young people themselves, again, they were trying to
make sense of that, and what did it mean for them, would
they be doing an online assessment, would they be doing
an —— in coursework assessment.

So all of that just created —— I think we were able
to see a link between concerns around succeeding well in
school and mental health and wellbeing, there seemed to
be a clear link between anxieties around achievement and
opportunities to do well in school, what would it mean
for the future. And obviously young people like
everyone else are reading headlines about what's the
impact going to be on the economy, what's the impact
going to be on jobs once we come out of this period.

And in our surveys, young people identified that
quite clearly that they were, you know, feeling that
anxiety. They were worried about some of the lost
learning and pathways. You know, when I say lost
learning, I think it's important that we kind of do
recognise that school —— that teachers and youth workers
and everybody involved in colleges and education were

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doing a lot in terms of online and working really hard
to make sure that young people did not miss out on those
opportunities, and programmes were adapted to fit, but
there's no doubt in my mind from the sort of
intelligence we've got that there has been periods of
lost learning, and that's because, you know, in youth
work in particular, we really sense that, because we
look at it as the broad general education that we talk
about, is that —— those other opportunities for young
people to succeed, some young people who are not
succeeding in the traditional pathways in particular in
school, then they often have those opportunities through
other programmes that happen in and around the school
day and after school clubs, and the evening activities.

So a lot of those things were limited, and therefore
that also connected into their own achievement.

Q. Food insecurity we've touched on already. You have
mentioned the pilot programme in the school holidays,
targeting those at risk of food poverty and learning
loss, and I think you mentioned that that was something
that was planned prior to the pandemic.

But could you possibly explain just again, or in a
bit more detail, some of the impacts that that was
designed to address, and whether and to what extent
those impacts were exacerbated or —— during the course

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of the pandemic?

A. So, yes, I think they were, and when I —— there was one
particular pilot working in quite a focused way around
exploring the issue, but there was a lot of other youth
work organisations that sort of pivoted towards —— there
was organisations before like Scran Academy and
Magic Breakfast who were doing a lot of kind of food
provision, but I think more —— increasingly, we saw
other youth work organisations recognising that food was
a real issue for children and young people; again, we
voiced that issue in and around the school day, where if
there's not school meals and so on, how is that —— or
how are young people picking up on that.

So that was something that a lot of youth
organisations kind of stepped into that space, and tried
to either take food to young people at their homes or
provide outdoor activities, where food was then added to
the experience. So if they were already doing a kind of
outdoor group session in a —— you know —— yeah, in
whatever setting, that food was part of that, was, you
know, you made it available and accessible to the
children and young people.

It's not gone away. Food poverty is clearly a wider
issue for everyone, and I think there was just that
recognition when the kind of —— the system, if you like,

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1   of schools and free school meals and so on, wasn't
2   running in the pre—breakfast clubs and the after—school
3   clubs, then there was a real concern about food
4   insecurity; and I think youth work as well as many other
5   agencies stepped into that space and started to adapt
6   their services towards that.
7 Q. Thank you, and then just finally in relation to impacts
8   on children and young people, the Inquiry is
9   particularly interested in hearing about
10   disproportionate impacts on particular groups. Are you
11   able to outline any disproportionate —— or groups that
12   were disproportionately impacted as a consequence of the
13   loss of face—to—face youth work and/or schooling,
14   education?
15 A. Yes, so I guess, you know, young people with additional
16   support needs, young people from a care justice
17   background, young carers, young people of colour, our
18   BAME communities, we did see disproportionate impacts,
19   and actually the second lockdown survey specifically had
20   focus groups with those groups of young people to
21   understand what —— the particular challenges that they
22   were having.
23   If you look to something like young people with
24   additional support needs, we were recognising that some
25   of those workers were not in schools in the same way

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1   during this period, or speech and language therapists
2   were not in. So a lot of these things, when youth work
3   was still happening, was picking up on issues that we
4   would imagine that other professionals would be picking
5   up on during the course —— the normal course of the
6   school day.
7   I think BAME communities in particular, it's
8   something that —— in terms of how connected —— if they
9   didn't have those opportunities and connections, it had
10   a really significant impact on them, and I think we
11   probably understood as a sector that we needed to do far
12   more in terms of making sure that we were —— that youth
13   work provision was going to all young people. Some
14   communities were not specifically mentioned —— missing
15   out, and we have recently set up a few years ago the
16   united voices collective, again working specifically
17   with charities that are supporting young people of
18   colour who want to work as well with a cohort group,
19   specifically just for young people of colour, as well as
20   sort of mixed groups that are happening in youth work.
21   So I guess we learnt a lot around making sure that
22   all of youth work and youth work provision was getting
23   out to where it needed to get to during this period, and
24   then added to that, of course, as well as those issues,
25   there are new Scots as well, and the New Scots strategy.

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1   So that has added to the need to make sure that youth
2   work is in every place and space and represents all
3   young people, and we have the kind of resource clearly
4   targeted towards that, so that some communities are not
5   feeling more isolated than others if they're not
6   supported by a particular youth organisation or
7   community group.
8 Q. Thank you. If we could come on now just to discuss some
9   of the impacts on youth work organisations, youth
10   workers and the youth work sector. You refer to the
11   role that youth work played from paragraph 74 onwards,
12   and some of the challenges for the youth work and
13   children of the move to remote learning. But I think we
14   had touched on the issue of access to facilities and
15   premises earlier on, and I understand, and correct me if
16   I'm wrong, that that was an issue in relation to coming
17   back into face—to—face learning, and some of the
18   challenges around that.
19   You describe the reasons for and issues experienced
20   by youth work organisations in relation to access to
21   facilities and premises during and immediately following
22   the pandemic, at paragraphs 94 to 101. Could you please
23   just explain some of the restrictions on access to
24   facilities, and what the reasons for those were?
25 A. Yes, certainly, so I mean, I guess in Scotland in

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1   particular, dedicated youth centres are something that
2   we don't have as much of as compared to other countries.
3   So we recently had a visit from Bavaria in Germany, and
4   they were noting the lack of dedicated purpose—built
5   youth centres, is something that we had in the past.
6   The reason for that has been community schools and
7   community buildings being open for all groups to use,
8   and I suppose making use of all facilities. But during
9   this period, I think that actually did become a bit of
10   an issue, because youth work organisations and charities
11   didn't have dedicated spaces to meet.
12   So I think one of the —— obviously some of that is
13   community halls owned by private organisations or by
14   voluntary organisations, community halls, faith—based
15   groups and charities, some of the community centres as
16   well, many of these were —— there's just such a wide
17   variety of reasons, so it will take me a bit of time to
18   get into it.
19   But some of the things were —— some of those
20   community centres were used as vaccine centres, so
21   therefore they weren't open for any activity. Schools
22   were prioritised in terms of cleaning, and that's both
23   the budget for cleaning and cleaning staff, so some of
24   the answers that we had about some of the community
25   buildings not being opened up to youth work activity

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was: well, sorry, we don't have any more budget, we have
focused on schools, we don't have the budget to open up
these facilities.

As they were multi mixed facilities, there was also
concern about, well, we can't have young people mixing
with older people or opening that activity. So that was
again a frustration, I suppose, from a youth work point
of view, because age restrictions meant that young
people were able to engage in some of this, if it was
educational activity in youth work rather than
unregulated work, they were able to engage. But they
weren't able to access some of the buildings and centres
to do that.

And schools as well were quite tightly defined, even
though they could open in the evenings and weekends, we
were sometimes left in the youth work sector with it
being at the discretion of a head teacher and their
understanding of what youth work meant. So to give you
a bit of an anecdote, one of the —— if it was —— if
somebody understood: oh, they're doing the Duke of
Edinburgh's Award, and that's an accredited award, so
that's fine, we'll open it for that, but we'll not open
it for these other youth organisations that are doing
some other things. It shouldn't have been limited by
the frame of a particular understanding of what the

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needs were. There's issues around ventilation as well,
insurance premiums.

So there was a range of different things. I think
some, again, schools and so on got support around
ventilation. The youth work sector, that's not one, we
didn't have a specific fund that people could tap into
to make the right kinds of adjustments in some of the
community halls. There may have been one community
fund, but there wasn't enough to cover those.

So it's a kind of wide range of issues, but I
suppose when we surveyed the sector, we were just
concerned that it was a very slow opening up, even
though the government had said: absolutely, youth work
should be happening, it's an educational response as
well as schools.

One of the things that really sort of challenged me
was that at one point, 70% of our third sector owned
private, you know, community halls and so on, had
opened, but 40% of the public sector buildings had
opened. So that was quite a differentiation, given what
the need for using those spaces were.

So in terms of countering that, one of the things
that we did, we did a statement with the minister and
COSLA to talk about the importance of youth work parity
of esteem, to ensure that facilities and buildings were

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open for youth work activity to take place. But I think
part of this is probably a deeper issue for the sector
in terms of being seen as truly an essential sector
that's really important for the educational provision
and the wellbeing of children and young people.

Maybe it's just worth saying at this point, I don't
know if you'll come to it later, but in England and
maybe, I think, the Republic of Ireland they had
dedicated youth work as essential workers, as key
workers. In Scotland, some youth workers may be key
workers, are considered that if they were supporting a
community hub and their local authority decided, but as
across the board, youth workers weren't given that same
sort of appreciation as being essential workers.

It's kind of something that is very much part of the
sort of —— the intelligence sharing within the youth
work community is that —— the need to strengthen
statutory basis for youth work, and consider the
importance of it in the wider educational establishment
is crucial, and it's something certainly that our sector
is calling for a stronger right to youth work activity,
and for youth workers to be, I suppose, protected in
terms of their numbers in the workforce and so on.

Q. Thank you. You —— just touch on a couple of things you
mention there. You suggested essentially a postcode

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lottery in terms of whether they were recognised as key
workers or not. You also mentioned with the Duke of
Edinburgh being something that was recognised and that
was allowed, whereas other youth work was not allowed.

To what extent is this —— was this slow return or
the hindering of return to face—to—face, and in
particular in relation to the premises, underpinned by a
lack of understanding on the part of either local
authorities and/or government of the important role that
youth work plays, and to what extent has that changed
since?

A. So, yes, I think it is —— partly it's a slow —— return,
but there was a University of Edinburgh study which ——
we were part of a COVID study for government, and there
was one specifically from the University of Edinburgh
that identified that there was a real parity of esteem
issue here between youth work and formal education, and
a recognition of the importance of youth work.

So, you know, there was one or two chief executives
in local authorities that I spoke to at different times
with a different appreciation. Some people looked at it
very much as purely a social engagement, and therefore
I think someone had said to me: well, we wouldn't be
doing those sorts of activities, because in the run—up
to Christmas, social interaction and mingling.

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1   And it was a kind of disrespect in a sense in terms
2   of, you know, youth workers had worked really hard
3   around all of the guidance, all the provision around the
4   safe distancing and measurements that they needed to do
5   to readjust their buildings. So I suppose some of it
6   was just about slow return, and, you know, in some
7   cases, I absolutely understand the priority around
8   formal education in schools to get those activities
9   running; but, you know, youth work was —— for some young
10   people youth work was their educational opportunity, and
11   so there was a number of factors where it was left too
12   much, I suppose, at the discretion of decision—makers
13   locally, which is why we wanted to —— we did a campaign
14   nationally as well around youth work needs a home, and
15   we had media and TV interest in that as well. It was
16   something that was connecting across the UK, not just in
17   Scotland, that need for safe places and spaces for young
18   people to connect.
19   And it just seemed to be that every time —— there
20   was a number of really challenging issues that —— I
21   appreciate that people, they were holding those premises
22   or had, you know, authority around those premises were
23   taking, but I have to —— that stat, as I said, around
24   those who had owned their own premises were having to
25   pay for their own extra insurance premiums and other

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1   things to kind of get those buildings opened up for
2   children and young people. And I think part of it was
3   the shared facility thing, the concern: well, we can't
4   open it for young people if we're not opening it for
5   other people.
6   Well, yes, you could during this period, but there's
7   lots of challenges around cleaning costs and so on.
8   There was cases where some voluntary organisations had
9   their equipment stored in local government, you know,
10   kind of facilities, and weren't able to go and even
11   access their equipment to come and do the work with
12   children and young people.
13   Now, I appreciate I'm telling one or two stories of
14   anecdotes, and that wasn't the picture broadly, but
15   I think it just gives a bit of a picture of some of the
16   frustrations that the sector felt in terms of wanting to
17   get activity up and running with children and young
18   people. It did improve over time.
19 Q. Thank you, and just on that, in terms of getting the
20   children and young people back in to youth work, could
21   you describe the adaptation of approaches that youth
22   work organisations took to be able to continue
23   supporting children and young people? Obviously, we
24   have touched on the move to a digital provision during
25   lockdown, but coming out of lockdown and faced with

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1   these challenges, facilities challenges in particular,
2   what were they doing to get around that?
3 A. So, again, really creative, often taking on costs
4   themselves into the organisation; sometimes hiring
5   marquees to do employability and skills programmes
6   outside. I certainly visited one in the Highlands
7   around that, where they were kind of not able to use a
8   facility, but actually it was an employability and
9   skills programme for sort of 15, 16—year—olds, and
10   again, they were all doing outdoor cooking and all the
11   rest of it and distancing, face coverings, all of these
12   different things were considered and were used, and were
13   effective in terms of the adaptions.
14   I suppose the other thing to say is that, yes,
15   people were absolutely taking this really seriously in
16   terms of the —— you know, the risk of spread and so on
17   of the virus. So lots of precautions were taken around
18   the nature of activity and certain types of activity
19   they would have been doing were off limits, you know,
20   and, yes, it's hard for me to kind of specify more than
21   that; but just —— you could see lots of change in
22   relation to ensure —— and creativity, I think creativity
23   in terms of ensuring that the activity still happened,
24   and that young people got something from it.
25 Q. Thank you. And then you mentioned key worker status

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1   being an issue, and that postcode lottery which we have
2   heard about in other contexts, but in practical terms,
3   what did it mean for youth workers who did not have key
4   worker status, in terms of delivering youth work or
5   being able to deliver youth work?
6 A. So I don't think it prevented them from delivering the
7   youth work, but I guess you did have situations where
8   people were doing support, but they couldn't have
9   support and provision for their own children and young
10   people, would be one of the issues if they were out
11   delivering activity, but their young people couldn't
12   access some of those community and after—school
13   supports.
14   So they were managing that without having the sort
15   of essential worker status, but I think the other aspect
16   was just that protection of the youth workspace, because
17   I suppose maybe especially in local authorities, they
18   were being pulled into lots of different types of
19   activity as part of response which —— and I mentioned as
20   well that happening in terms of food provision, and I
21   suppose that's as it should be; but in another way, you
22   know, teachers in formal education weren't being pulled
23   into lots of different types of activities.
24   So although it was helpful at the time, people
25   recognising that we need to keep the teaching going with

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1   these young people to still have the opportunity to
2   achieve and be accredited, and the concern now is that
3   because some youth work was pulled into different places
4   during that period, and supporting other services,
5   whether it be covering for social workers that were off,
6   or stepping into different roles, is that at this point,
7   a lot of youth work activity is under threat in terms of
8   overall funding; because it's not a strong statutory
9   service —— it has a statutory basis, but it's not as
10   strong and so we are seeing cuts to youth work services.
11   So there's a bit of a sense within the sector that
12   it's adapted, it changed, it worked in this way to
13   support young people in very specific ways around their
14   mental health and wellbeing, and it wants to get back to
15   youth work and educational opportunities through youth
16   work.
17   I suppose in hindsight, a more clear essential
18   worker or dedicated space would have been —— we know you
19   want to help with that and that's great, but actually
20   that's for us to consider; or you'll do this for a
21   period of time but you need to come back to your day
22   job, which is youth work, and it's highly valued and
23   respected, and it has a key role in terms of young
24   people's education and skills development.
25 Q. Thank you, and then if you could please just —— you talk

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1   about it at paragraphs 102 to 104, just about the impact
2   on and loss of youth workers, so please just describe
3   some of the challenges just in terms of workload change
4   and delivery of digital training, and what impacts those
5   had on youth workers and volunteers?
6   A. So, yes, the decline as I have mentioned there in terms
7   of the numbers of volunteer youth workers in particular,
8   in the voluntary sector, you know, you had a number
9   of —— it's from 73,000 to 46,000, so that's a
10   significant fall, and it is kind of trying to build
11   back, but you were losing a lot of volunteers,
12   especially older volunteers who understandably took this
13   opportunity to kind of, you know, step away. They may
14   well have more concerns rightly around COVID and how it
15   might impact them.
16   So that had a significant impact on the sector today
17   in terms of some of our organisations, you know, have
18   waiting lists for children and young people to come and
19   be part of it, because we're trying to grow a workforce
20   of volunteers, but those volunteers also need part—time
21   staff and full—time staff as supporting that provision,
22   and also doing direct, more targeted interventions as
23   well.
24   So I guess the numbers challenges is a big one, and
25   on top of that, the financial challenge which I have

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1   mentioned, we're coming to a situation where it's
2   post—Brexit, we have cost of living costs going up. For
3   some of our charities as well, we have the National
4   Insurance hike as well that's going to be impacting
5   things, and charitable trusts as well, their funding
6   sources, as well as the local government and national
7   government, is declining.
8   So as an agency, we're setting up a kind of an
9   investment, a group looking at youth work and
10   sustainable investment for youth work across the piece.
11   You know, what government's funding is for —— and also
12   what trust funds can support. I think a telling stat
13   was 70% in one of our surveys believed that cuts to
14   youth work services and budgets would happen post—COVID,
15   and that was them saying it during that COVID period,
16   and it's now playing out, which is something that we're
17   very keen to address, and to ensure that with the UNCRC
18   in particular coming in, that young people have a right
19   to youth work and to high quality youth work.
20 Q. Obviously you've discussed the challenges with loss of
21   youth workers and volunteers; what is the demand for
22   youth work services post—pandemic looking like?
23 A. So I think the demand is growing hugely. We had a
24   conference just last week around prevention, along with
25   Public Health Scotland, thinking about early

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1   intervention and prevention and the opportunities to
2   look at that, in terms of the impacts on children and
3   young people, if they don't have these opportunities to
4   develop their skills and get support with mental health
5   and wellbeing etc.
6   So in the kind of space of youth justice, in the
7   space of health and wellbeing and educational pathways,
8   these —— you know, I think it's just so crucial that we
9   have opportunities for children and young people to
10   thrive and to succeed, and I think we need the full
11   spectrum.
12   And what youth work provides is a holistic service
13   for children and young people that connects their
14   interests with what their educational needs are, and ——
15   you know, so mental health and wellbeing post—pandemic
16   has —— is getting worse for children and young people.
17   There's a number of factors in there that we could talk
18   about, but it's something that has increased the need
19   for kind of these early intervention and universal
20   opportunities and provision through schools and through
21   youth work to prevent sort of longer—term negative
22   outcomes for children and young people.
23 Q. Thank you. I'm conscious of our time. I think we have
24   just over ten minutes left. I would just like to touch
25   on —— you have got a section on the impacts on YouthLink

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1   Scotland and the engagement with Scottish Government,

2   starting at paragraphs 53 and following.

3   At paragraph 70, you say that the two biggest

4   impacts were delivering the training and developing the

5   guidance on COVID—19 guidance, digital guidance and

6   detached youth work guidance, and that it was resource

7   intensive.

8   Could you please touch briefly on the issues in

9   relation to —— or the impacts in relation to delivering

10   training, but then I would like to come on to discuss

11   some of the issues in relation to developing guidance,

12   and some of the frustrations around that, against a

13   background that we're going to be hearing from a panel

14   of youth workers this afternoon who will be discussing

15   in particular challenges that they had around guidance.

16   So if you could start briefly about the delivering of

17   training?

18 A.   Yes, so the training I have mentioned around sort of

19   mental health and wellbeing and digital and all of

20   these, was very much us collecting the best practice

21   across a sector and delivering online training, so that

22   we were supporting youth workers around some of the

23   issues that we've discussed already around safeguarding,

24   around signposting and so on.

25   So there was training around that, but in terms of

1   the actual guidance itself, that took a lot of

2   information sharing, a lot of sessions online where we

3   were making ourselves available to answer questions

4   about interpretations of the guidance and what that

5   meant, and how people could apply it and how they could

6   apply it safely.

7   The guidance was changing quite regularly, and one

8   of the challenges that I have mentioned there is that in

9   our sector in particular, we quite often had an idea

10   that the guidance was going to change, but it wasn't

11   until last thing on a Friday that we finally got —— kind

12   of signed off, and we had a whole realm of people

13   waiting to do weekend activity.

14   So I wonder in reflection is that because again

15   people were thinking more about maybe the formal

16   education thing starting again on a Monday, but we had a

17   lot of people that were lined up and ready to do a lot

18   of activity over the key weekend period.

19   So that was a real challenge for us. We had people

20   working, you know —— it's not —— lots of people worked

21   extra hours, and it was resource intensive during the

22   COVID period, but —— so as it should have been, you

23   know, but I guess there was one or two things, I think,

24   that would have helped our sector better.

25   What we managed to do was make sense of it for these

1   different settings, so as I mentioned before, different

2   guidance for the use of a community centre or space,

3   versus what the schools guidance was saying, because

4   remember, youth work is also taking place in schools or

5   with schools, at the second part of the day, and some of

6   that guidance was overlapping, but sometimes it was

7   contradicting as well, which was causing confusion to

8   the sector.

9   And I think we did a good job of trying to iron that

10   out and explain that to some of those that were

11   developing the policy and guidance. It wasn't an easy

12   task to do, but likewise from our point of view, it had

13   a big impact in terms of the amount of work and resource

14   that we as an agency put into that, to ensure that

15   people had the best information, that they were making

16   adaptations that they needed to make.

17 Q.   Mr Frew, then ——

18 A.   Sorry, can I just say, we're talking about government,

19   so equally, I'm talking just about guidance as if it's a

20   linear thing. There's also the Cross—Party Group on

21   Children and Young People, and we were very much wanting

22   to get young people's voices through the youth work

23   process. Having said a lot about that, that was really

24   important, that not just through the surveys, but

25   actually ensuring that we had young people getting the

1   chance to speak to those in Parliament on different

2   cross—party groups, and in organising opportunities for

3   young people to speak directly with their lived

4   experience into some of those myriad of different COVID

5   groups that were planning.

6   So our key job for us was to ensure that their voice

7   was held in those different spaces and heard properly.

8 Q.   Thank you. I'm going to give you an opportunity to

9   articulate any potential lessons to be learned, or

10   things that could be done better, or not to have been

11   done in the event of a future pandemic or other

12   emergency; but before I do, are there any other

13   challenges in relation to impacts on YouthLink that you

14   would like to highlight? We have obviously got your

15   statement, but is there anything else you would like to

16   highlight before going on to identify any potential

17   lessons learned?

18 A.   I suppose the challenges for us going forward is

19   something that is facing a number of charities and

20   intermediary bodies in particular, so I have mentioned

21   the importance of being kind of one agency that

22   connects —— you know, brings the collective together of

23   community—based organisations with national charities

24   that are voluntary along with local government, and is a

25   safe space for all of those conversations to be held

1 separately but also together.

2   So I suppose I do have concerns in terms of our own

3 funding which has just been cut this year, that

4 longer—term multiyear funding which is a wider issue

5 that the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations

6 has brought up and we brought up in Parliament in terms

7 of fair funding to have these in place. And how that

8 relates to COVID, I suppose, is that there is a real key

9 role for intermediaries to play to communicate what a

10 whole sector is facing to government, and to work with

11 government to overcome the challenges.

12   So that's a key role for us, not just in this space

13 of emergency and trying to deal with the pandemic, but

14 in terms of the general needs of children and young

15 people. So that's an ongoing issue. Did you want me to

16 talk about future things that I could ——

17 Q. Lessons?

18 A. Lessons.

19 Q. Any potential lessons learned?

20 A. So one of the things I suppose would be around UK—wide

21 guidance, so bear in mind that some of the charities

22 that we support, that I have got —— that are UK—wide,

23 and that was an extra level of complexity, that we have

24 not talked in terms of resource and guidance. So when

25 some organisations were trying to communicate to four

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1 nations at the same time about slightly different

2 restrictions in different places, and any kind of ——

3 once restrictions eased, there was maybe organisations

4 coming up from England to do an activity, a residential

5 summer activity in Scotland, and what did they need to

6 know. So there's maybe something about that.

7   I think it would have been helpful for ourselves to

8 be more connected to some of the discussions that were

9 happening in schools. So we weren't on the schools

10 group, COVID Recovery Group; we were sitting in advanced

11 learning and science, which is where colleges and

12 universities, and the conversations were mostly about HE

13 and colleges.

14   We did have a voice into that place, but I think it

15 would have been helpful for us to have had a voice also,

16 or maybe more so with the same age bracket of young

17 people and —— with schools that we were working with.

18   The issue of essential workers, I have brought up,

19 of kind of recognising what the sector does and

20 understanding it better, especially around prevention

21 and inequality, and supporting vulnerable young people.

22   So at various stages, you've asked about different

23 types of funding. Almost all of those aspects of

24 funding in terms of the summer fund, and youth work

25 education recovery fund, were very targeted funds around

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1 children and young people that were needing that support

2 in terms of education recovery, and especially in areas

3 of real need and poverty in Scotland. So I think it's

4 important to emphasise that.

5   And I mentioned the issue of facilities, so I won't

6 go into that again, but it's still an issue that's got

7 legacy with it. In terms of getting back into some of

8 the facilities that youth work had pre—pandemic, has

9 still not happened in some places, because other people

10 have the resource to book lets and so on for commercial

11 use. That's something that I think needs to be

12 addressed.

13   And if we can maintain —— if we have another

14 situation like this which we hopefully won't, if we can

15 maintain face—to—face learning for young people if

16 they're not —— a specific threat to them, then obviously

17 that would be the preferred in terms of everything, in

18 terms of isolation, loneliness, mental health and

19 wellbeing and education and achievement; if we can

20 maintain face—to—face where possible along with schools,

21 that's what we would seek.

22 MS VAN DER WESTHUIZEN: Thank you very much, Mr Frew. My

23 Lord, I don't have any more questions unless your

24 Lordship has any?

25 THE CHAIR: Fine, thank you very much indeed. Thank you,

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1 Mr Frew, and thank you Ms Van der Westhuizen. Right,

2 it's 11.28, so we'll come back with the next witness at

3 quarter to 12. Thank you.

4 (11.29 am)

5   (A short break)

6 (11.45 am)

7 MS STEWART: Good morning, my Lord.

8 THE CHAIR: Good morning, Ms Stewart. Now, you have another

9 witness for us, I believe.

10 MS STEWART: I do, thank you. Giving evidence this morning,

11 my Lord, is Neil Young of St Paul's Youth Forum.

12   MR NEIL YOUNG (called)

13 THE CHAIR: Very good. Good morning, Mr Young.

14 A. Good morning.

15 THE CHAIR: Ms Stewart will have some questions for you.

16 We'll start now.

17   Questions by MS STEWART

18 Q. Can you please give us your full name?

19 A. My name is Neil James Young.

20 Q. You have given a statement to the Inquiry?

21 A. Yes, I have.

22 Q. For the transcript, that's reference SCI—WT0448—000001.

23 Mr Young, you are a youth leader at St Paul's Youth

24 Forum. How long have you held that role for?

25 A. I have been in this organisation for 23 years in the one

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1   community.

2   Q. How long have you held the particular role of youth

3   leader?

4   A. I have been the person in charge of the organisation for

5   all of that length of time. When I first came in, there

6   was four young people on a Thursday night that we had to

7   work with, and now we're working with over 750 people a

8   week from our facility.

9   Q. Thank you, and can you tell us a bit about St Paul's

10   Youth Forum in terms of its aims and objectives?

11   A. The organisation was formed from some voluntary groups a

12   way back in 1997, and its aims have continued to be the

13   same of looking at to alleviate the worst effects of

14   poverty. We are based in a community that's in the

15   bottom 2% of SIMDs, and so we're looking really to help

16   make people's lives a little bit easier and a little bit

17   better.

18   Q. In terms of your particular role there as youth leader

19   over the years, what does that role involve, and in

20   particular what did it involve in the pandemic response

21   period?

22   A. So I'm currently responsible for 26 members of staff, a

23   team during COVID which was more about 15, 16, and a lot

24   of what —— my role is about ensuring that the staff are

25   working safely and effectively, and really kind of

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1   guiding the organisation and the staff team and

2   volunteers through the objectives of the board. And so

3   we cover a huge amount of different work, and so whether

4   it be from traditional youth work, and running

5   activities for children and young people, through to

6   also work around food insecurity, recognising that if

7   young people didn't have something to eat, they were

8   less able to concentrate.

9   And so there's a large area of that that grew into

10   an urban farm, and we also have a large project that's

11   dealing with cycling and getting people both active and

12   able to move around the community.

13   Q. Thank you. And your statement tells us that the forum

14   is based in Provanmill in Glasgow. Can you tell us a

15   bit more about the demographic of that area?

16   A. So it is a community that was formed in the 1930s, as

17   part of an overspill from what was the Garngad slums,

18   Royston. It's one that is a very mixed community but a

19   very young community. In our area the average life

20   expectancy is way below the national average, around 68

21   for males, and we have a much less healthy community

22   with lots of people that —— it's said that the healthy

23   age is 44 where people then start to require additional

24   help from medical professionals. And so it's one where

25   you're more likely to suffer a heart attack, you're more

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1   likely to have respiratory disease, and that is

2   primarily due to poverty. As I said it's in the bottom

3   1% actually for health and the bottom 2% for both

4   educational attainment and education and employment.

5   And so there's a number of different areas that we've

6   been able to analyse and then work towards addressing in

7   some way some of those different challenges.

8   Q. Thank you. I want to ask you today about youth work

9   pre—pandemic and during the pandemic, and the impacts

10   that you've articulated in your witness statement. But

11   first of all in terms of youth work and what it is and

12   in particular how it relates to education, can you

13   explain a bit about that for us?

14   A. The biggest bit that we hold on to with youth work is

15   that young people choose to participate. It is not a

16   requirement of anybody to go and attend. So that is ——

17   so people who come along to be involved with us come of

18   their own free will and volition.

19   Where it partners with education is that youth work

20   is part of —— partners in the learning journey, and that

21   learning journey is much broader than just numeracy and

22   literacy, but incorporating as —— many different things.

23   So for some youth work organisations, it will be around

24   going camping and learning outdoor skills. For others,

25   it will be learning to ride a bike. So we have lots of

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1   different ways that young people come into learning.

2   One of the things that we've been operating since

3   2001 has been our youth—led radio station, and there

4   young people have been learning not only the skills of

5   broadcasting and using radio equipment, but we quite

6   often have used it as stealth education with young

7   people looking to write down what they're going to say:

8   "I'm not that good at writing, Mr"; "Okay, come on,

9   we'll help you"; "I'm going to add up all your different

10   numbers to make sure we can see how long your music's

11   going to last"; "I'm not that good at adding, Mr".

12   So they think that they're coming to become DJs, but

13   actually they're working on core literacy and numeracy

14   in different ways.

15   So we have partnered with both local secondary

16   schools and primary schools for many years, bringing a

17   different way and a different methodology of people

18   being able to learn, and through to gaining

19   qualifications. So we've created an SQA qualification

20   around our radio station, which gives people that first

21   accredited pathway within the SQA. So it's one where

22   education is at the core of what we do, but it's in a

23   very different style and methodology to what formal

24   education would be.

25   Q. Thank you. I'm going to come on to ask you about your

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1   collaboration with schools in a moment, but could you
2   give us a flavour of what youth work at St Paul's Youth
3   Forum looked like pre—pandemic in terms of the offering?
4   You've mentioned camping and bike riding?
5 A. Yes. There's many things that would be seen similar
6   around the country. Our young people have —— are part
7   of the core leadership of the organisation, we have
8   young people on our management board, and they have
9   helped to direct some of the issues that we've needed.
10   When we discovered that there was a lot of youth
11   crime and violence in our community, we asked the young
12   people why. And they said: well, we're bored; so being
13   able to put on alternatives for them to do. So on a
14   Wednesday through to Saturday night, every evening there
15   will be different activities for young people to do, and
16   so whether that's through traditional things like dance
17   and sport, through playing games, through being able to
18   have a secure and safe place where they know that they
19   can come without any worries, where there are interested
20   good adults that are able to work with them alongside
21   their different issues that they are facing.
22   It's a space where young people would come and learn
23   cooking. They would come and take part with our
24   wood—fired pizza oven. They would do some gardening,
25   they would play with our chickens. All these kind of

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1   different bits and pieces are just different
2   opportunities that young people have offered and wanted.
3   So we would help facilitate that.
4   And again coming back to that kind of partners in
5   the learning journey, we would work with them on: "I
6   have got this idea"; "Okay, let's see how we can make
7   that happen". So from as simple as, "I want to play a
8   football game against somebody else, let's get a team
9   together, how do we do that", and these young people are
10   able to work together with our trained staff to be able
11   to make these kind of things happen; through to the more
12   obscure, and young people going off on international
13   trips to Iceland and to Zambia, as part of their work,
14   looking to collaborate with other young people around
15   the globe.
16   So there was a whole huge amount of different work
17   taking place where young people were learning. We would
18   also be working in schools, and that was, I think, a key
19   to what was happening is that we were very welcome
20   within both the primary and secondary schools, and so
21   had a strong relationship and bond with senior
22   management, pastoral care staff. So we were a known
23   entity with that, and so they trusted us in terms of the
24   kind of content that we were providing, and recognising
25   the unique skills that the team had.

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1 Q. Thank you. In terms of delivery of youth work during
2   the pandemic, we had the statement of Marc Smith, who is
3   a youth worker at St Paul's Youth Forum, in which he
4   describes how such activities were delivered online.
5   This statement can be found at reference
6   SCI—WT0251—000001. I'm not going to ask you too much
7   about that, given we have this evidence in his
8   statement, but I want to ask you to build on what you
9   say about friendships at paragraph 44, and I wondered if
10   you can describe for us in general terms the importance
11   of friendships, in particular for young people, and what
12   it was about the online delivery of youth work that
13   impacted those friendships and the formation of them?
14 A. I think that at the core of humanity is wanting to be
15   able to relate to others. We are pack animals, we want
16   to be involved, and whether that's through a family
17   unit, but particularly in your teenage years where you
18   are looking to develop your own identity, it's vital
19   that young people are able to meet with other young
20   people.
21   Now, for many young people, that is —— what happens
22   at school and playtime and break can actually be quite a
23   challenging time, as they try and work through that
24   social awkwardness. But for most young people, being
25   able to hang out with friends is seen as an important

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1   part of developing and growing, shaping who they are.
2   So it's one where we are very used to seeing people
3   in person, but as we moved online really from 2006
4   onwards, there is more and more things would happen
5   online, young people being able to have mobile phones
6   and being able to interact online. It became an area
7   where people could nefariously exploit that, and so we
8   were worried —— young people have been taught how to
9   protect themselves online and online safety.
10   So the easiest way to know who you're speaking to is
11   to see them in person. Is it going to be some
12   40—year—old person stuck away on a phone pretending to
13   be somebody that's 13? So the easiest way to do that is
14   to come in person. So there has been a number of bits
15   and pieces.
16   Our team recognised that, particularly a number of
17   the boys would be playing consoles online, and so that
18   was an area pre—pandemic that we were able to build
19   rapport and build some of these relationships. So it
20   was something that we were able to see happening
21   beforehand, and there was therefore a structure and a
22   procedure that we had set out about how we could safely
23   participate with young people online and create that.
24   So there was already a framework to operate.
25 Q. Thank you. I want to ask you now about the

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1   collaboration with schools. You've touched on the
2   collaboration, the partnership on the learning journey
3   and the SQA qualification. Can you explain a bit more
4   about the nature of the relationship St Paul's Youth
5   Forum has with the local schools and what you sought to
6   achieve through that?
7 A. I guess there's a number of different layers to the work
8   that we do with our schools. And if I take our
9   secondary school as a kind of good example, in our
10   secondary school, there is a large communal area where
11   people meet for lunch, and we call it the street in many
12   Glasgow schools. And in that area, we were able to do
13   almost detached youth work, which is being able to stand
14   about, and young people would come and have
15   conversations with us, and it would build up some of
16   that relationship.
17   So it was another trusted adult that people knew was
18   somebody that they could turn to and talk to about
19   things, but also share their life with. We would work
20   with school with the personal, social and health
21   education, and deliver classes on a number of different
22   topics, again, just adding a different flavour to the
23   teaching staff, bringing in some of the knowledge that
24   we have from out in the community, and helping to build
25   that community link with the school.

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1   And so from that, young people could come and
2   volunteer and develop skills with our project, but we
3   would also help them to find other volunteering
4   positions that may not just necessarily be with us.
5   We would do formal assemblies with schools, and
6   they're able to have different topics that the schools
7   are looking to support. And we would be able to work
8   alongside academic staff in terms of supporting mental
9   health, and young people who just need a little bit more
10   nurture, and so to be part of that team, I don't think
11   you could meet a school in Scotland that would say that
12   they've got a plethora of staff and that actually
13   everything is great. They would love to have always
14   more influence, more good adults that are able to make
15   that impact in the young people's lives.
16   So there was a huge amount of different work that
17   we've carried out over the years with the schools. In
18   primary schools, similarly, we would have that and again
19   I'm thinking to us working with some of the enhanced
20   nurture departments within our local primary school, and
21   also being able to take them to our growing spaces, and
22   so young people hatching eggs in their class, and then
23   seeing these hens grow up, and then 18 weeks later
24   cooking, learning to cook with the same eggs that have
25   come from the chickens that they hatched.

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1   So that real connection to farming for an urban
2   community has also been very important.
3 Q. Thank you. You mentioned at paragraph 9 in respect of
4   the transition to online learning, that schools did not
5   know how to transition to online learning, and how to
6   connect with students, and that St Paul's Youth Forum
7   worked alongside them to achieve this. Can you
8   describe, as you see it, the difficulties that the
9   schools faced with this?
10 A. Naturally, there was an awful lot of worry about keeping
11   young people safe, and so the guidelines that were
12   coming through from education take an awful lot longer
13   to be able to do that. As a small organisation, we're
14   able to take quite quick advice, and be able to make
15   that work an awful lot easier. So we selected, for
16   example, to use Zoom where schools were trying to make
17   Teams work, and Zoom was chosen by us due to its
18   simplicity and the fact that we had used it previously,
19   whereas other folks weren't.
20   But we were also able to use the consoles; we had
21   already been working with young people and talking to
22   them through Playstations, playing FIFA and things like
23   that, and so there was already a way of connecting in
24   with a group of young people easily.
25   So we were quite quickly able to do it within the

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1   first week; check-ins, first of all, making sure that
2   their mental health was okay, and was there any
3   requirements. Part of our organisation was tackling
4   food insecurity, so making that that was all there. And
5   then being able to start to work with some of the young
6   people who didn't have accessible devices, and "How do
7   you install Teams on my phone, I don't know how to do
8   that", and being able to support them through different
9   methods that we already had.
10   So we were able to be that just a little bit more
11   rapid and that a little bit more specific, and with our
12   relationship that we had with young people outside of
13   school, we were able to be that trusted adult of, "Yes,
14   these guys know how to fix this, we'll ask them".
15 Q. Thank you. I want to ask you now about the expansion of
16   the forum during the pandemic, and you set out in your
17   statements at paragraph 12 and following that the
18   pandemic was one of the factors that allowed your
19   organisation to grow from a small to a medium-sized
20   charity. You attribute this growth to two things: first
21   of all, your place-based approach. Can you tell us a
22   little bit about what you mean by this?
23 A. I guess —— I mean place-based approach is something that
24   both the Scottish Government and academics look at. For
25   us, what was really vital was that we were a respected

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1   organisation before the pandemic and in a small
2   community. And so we were able to pull on —— pull in a
3   number of different resources quite quickly and easily,
4   because that structure, infrastructure was already in
5   place.
6   70% of our staff team live within our community, and
7   so they're local people who know the local situation
8   well. And so that enabled us to be able to target
9   support to those that were needing it most —— most
10   quickly. That place—based approach meant that we know
11   this is the street, this is the person, these are the
12   different assets that we have around, and so being able
13   to respond to that.
14   And so we had local government, we had national
15   charities, being able to phone up and say: what
16   resources do you need because we know that we've a
17   relationship with you, that you're within that community
18   and can make an impact within that community quickly.
19   And so that enabled us to respond very rapidly to
20   what was needed and required at the very beginning.
21 Q. Thank you. I want to turn to ask you now about some of
22   the impacts you've expressed in your witness statement,
23   first of all, in relation to mental health, both in
24   respect of the workforce and the young people that you
25   work with.

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1   First of all, in relation to the workforce, you set
2   out at paragraph 16 and following that you quickly found
3   many of the —— staff, sorry, were missing in—person
4   connections, given the nature of your work. Can you
5   tell us a bit more about their role during the pandemic
6   and what impact it had on them in terms of their mental
7   health?
8 A. I think, for example, one of my staff members who lives
9   locally, he is face—to—face with young people 28 hours
10   in a week, being able to take all the different cues
11   that come from that conversations and really being able
12   to drill down into where young people are at with that
13   and provide the support that's required. He suddenly
14   was almost disabled from so many different cues.
15   Many young people didn't want to have cameras on so
16   you're not able to see the facial responses. Some young
17   people didn't even have that opportunity to put a camera
18   on because their broadband wasn't fast enough. So he in
19   particular as an example was somebody that was really
20   struggling to find his way with that.
21   And we were very fortunate that when his mental
22   health started to take a severe turn for the worse, we
23   were able to put him into some of our food delivery, so
24   that he could have that in—person connection, and
25   therefore that gave some of that energy to be able to

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1   work with our online activities that were going on.
2   We were doing maybe five hours of online activity a
3   day midweek and so that was a severe drain on people's
4   energy, and ability to do stuff, particularly when there
5   wasn't the cues coming back from young people, and so a
6   lot of the staff team were really struggling to adapt to
7   a different way of working when that is so much of their
8   bread and butter.
9 Q. And you say:
10   "I think we will be facing years of mental health
11   impacts as people continue to unpack what was going on
12   during the pandemic."
13   In terms of the ongoing impacts on the mental health
14   of the workforce, is that something you're continuing to
15   see?
16 A. Unfortunately last summer we lost, as I mentioned in my
17   statement, a very good member of staff from our team
18   whose mental health rapidly went down after the
19   pandemic. He had been able to keep everything going,
20   was a manager of the youth team, but it was one where he
21   felt that there was just too much pressure and I think
22   there is a large amount of unpacking that we've had to
23   do and continue to do with the staff team who feel that
24   they —— did they —— were they able to offer enough,
25   could their support have been better, and I think

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1   because of some of the traumas that were being faced on
2   a day—to—day basis by our young people, providing a way
3   to support that was a real challenge, and so it's one
4   where, yes, I think that there are a number of members
5   of the staff team who still to this day would attribute
6   some of their trauma and mental health challenges due to
7   that time and feeling the pressure that they had to
8   perform their job at a higher level and come up with a
9   whole lot more to be able to support the young people
10   that they work with and care for.
11 Q. In terms of the impacts on the young people, you've
12   ordered these under various headings, for example,
13   "nocturnal behaviour", "addiction", and so on. I wanted
14   to ask, first of all, you start this section at
15   paragraph 22 about young people essentially becoming
16   nocturnal in their behaviour. How was it that you
17   became aware of this pattern?
18 A. I think that when we were switching on our evening's
19   activities, half past 6, 7 o'clock we're seeing a young
20   person with a bowl of cornflakes, now that's not an
21   unusual thing to see, but we were like: "Is that your
22   dinner?" "No, no, this is my breakfast, I'm just up."
23   And we started to delve into that as it happened more
24   and more so young people would be getting up 5.00,
25   6.00 pm, and then having their day through until 7.00 or

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1   8.00 in the morning and then sleeping during the day,
2   and so we spent a lot of time trying to work outing with
3   them what it was about. Now, for some of them it was
4   the only quiet time in their house when everybody had
5   gone to bed. A number of our young people, their family
6   members were keyworkers, and so that conversation of
7   "Time to get up, it's time for school". "Oh, I'm really
8   tired". "Well, I need to get out of the house". And so
9   —— and then the young people would just go back to sleep
10   and back to bed and other people were just —— it was
11   their way of coping and getting some kind of control
12   within their lives: this is something I can do, I can
13   decide for myself when I get up and when I go to bed and
14   so therefore I feel as if there's something I can do
15   that's making an impact with my life.
16 Q. And how was the forum able to respond to that in terms
17   of your service delivery?
18 A. I think that naturally because schools are a 9.00 until
19   3.00 activity, and teaching staff are —— that's where
20   they're available, young people would be able to come on
21   and say: well, maybe I have got some homework to do and
22   we'll maybe talk through that, one of my favourite
23   activities which they did which I was completely shocked
24   about, that the young people wanted to do was we had a
25   story time so we distributed novels to people and they

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1   all took turns to read a chapter to each other, and this
2   is 14, 15—year—old boys who are used to going out and
3   playing football and being quite, what they would call
4   macho, and actually they're sitting reading to each
5   other, and those kinds of bits and pieces really
6   enhancing what the educational professions were
7   saying: the best thing they can do is to read suddenly
8   finding that, and that reading group also turned up with
9   people —— a mother once came on and said, "Is it all
10   right if I switch this off because my kid has fallen
11   asleep", and it was the first time the kid had fallen
12   asleep at a normal time, and so there's a number of
13   different bits and pieces and because we naturally do
14   youth work in the evenings we're able to then work
15   through with the nocturnal young people and so when they
16   would normally be going to school in the morning they
17   were coming to youth club in their morning instead, long
18   after the teaching staff had officially signed off.
19 Q. I wanted to ask you that, in particular presumably they
20   weren't able to attend, certainly the live online
21   sessions because of their sleep pattern?
22 A. Yes, and so it's one of these ones, again, if you have
23   parents working from home then that's fine, but ——
24   they're able to kind of cajole their young people into:
25   "Come on, 10 o'clock school is there, you should be up

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1   at 10.00 am." These young people, quite often their
2   parents were keyworkers so were out doing stuff, whether
3   that's working in the hospitals or working in other key
4   areas, and so they would be left more to their own
5   devices, and other parents that we know of are like, "If
6   you don't want to get up, that's your problem, I have
7   got my own worries to deal with, I'm just going to leave
8   you to that and we can sort it out." And again, one of
9   the things that was great with our collaboration with
10   education was that we were able to inform teaching staff
11   of what was going on and so they would be less worried
12   about what that young person was doing: "Oh, you're
13   spending some time with them, that's great, if you can
14   get them to do this or to do that, that would be hopeful
15   but it's not vital."
16   And I think particularly during the first lockdown
17   there was an awful lot of emphasis on ensuring that
18   young people's mental health was looked after and how
19   are we making sure that there are still those
20   connections and that young people are okay, and so we
21   had a way in of daily conversations with a number of
22   young people.
23 Q. You spoke there about the collaboration with schools
24   again. You mention at paragraph 25 that there was a
25   choice to focus on the senior pupils. Did they start to

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1   attend online schooling lessons or did they do their
2   schooling through St Paul's Youth Forum?
3   A. Again, there was a big variety: we had some senior
4   pupils who, again, didn't want to work in that
5   traditional 9.00 til 3.00 with the online schooling, so
6   that's when we were able to work with them and keep them
7   going. During the summer programmes we always hold a
8   holiday club and we know that when young people are
9   attending our holiday club, they don't lose as much of
10   the academic time and so the teachers notice the ones
11   that have been with us and who haven't, and that was
12   similar. For the ones that weren't attending, they were
13   still keeping up a number of those core numeracy and
14   literacy skills, and from different things like being
15   able to do online quizzes and things like that, young
16   people were still keeping their brains focused on some
17   of their academic work, and they would do a chemistry
18   quiz for folks to be able to do that, and so that kept
19   them kind of doing a little bit of the work.
20   So we also knew through the collaboration with the
21   secondary school that there was going to be —— the
22   planning was that the senior pupils were the ones that
23   the school was going to really spend a lot more time on
24   and so for the junior school, being able to support them
25   going: the teaching staff can't manage everything, come

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1   and be involved with us and we're able to make sure that
2   you're keeping ticking over.
3 Q. And in terms of that work, that, what you refer to as
4   catch—up with the lower schools and the primary schools,
5   is that still part of the work that St Paul's Youth
6   Forum is involved in?
7 A. I think that, yes, we're still involved and I think that
8   there is a huge amount of research that still needs to
9   be done more nationally. We work with a number of young
10   people who are really disengaged from school and no
11   longer seeing mainstream school as something they need
12   to be part of, and so we're finding different ways of
13   supporting young people and it can be as simple as them
14   just getting to school in the mornings, just that little
15   bit too difficult, but alongside being able to support
16   young people within the school, and so we see across the
17   board, resilience is very, very low for a number of our,
18   particularly SIMD 1 and 2 young people, they find
19   difficulty concentrating, they find difficulty sitting
20   still, and so being put back into a mainstream classroom
21   is a major struggle for a number of them, and I would
22   say that we're dealing now more with young people who
23   are struggling with mainstream school and being able to
24   do that and it's come at a similar time when there has
25   been fewer resources within education to be able to

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1   tackling that as budgets have been constrained, and so
2   because of that collaboration, because of the fact that
3   we're all looking to support young people, we're able to
4   step in and provide some of that support.
5 Q. I'm going to come on in a short while to ask you about
6   some of these ongoing impacts you've mentioned, their
7   attainment and attendance, but before I do so, I want to
8   ask you about digital inclusion, and you set out at
9   paragraph 36 and 37 that there was an issue with a lack
10   of devices and a lack of connectivity. Can you expand
11   for us on what the issues were and which cohorts, if
12   any, that had a particular impact on?
13 A. It's one where there was a really massive digital
14   divide. There were some families who had devices that
15   were able to be worked on, but some of the stories
16   were —— there was a family that had five kids in the
17   school who were all gathered around one phone, so trying
18   to teach five different levels, and so that became
19   impossible, and so we were able to get hold of devices
20   and funding to secure that. Other families who maybe
21   had two devices that were able to work for their two
22   kids but the kids were online doing other things as well
23   so their broadband quite quickly reduced down and so
24   they didn't have the resources to be able to keep going
25   and so the first couple of weeks were great but the next

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1   couple of weeks in that month there was no connection,
2   and so again, being able to source some of the digital
3   connections.
4   This was something that was really good coming
5   from —— we worked in collaboration with the housing
6   association and with funders to be able to bring those
7   resources into our community and so there was ways that
8   particularly the schools weren't able to get the same
9   resources and so the head teacher from the primary
10   school, for example, would go, "I think there's these
11   families, is there any chance that you can support
12   these?" And so of course we were able to make that
13   happen and dropping off 50, 60 tablets to the school to
14   be able to say, "Okay these are ones that are coming
15   from us", and again, that procurement process, the
16   schools may have been able to deliver that but because
17   of the procurement process, we could go on Amazon and
18   other retailers and have it with us the next day, and so
19   we were able to very quickly put that into people's
20   hands and connect people and so being that smaller
21   organisation really benefited within those kind of
22   structures.
23 Q. Thank you. And you mention at paragraph 46 that in
24   terms of digital equality, there was a disproportionate
25   impact on those from ethnic minority communities?

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1 A. Certainly that was our experience was that a number of
2   ethnic minority families who we had had a relationship
3   both through with our holiday food programme and our
4   food insecurity programme, a number of them where
5   English isn't their first language maybe didn't
6   understand what was coming out and so didn't get the
7   resources that could have been due to them, and so when
8   we were speaking to them around our food delivery we
9   were able then to be able to add more devices to that
10   household and it tended to be those who English wasn't
11   their first language and a lot of BME families.
12 Q. Thank you. I want to know now to looking at your
13   heading "Addiction" which starts at paragraph 38 and you
14   highlight that this was an issue during the pandemic and
15   that there was an increase in the number of young people
16   who started taking drugs at that time.
17 A. I think that where there is a void there is always
18   something that comes into that void and into that
19   vacuum, and a number of the dealers within our
20   community —— and we come from a community where most
21   kind of 8 to 10—year—olds can tell you where to buy
22   drugs in the different houses, it's very well—known, and
23   so they were able to go: "Okay, you're a bit bored,
24   you're a bit stressed, here, have some cannabis", and
25   being able to relax, "Actually, you'll want something a

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1   bit more exciting because it's the weekend."

2   And so suddenly young people being involved with

3   that because there wasn't these traditional structures

4   that were in place they found their ways into that, and

5   that became much more prevalent and then young people

6   being able to go: "Well, I don't have the money".

7   "Well, if you go and take this package to my friend I'll

8   give you your next bit."

9   And so when it came after the pandemic and trying to

10   get young people into employment a number of young

11   people said, "Well, give me 50 quid an hour because

12   that's what I'm getting at the moment from my friend."

13   And that risk v reward was one where: why should I

14   do something that's legal when I'm going to be paid an

15   awful lot less for doing something that will be harder

16   work, and so there is a lack of the criminal justice

17   system catching up with some of these. Now, I'm pleased

18   to say that the criminal justice system is working its

19   way through a number of those situations but there is

20   still a much larger group, a cohort, they're now in

21   their very early 20s, who have gone from being that kind

22   of late teens and sucked into that area that have come

23   through and who are now facing addiction issues

24   alongside the employment issues with that, so it is,

25   it's one of those ones where if they had broken their

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1   leg during the pandemic we would have been able to fix

2   that there and then, that would have been seen as

3   important, whereas some of their mental health wasn't

4   able to be fixed immediately and therefore they found

5   ways of fixing it themselves and that has unfortunately

6   led into addictions.

7 Q. Thank you. In terms of alcohol abuse, you say young

8   people used to drink in the park pre—pandemic but that

9   this isn't so much of a problem anymore. Do you have

10   any insight into why that is the case?

11 A. I think that when people were kind of banned from the

12   parks it wasn't —— kind of —— almost kind of chaining up

13   the swings, that people stopped doing that and so found

14   different things to do and it's one where young people

15   have now gone and found other activities to do that and

16   so for us, we have many young people who are coming

17   along to our clubs on a Friday and Saturday night

18   instead of going out drinking, and some who it will be

19   very small groups in the house with parents and parents

20   much more in support and control of that situation so a

21   much more safe space for young people to be

22   experimenting with alcohol, so I think there has been a

23   bit of a change and seeing that and recognising that

24   when so much of the community started using alcohol more

25   during the pandemic, that similarly, that fell off after

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1   the pandemic and people not being able to both afford it

2   and see that there's different and better things to do

3   and so our young people, it's just not something that's

4   part of their weekend lexicon that used to be, and so

5   we're delighted that there's so many that will engage in

6   services rather than be involved in a park.

7 Q. Is there a link to be made between the decline in

8   alcohol abuse and the increase in the use of other

9   substances?

10 A. Certainly there is a number of folks that as one went

11   down, another went up, the substances went up, but

12   I would say that that seems to be a generational shift

13   that has moved on and the new generation coming in

14   behind that have been less involved.

15 Q. I want to turn now to look at ongoing impacts and you

16   have alluded to some of these already in terms of

17   concentration and engagement and motivation. Your

18   section on this is at paragraph 51 and following. You

19   highlight here the ability of young people to

20   concentrate has been affected; can you elaborate on that

21   for us?

22 A. We —— before the pandemic we were in schools and would

23   be working with pupils in class and now we're doing an

24   awful lot working alongside the schools with young

25   people who are struggling and so there is far more young

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1   people who are looking for those services. Young people

2   are much less able to sit down in a class for a long

3   period of time and general concentration, whether that

4   be both within the youth club setting or within the

5   school setting, it's one where people want to wander

6   about a bit more, people have got out of the way of

7   being able to concentrate. I think that there is a huge

8   issue around mobile phones and that response of

9   doomscrolling and where that is there and young people

10   are now looking for a much more kind of that quick

11   dopamine hit of: is this the funny cat that's going to

12   be appearing on my screen, and so when it's in classroom

13   or whether it's out of the classroom, they're wanting

14   more than just what was the same stuff that was

15   happening before and so that makes it much harder for

16   those who are able to sit and learn within a classroom

17   setting alongside these young people who need that

18   little bit more, and so alongside our partners in formal

19   education we're able to then either work with some of

20   these young people and move them into small groups and

21   so our radio station still will go in and take groups of

22   six or seven young people away rather than dealing with

23   the whole class approach, and so that means that the

24   teaching staff are able to work with that —— the main

25   group and we're able to then take those young people

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1　that would be distracting other folks away, so enabling
2　that learning to take place within the school, but there
3　is certainly a much greater need for support with our
4　young people and I would say an awful lot more research
5　behind it because it's our thoughts as a team that it's
6　around that mobile phone use but there may be far more,
7　that it's around in terms of their resilience and
8　ability to concentrate.
9　Q. And that same paragraph you mention there has also been
10　an impact on their ability to interact with their
11　contemporaries and with adults; how does that manifest
12　itself?
13　A. There are times when you can see and I think that it's
14　maybe not just young people, but you'll see people just
15　sitting together scrolling, they're not talking to each
16　other but they're all just zombied-out doomscrolling,
17　and so it takes an awful lot more interaction to get
18　these young people involved in stuff. Now, I have been
19　able to be involved with young people where we have
20　taken the phones off them and it's almost as if they
21　have been released from a spell and young people doing
22　fantastic interaction cross-generationally around that,
23　and it's one where I think that there is some
24　indications of how to make this situation better but
25　there's also that area with our young people when we

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1　asked them, we did a survey with them around mobile
2　phone use and how they said: well, we need to keep our
3　phones with us, we don't know what's going to happen to
4　my mum, to my granny, whatever is going on, and so there
5　is that constant fear that these young people are living
6　in, that heightened anxiety that something bad is going
7　to happen next, and it doesn't help that we have got
8　situations in Ukraine, in Gaza, Russia, America, all
9　adding to these young people's knowledge of where the
10　world is at the moment, and they're very fearful and
11　I think there is something that we can relate to the
12　fact that Public Health Scotland are saying that young
13　people are now —— only one in five young people are very
14　happy as opposed to 50 per cent a few years ago.
15　　　There is something massive that is going on, that I
16　think we need to address with our young people and
17　I think the mobile phones plays a significant role
18　within that.
19　Q. You've touched there on mental health and anxiety
20　perhaps being a root cause of that; could it be said
21　there's a speech and communication issue as well?
22　A. Yes, I mean I think that young people, I don't know if
23　they're fearful to lose some of the relationships
24　they've had and so therefore it's better not to speak
25　than to upset somebody, they've missed out on some of

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1　that learning at a crucial stage about how you make
2　friends and influence people, how you form those social
3　groupings and so, yes, we have got young people who are
4　much more in the background and would talk, we're
5　speaking to 12-year-olds who are saying: oh, my social
6　battery is reduced and so therefore I don't want to
7　speak to people today. And so they're much more used to
8　being on their own, sitting in their own rooms, doing
9　that and segregating themselves off and we see that
10　within schools and we're very fortunate that they feel
11　comfortable enough in our project to come in and just
12　sit and we're able to start to work on that group work
13　stuff but I think there is a fear around that rejection
14　and so therefore, if I'm not doing anything that's going
15　to highlight my differences, then I'm not going to be
16　rejected, and so I'll do the same as others.
17　Q. And you say this is something that affects those from
18　lower SIMD areas the most?
19　A. I would say that within our families that we are working
20　with, the lower SIMD families, I think that there is
21　something around the whole family struggling much more
22　around where is the food going to come from, where is
23　the work going to come from and being much more fearful
24　of the future, they don't have the savings, the ability
25　to have that kind of rainy day fund, and so the families

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1　themselves are dealing with a whole lot of challenges
2　and so therefore they don't have that ability to support
3　their young people and so that interaction of kind of,
4　"How is your day? What are you doing?" They're more
5　interested in their own way —— in their own mental
6　health rather than trying to support their young person
7　alongside that. And so there is, yes, definitely some
8　struggles there that I would say fit the brackets that
9　are around those lower SIMD brackets.
10　Q. And in terms of the concentration and the inability to
11　sit still or to interact with others, to what extent is
12　that attributable to the pandemic experience?
13　A. I think it's certainly far more noticeable, and so in
14　terms of the youth groups that we've had, young people
15　would have been able to sit down for an hour's session,
16　now, if they can do 20 minutes, that's a great session
17　and so—— there is certainly something that has happened
18　since then where young people are more used to being ——
19　doing their own thing. For us we've countered that by
20　having more young people lead and so since the pandemic,
21　we have got a far greater peer education group and so we
22　have a dozen young people who are trained now within our
23　youth project and we have trained up another 30, 40
24　young people within the school to be peer educators and
25　young people will listen more to young people now.

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1　　I don't know if that is because their trusted adults
2　　didn't stand up for them quite as much because they were
3　　dealing with things themselves, the adults were dealing
4　　with things themselves, or that young people have
5　　created that bubble because of their nocturnal stuff and
6　　therefore reliant more on their social bubbles that were
7　　around rather than their familial bubbles, but there is
8　　certainly something around that change that happened
9　　post—pandemic for these young people.
10　Q.　Do you think there is anything in connection with the
11　　form of education delivery during the pandemic that's
12　　impacted them?
13　A.　I think for some of our young people they saw that it
14　　was a massive break from school, that school wasn't as
15　　important to them anymore, and that the crucial thing
16　　that the government was saying was to stay safe and stay
17　　at home, and I think that there is a number of folks who
18　　would have benefited more from recognising that they
19　　could have been in a mainstream education facility.
20　　Again, that's decisions that were made but it's one
21　　where I think that young people definitely have faced
22　　more challenges because they had that big block of time
23　　off, then the summer holidays, and so virtually almost
24　　six months of no formal education for them that then has
25　　had a significant impact and then to go back and have

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1　　the schools closed again, albeit much better resourced
2　　for the second lockdown, still is education that
3　　important, particularly for the young people who
4　　maybe —— well your dad didn't go to school, he left
5　　school at 14 and got a job, you're doing to do the same
6　　so you don't need to worry about qualifications, and
7　　recognising that both schools and youth projects provide
8　　so much more than just your literacy and numeracy and
9　　your different qualifications, but there's so much
10　　around the social aspect of development that's there as
11　　well and so, yes: if it's not important to the
12　　government then is it important to me now?
13　Q.　Thank you, and you have touched on it already but I want
14　　to ask you about attendance and attainment. First of
15　　all, in relation to attendance, which you speak about at
16　　paragraph 54, and in particular, the pandemic experience
17　　impacting attendance and you've alluded to it already
18　　saying that they didn't go to school, certainly not the
19　　physical school during the pandemic, and that has
20　　perhaps impacted how they view attendance now?
21　A.　Yes. We're working with a number of young people to
22　　support, to try and get them to the basic bit of
23　　attending school. As youth workers we know that the
24　　best place for them for their education is to be within
25　　the formal education system, there's so many more

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1　　resources that can support them, but for so many of our
2　　young people it is a struggle to see —— to be able to
3　　get into the space. Now, some of that is related, for
4　　example, one of the ones I was dealing with today, this
5　　morning, was around a bullying incident that happened
6　　and so therefore they don't have any resilience to be
7　　able to deal with that so it's easier just not go to
8　　school, and looking at that kind of breakdown, because
9　　they have not got that same social bonds that were
10　　missed for that crucial time, and so we have a number of
11　　young people I would say who were in the kind of P5, 6,
12　　7 who have really struggled to then attend school later
13　　on and "what is the point?"
14　　Whereas folks who were maybe perhaps more used to
15　　secondary school were able to do that and so there is a
16　　large number of young people who are not attending
17　　school as much as they perhaps would have done
18　　pre—pandemic and supporting that. Now, some of that is
19　　to do with the parents' ability to support the young
20　　person and again, the parents trying to concentrate on
21　　them keeping the show on the road themselves, and so
22　　their window of tolerance is diminished so much that
23　　actually: if you don't want to go to school, that's the
24　　school's problem, it's not my problem, and they can work
25　　it through, and so how to support then the families with

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1　　that to enable young people to come back, and a number
2　　of young people who have had major traumatic experiences
3　　who need that much greater support with their mental
4　　health and for counselling, that then will unlock them
5　　being able to attend school again, and so there is a
6　　whole host of different areas that the numbers are quite
7　　large of those who are not attending and we're working
8　　very hard alongside our colleagues in formal education
9　　to try and drill down to each individual one, and again,
10　　because we've got a different methodology, a different
11　　timeframe of being able to do that, we can speak to the
12　　families in the evenings when they are maybe back from
13　　work, or are around, and are able to do that. We can
14　　work outside of that traditional 9.00 to 5.00 so we're
15　　able to partner with them to ensure that the young
16　　people can come back to school but there is a large
17　　amount of young people who are really struggling to
18　　attend.
19　Q.　Thank you. And in connection with attainment, is that
20　　something you're aware of from your work with schools?
21　A.　Yes. I mean, I think that we know that young people are
22　　really struggling to have caught up with where they're
23　　at, we're now seeing classes that we're in with our
24　　primary school work where you could be in a primary 6
25　　class with people who are working at the level they're

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1　supposed to be doing, alongside pupils who are two or
2　three years below where they're at and so there's a
3　large, and it's increasing, of young people who have not
4　got that core literacy and numeracy skills that we're
5　able to support as youth work professionals, being able
6　to see that that is not decreasing as it was and we
7　could have seen that and I'm thinking through to a radio
8　project with that where it was improving and now young
9　people are really struggling to even just write down a
10　few paragraphs, whereas everybody would have been able
11　to do that, so there is certainly a large increase.
12　Q. In connection with attainment, you mention there at
13　paragraph 53 that you're:
14　　　"... working with secondary schools to create
15　alternative curriculums ... "
16　　　Can you describe for us what the school experience
17　of somebody on an alternative curriculum would look
18　like?
19　A. I think that we have always tried to work towards the
20　world of work, and recognising that an academic career
21　isn't for every young person so we have been able to
22　partner with the school and go: okay, if this young
23　person is really struggling with some of the more
24　academic subjects we have got different opportunities
25　for learning to continue and so through whether it be

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1　our farm, our cafe or our bike project, much more
2　practical hands—on projects for them to be involved
3　with, and so young people are coming in and getting
4　their elementary food hygiene and being able to serve
5　folks in a cafe knowing that that might be their career
6　path to be chosen, and similarly bike mechanics and
7　learning some of those basic skills , and so young people
8　are being given an alternative curriculum that enables
9　them to be able to choose things that they can maybe see
10　has more relevance in their immediate life and again,
11　I'm wondering from the kind of —— the conversations
12　we're having, what's going to happen next year, what's
13　going to happen two years' time, three years' time, is
14　there going to be something catastrophic that happens
15　again in our lifetime , and so young people less willing
16　to put in the effort for something that's going to
17　happen in many years' time and just going: I'm going to
18　take what I can get right now, and so therefore coming
19　and working in a cafe is great because I know that I'll
20　be able to get a job when I leave school with that, and
21　yes, there's more people cycling so I need to learn how
22　to fix that and then I can get a job that way, and so
23　there's different ways that people are able to do that.
24　　　We have a small urban farm and our chickens are the
25　best mental health ambassadors that we can find and so

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1　spending five minutes cuddling a chicken can really
2　transform a number of our young people that are really
3　struggling with interacting with humans, and so it can
4　just make a bit of a difference , so again, we're very
5　fortunate to have had that, that funding that enables
6　these things to happen and for some sort of our projects
7　they're very much secondary outcomes that we weren't
8　originally funded to do but it's making an impact within
9　the young people's lives and it's supporting the school
10　because when these young people are in school, they tend
11　to be disruptive and so if they're not being disruptive ,
12　suddenly they're no longer the bad kid but actually
13　they're the kid that goes and sorts your bike and
14　they're the kid that goes and gets you that cake that
15　they have made, and so there's a lot of things that they
16　can then have pride in what they have done themselves.
17　Q. Now just very briefly in terms of the impacts you've
18　described for us today and in your statement, were these
19　relayed to the Scottish Government at the time of their
20　decision about the pandemic?
21　A. We're very fortunate that there is a number of different
22　methods that we've been able to connect in with the
23　Scottish Government. We've got a number of different
24　funds from the Scottish Government and so in our
25　monitoring and evaluation of those funds that was

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1　mentioned, and similarly, as a member of YouthLink
2　Scotland and Youth Scotland we form —— give them some of
3　our impact reports and what's going on, so it was great
4　to have that kind of two—way conversation. We're also
5　very lucky that our MSP is incredibly supportive of our
6　project and visits regularly so he was able to see
7　firsthand the impacts and be able to take that further
8　back to the Scottish Government.
9　Q. Thank you. And just in closing, I want to ask you if
10　there are any key lessons St Paul's Youth Forum
11　considers should be applied to ensure these impacts we
12　have spoken about are addressed and mitigated?
13　A. I think that one of the things that we were able to do
14　very quickly was because of the different guidance that
15　was coming, when we were able to get young people
16　together in person that was a really important thing.
17　Young people need to spend time together and being able
18　to do that at a safe distance enabled a number of bits
19　and pieces to happen. I think there is some really big
20　research to be done about how young people interact
21　online, is it safe, how is it happening, and so there is
22　some stuff around mobile phones that needs to be looked
23　at that I know that's already been part of that but
24　there is something about ensuring that young people can
25　find safe ways to interact when these kind of happen,

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1   and of course, that digital divide, people who are able
2   to sit down, have a screen to themselves and supportive
3   adults around to be able to help them learn is fantastic
4   but when there is not that supportive environment around
5   to be able to find where that is and so it's our opinion
6   that being able to extend those who were able to attend
7   school in person from just keyworkers' families, and
8   actually young people —— that widening the number of
9   young people at risk that would have benefited from that
10   but being able to then recognise that youth work can
11   fill a huge amount of those gaps and we were very
12   fortunate that we were able to bend a number of
13   different funds to make that work.
14   We don't have —— we have very little funding that's
15   particularly towards some of the areas that we're able
16   to tackle and, yes, let's get some more young people
17   speaking to counsellors. The trauma that has gone on
18   for a number of those guys, their resilience is at an
19   all —time low, and so we need to spend time building that
20   back up again.
21 Q. Thank you very much, Mr Young.
22   I don't have any further questions unless you have
23   anything to add, Lord Brailsford?
24   Questions by THE CHAIR
25   THE CHAIR: I have actually got a question for once which is

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1   a little unusual. I'm not entirely sure how relevant it
2   is, but first of all, thank you, Mr Young, for your most
3   illuminating and instructive evidence, but you mentioned
4   that one thing which you thought was very positive and
5   which was surprising to you was groups of, I think, 14,
6   15, 16—year—old boys who were participating in reading
7   novels, or reading novels to each other. I'm intrigued,
8   what sort of novels were they reading?
9 A. It was one where, again, I wish I could tell you the
10   book and the author but what we did was we spoke with
11   the English department at the school and said "What
12   would you recommend?" And so they had a number of
13   different ones, and I think The Hunger Games was one of
14   the ones that the boys enjoyed but it was one where
15   being able to get the young people also to do a bit of
16   research was another bit for that, and so they went and
17   had to go and read book reviews to discover what it was,
18   but it's one where, yes, the teaching staff were
19   saying: if you can get them to do one thing, get them to
20   read, because that will give them the keys to an awful
21   lot of other things in the future, and we were shocked
22   that it actually worked, that the young people enjoyed
23   that, and it's one where we still, when we take young
24   people on residentials, we will read them a bedtime
25   story and 16, 17—year—olds that we had away in the

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1   October holidays loved it, it was their favourite part
2   of the day to go and listen. Quite often it was to much
3   more junior fiction than adult fiction, but it was one
4   that just, it was very comforting.
5   THE CHAIR: Yes, good advice, I think. Thank you very much
6   again, Mr Young, and that brings us to an end of this
7   session, and we'll come back at 2 o'clock. Thank you.
8   (12.45 pm)
9   (Luncheon adjournment)
10   (2.01 pm)
11   MS VAN DER WESTHUIZEN: Good afternoon, my Lord.
12   THE CHAIR: Good afternoon, Ms van der Westhuizen. Right,
13   we have a panel this afternoon, I believe.
14   MS VAN DER WESTHUIZEN: We do, my Lord. We have a panel of
15   youth work practitioners representing organisations that
16   are all members of YouthLink Scotland who we heard from
17   this morning. We have Mr Molloy, who is service manager
18   for young people from Dumfries and Galloway Council. We
19   have Ms Ross, who is team leader, youth work, Dumfries
20   and Galloway Council. We have Ms Meehan who is head of
21   youth work programmes and quality improvement for Youth
22   Scotland. We have Mr Luke who is chief executive
23   officer of Scouts Scotland. Then we have Mr Jordan who
24   is youth work manager of LGBT Youth Scotland, who is
25   joining us virtually today.

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1   MR MARK MOLLOY (called)
2   MS KELLY ROSS (called)
3   MS MICHELE MEEHAN (called)
4   MR GRAEME LUKE (called)
5   MR BARRY JORDAN (called)
6   THE CHAIR: Very good, welcome to you all. There will be
7   questions asked to you by Ms van der Westhuizen, and I
8   would ask you to start now.
9   Questions by MS VAN DER WESTHUIZEN
10   MS VAN DER WESTHUIZEN: Thank you, my Lord.
11   Good afternoon, everyone. If I could start first by
12   asking you in turn to each confirm your name, your role,
13   now and during the pandemic, and also to give a short
14   description of the organisation that you represent,
15   including approximate size of the membership and the
16   work it does. Perhaps we can start and work our way
17   down the line, start with Mr Molloy, followed by Ms Ross
18   and we'll end up with Mr Jordan last. Thank you.
19   MARK MOLLOY: Good afternoon, and good afternoon, my Lord.
20   My role within COVID was as the head of communications
21   for the community planning partnership within Dumfries
22   and Galloway area, but with strategic oversight for
23   youth work services as well. I'm Mark Molloy.
24   Currently —— and service manager for Dumfries and
25   Galloway Council now as their young people services

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1   department. So it was a different role during COVID,
2   but it —— now overall responsible for their young
3   people's services.
4   And in terms of the area that we cover, it's the
5   third largest local authority area in Scotland in
6   landmass size, with a population of approximately
7   147,000 people, and around 12,000 of those would fall
8   into the age bracket of being a young person as defined
9   within the national youth work strategy for Scotland.
10   Q. Thank you. Ms Ross?
11   KELLY ROSS: I'm Kelly Ross. Currently I'm the team leader
12   for youth work within Dumfries and Galloway Council.
13   During the pandemic, I was acting service manager for
14   youth work, and I also work within the same descriptions
15   as Mark has just described, so ...
16   Q. Thank you very much. Ms Meehan?
17   MICHELE MEEHAN: Hi, I'm Michele Meehan. I'm the head of
18   youth work programmes and quality improvement for Youth
19   Scotland. Youth Scotland is Scotland's charity for
20   community—based youth work. We have a membership of
21   over 105,000 young people across Scotland in 2,200 youth
22   groups, and supported by a workforce of about 11,000
23   youth workers and volunteers.
24   My role during COVID was the same as it is now:
25   overseeing our kind of youth work delivery, upskilling

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1   of youth workers, youth awards and supporting our
2   membership, so providing a range of membership services
3   to the community—based youth groups.
4   Q. Thank you very much. Mr Luke?
5   GRAEME LUKE: Good afternoon. I'm Graeme Luke. I'm the
6   chief executive officer of Scouts Scotland. We have
7   approximately 35,000 young people across all 32 local
8   authorities, and we provide skills for life for young
9   people from age 4 right through to 25, and approximately
10   12,000 volunteers again across all 32 local authorities
11   I'm currently chief executive. I was head of scouting
12   operations in 2020. I have been in this role for three
13   years, and our purpose is really just to provide those
14   opportunities for young people to gain skills for life
15   through our community—based groups.
16   Q. Thank you very much, and Mr Jordan?
17   BARRY JORDAN: Good afternoon, everyone. So my name is
18   Barry Jordan. I'm a youth work manager with LGBT Youth
19   Scotland. My remit covers Tayside and Forth Valley.
20   LGBT Youth Scotland is the national youth organisation
21   for LGBTQ plus young people, and we work with
22   approximately about 400 young people each week through
23   our youth groups, and through our asset—based coaching
24   one—to—ones that we deliver.
25   We also have our LGBT charter programme which

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1   reaches out to thousands of young people across all 32
2   local authorities. We work closely with schools and
3   local authorities to do that work. And during the
4   pandemic, my role was the same, delivering the services
5   across Tayside and Forth Valley.
6   Q. Thank you very much. The intention today, as you know,
7   is to hear about some of the key issues and impacts
8   experienced by children and young people, youth workers,
9   both staff and volunteers, and youth work organisations
10   as a consequence of the restrictions in place during the
11   pandemic. And that's under a number of broad themes.
12   Time permitting, I propose that we discuss issues
13   and impacts relating to first transitioning to remote
14   and online youth work. We heard something about that
15   this morning from Mr Frew, who you will all know from
16   YouthLink Scotland.
17   Secondly, impacts on children and young people.
18   Thirdly, the wider role played by youth work
19   organisations during the pandemic ie beyond your normal
20   youth work activities.
21   Fourthly, issues around return to face—to—face youth
22   work.
23   Fifthly, issues around rules, guidance and
24   communication.
25   And finally, sixthly, other impacts on and

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1   challenges for youth work organisations, youth workers
2   and the youth work sector that we don't cover in the
3   rest of the discussion.
4   Then finally if there is time, I would like to give
5   each of you the opportunity if possible to make
6   suggestions for what the Scottish Government could
7   reasonably do to mitigate ongoing impacts of the
8   strategic response to the pandemic, or could do
9   differently to improve matters in the event of another
10   pandemic or similar crisis in the future.
11   So if we could perhaps start with a discussion about
12   transitioning to remote and online youth work, and just
13   by way of sort of prompts, and again, feel free to bring
14   in anything that is key to your organisations or your
15   experience, and also feel free to build on anything that
16   your colleagues mention. But for example, how services
17   were delivered pre—pandemic and by contrast changes
18   required to deliver youth work programmes and services
19   remotely and online. We heard some —— about that from
20   Mr Frew this morning. Any issues about around digital
21   inclusion and accessibility for children, young people
22   and youth workers. Safeguarding considerations if any
23   of you have any particular issues around that.
24   Challenges in maintaining relationships and providing
25   support remotely, and any other relevant key issues.

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1   If we could perhaps start with Mr Molloy on this one
2   and work our way down the line again, and we'll end up
3   with Mr Jordan.
4   MARK MOLLOY: Thank you. I think as the pandemic started,
5   I think one of the biggest challenges for youth work was
6   that predominantly youth work was delivered on a
7   face—to—face basis at that point. There's maybe some
8   good examples from some organisations around digital and
9   online youth work, but predominantly it was around a
10   relationship —based practice that was very much delivered
11   on a face—to—face basis in local communities by third
12   sector organisations and local authorities across
13   Scotland.
14   And I think when those restrictions were first
15   coming in, and the pandemic was unfolding in the very
16   early weeks of that, there was a real challenge for
17   moving that delivery practice from being face—to—face to
18   online, partly because in some organisations, and
19   certainly within our own, we were not necessarily geared
20   up technology—wise to pivot to a fully online—based
21   practice.
22   And with that as well that, because quite often
23   within youth work, we're working with some of the most
24   marginalised young people and young people who were
25   experiencing poverty and inequality, the assumption that

1   all children and young people would be able to access
2   online services in my view was wrong, because a number
3   of those young people who we were working with did not
4   have access to wi—fi in their house, or did not have
5   digital devices. Because quite often what those young
6   people were needing, if they had spare money within the
7   household, it was going to pay for their electric, their
8   gas, their food, you know, their basic necessities.
9   So we were asking young people to start accessing
10   services online when they wouldn't necessarily have the
11   capacity to do that at home. And I think that the ——
12   the online provision for us was very much around how we
13   keep the relationships going and young people not to
14   feel isolated, because I think it was a scary time for
15   young people, and a lot of professionals, you know, were
16   doing their best while they were still experiencing the
17   same anxiety and the same challenges with their own
18   family.
19   But I know across both third sector and local
20   authorities, staff went way over and above where maybe
21   other professions took the tack of: they didn't feel
22   safe, or they didn't want to work with those young
23   people, and maybe fully going to be at home until there
24   was more guidance available from the government. But
25   I know across Scotland, there was youth workers whose

1   first instinct was to go out and support those young
2   people.
3   And at the very start of this, from what I have seen
4   within Dumfries and Galloway, but I heard of from across
5   Scotland, was that youth work very much was the —— you
6   know, was the only organisation or services who were
7   actually engaging with young people within the first
8   early days of that.
9   But I think the accessibility to that and access to
10   devices to connectivity etc was a real challenge that
11   maybe wasn't resolved until later on in the pandemic,
12   through some of the national initiatives that were
13   there.
14   And the final part of that is that I think there
15   needs to be incredible recognition of how much and over
16   and above youth workers in a wider sense across Scotland
17   did in those early days of the pandemic to ensure that
18   they stayed in contact with young people, and young
19   people felt as though there was still a good connection
20   to those services.
21   And I think as well, testament to the staff across a
22   number of organisations that did manage to pivot to
23   online delivery. In some cases within Dumfries and
24   Galloway, within 48 hours of our services being told
25   that they had to close, we had an online offering for

1   young people that was running seven days per week in the
2   daytime and in the early mornings as well.
3   Q. Thank you very much. Ms Ross, if we could come to you
4   next?
5   KELLY ROSS: I think just following on from that, I think ——
6   sorry, I'm full of the cold. Just to follow on from
7   around the lack of devices and wi—fi for young people,
8   one of the things that we found being in a rural
9   location is that actually for a lot of young people, it
10   was really difficult to get wi—fi maybe in really rural
11   areas, maybe if you're living in farms, or some of the
12   other areas.
13   So that was something that was definitely
14   problematic, for some young people was even —— and I
15   know personally for me, it's an issue I have in my own
16   house, is because it's an old building, that it doesn't
17   work the best it could be.
18   I think the other thing that was a challenge for
19   people was that it was a new way of working with young
20   people, so there wasn't necessarily guidance set up
21   around how you deliver that in terms of keeping young
22   people and the staff safe. So for example, you were
23   maybe seeing a lot of online schooling that was
24   happening, but actually what you were able to maybe
25   identify was maybe where the teachers lived, based on

the background or things like that.

So very quickly in youth work, we had to develop guidance that kind of instructed staff and volunteers on how to keep themselves safe whilst delivering these services online for young people. So an example of that would be making sure you couldn't see out of windows or you couldn't see family photos in the background, sort of thing, safeguarding things, that you wouldn't really think of when you are delivering in a physical building.

I think one of the other challenges was around, again, I think, just picking up on Mark's point, for some young people, this was a really scary time, because actually for them their youth club or their youth worker is a lifeline. So that transition, I think, was really difficult because the communication was quite hard and firm on it, so young people were scared.

But it also then left youth workers dealing with it in a way that where they would maybe normally deal with a young person who was maybe really struggling with their mental health in a building sat in front of them, you have much more control over the situation, because you've got them in front of you, you're able to have that open communication.

Whereas actually when you're doing that over the phone or online, that became much harder. So staff and

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volunteers were having to find new ways to maintain them relationships with young people.

Q. Thank you very much. Ms Meehan, if we can come to you next?

MICHELE MEEHAN: Just picking up on those points of that rapid response, so certainly with our member groups, like, you know, like, say, within 48 hours, people were up and running. Our training team were literally teaching themselves how to do stuff digitally, and then within a day or so were then training youth workers on how to do that. Platforms like Zoom technology, we're all very familiar with these things now, but it was unknown to most people.

So there was a real kind of need for rapid learning, getting people the software. We also, with some of our kind of key funders, we set up a youth action fund. 75,000 was literally out the door within a matter of months, so the first grants were given within two weeks of the first lockdown, and again, that was going to go to individual young people for their digital connectivity, for phones, for data top—up cards, very practical things that they needed just to kind of get connected and get engaged. And then following on from that, wellbeing packs and things like that.

So just very practical resources. And for youth

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workers, we're kind of sending out resources to young people, you know, so they could engage and connect —— so, yes. And just in terms of that upskilling, it was a huge thing. You think some of the big multinational companies struggled to get their workforces upskilled, whereas the youth work workforce with very limited resources, we upskilled our own workforce very, very quickly. I think that's a real positive that came out of it, but, yes, real diversity of young people in like say the different levels of engagement, but most young people were offered some kind of lifeline, and it was a lifeline for many young people.

Q. Thank you very much. Mr Luke, if we could come to you next then?

GRAEME LUKE: Yes, I won't repeat what I have heard already because I think a lot of the points are the same for us, but I think the prominency on the importance of the relationship between the young people and the volunteers was really quite impactful. These young people are sometimes marginalised; therefore, the relationship they have at school or with other parts of their life is often a negative experience.

So having a positive experience with a volunteer on a weekly basis is quite a positive thing for those young people.

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The other thing that we found really critical was the relationship with parents, which changed completely the way in which we delivered youth work, because the way we traditionally delivered youth work, as Mark said, is on a weekly basis usually in a hall somewhere in the community. And all of a sudden, that was all gone. So we weren't able —— within, as Michele said, 48 hours we had repurposed our entire Scout programme, which is substantive for all five of our then sections, from six through to 25. We have now got another section for four—year—olds.

But again, the requirement for volunteers to engage with parents, because effectively the parents became the leaders, even though it was their own young people, the traditional model is parents drop off their kids in a Scout hall at the end of a week, or a Guide hall, or whatever youth club they're going to, and they go home.

But here we now required a programme to be delivered remotely by volunteers with all the challenges that had already been referred to, but also to be supervised by parents who had never done that before. So that became quite a challenge, but actually it was also a positive, because it opened those parents to an understanding about youth work which they never had before, because in the past, they simply dropped them off and came back for

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1   them at the end of the evening.
2   So I think the key thing for me was definitely the
3   relationship, and I think the other thing was that we
4   had to also repurpose some of our programme, because
5   some of our volunteers who were well—established youth
6   workers were key workers, and they suddenly became
7   unavailable, so we had to repurpose the volunteering
8   side as well, and other youth workers stepped up to
9   carry that work, so it was a really positive experience
10   delivered really quickly.
11   Q. Thank you very much, and Mr Jordan, perhaps if we could
12   come to you then finally?
13   BARRY JORDAN: Yes. Again, I won't echo a lot of the things
14   that have been said because they do relate to us.
15   I think for us in LGBT Youth, we were, I guess in a bit
16   of a fortunate position, so pre the pandemic, we were
17   actually looking at creating a digital platform to
18   connect all our young people together, because it was
19   something they had asked for for many years.
20   We also have always had a digital youth work team
21   within the organisation. So again, pretty much
22   overnight, we were able to move our services online, and
23   within a few weeks we were able to get that youth work
24   platform up and running. It had its challenges at the
25   time, we learnt a lot from trying to do it overnight.

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1   What was meant to be a two—year project became a
2   three—month project.
3   But it did present —— like I say, it did present its
4   challenges. One of the biggest things that we found
5   actually for our young people was a lot of them were
6   having to return home if they had been at university or
7   maybe moved away from college, were having to go home,
8   potentially back to quite homophobic or transphobic
9   environments, and then trying to access our services in
10   the home environment was proving quite challenging for
11   them.
12   So we did see quite a lot of young people drop off
13   completely, and we were having to sort of like basically
14   get in contact with them, and a lot of them did say that
15   they didn't feel safe being able to do it in their own
16   home, so that did present some challenges at the time.
17   Ultimately, as well, I just want to echo the fact
18   that our youth work team really stepped up to the mark.
19   Sorry, can you still hear me?
20   MS VAN DER WESTHUIZEN: Yes, we can. We lost you for a
21   second there, but you're back, Mr Jordan. You said
22   "stepped up to the mark". That's the last thing we
23   heard.
24   BARRY JORDAN: Yes, just around their creativity and being
25   able to continue to provide that programme online, our

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1   young people as well, they really came together to be
2   able to continue to provide our youth groups, although
3   it was very different. So, yes.
4   Q. Thank you very much. Does anyone else have anything to
5   add to that topic before we move on to discuss ——
6   Ms Meehan?
7   MICHELE MEEHAN: Just maybe one —— you said about the story
8   telling, and I suppose in the early days as well with
9   wi—fi, where the young people didn't have wi—fi, what
10   happened with some of these projects, they literally
11   went and turned on —— they left the wi—fi on at their
12   building, so that the young people could come, once they
13   are allowed outside, could go and kind of sit outside
14   the building and pick up free wi—fi and stuff like that,
15   you know, so just very, very practical things as well
16   that happened.
17   Q. Made a difference, thank you. Well, if we could turn
18   then to discuss impacts on children and young people.
19   We've heard obviously from Mr Frew and from yourselves
20   this morning about the importance of that face—to—face
21   experience and that connection with the youth workers.
22   So if we could have a discussion about the impacts
23   on children and young people in relation to that, and
24   that loss of face—to—face with that move to digital
25   youth work and school education. So including, for

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1   example, the importance of youth work in particular for
2   those who do not engage particularly well with formal
3   education; loss of face—to—face connections and support
4   networks, if there were issues around that; loss of
5   opportunity for peer interaction and social development;
6   mental health, wellbeing and social impacts.
7   I think, Mr Molloy, you had a particular role in
8   relation to that, I understand.
9   Disruptions to educational and employment pathways;
10   disproportionate impacts on any particular cohorts of
11   young people; and any other relevant key issues.
12   Perhaps, although I know mental health is your area,
13   Mr Molloy, if we could start perhaps with Ms Ross and
14   work our way around the table and come to you last on
15   that. So Ms Ross, followed by Ms Meehan, followed by
16   Mr Luke, Mr Jordan and then Mr Molloy. Thank you.
17   KELLY ROSS: I think in terms of impact on young people,
18   I think young people's wellbeing in every sense of the
19   way was impacted. I think for young people initially,
20   that was around the physical needs, so for a lot of
21   young people who we were working with, an example would
22   be we worked with a lot of young parents. Actually at
23   the point of the first lockdown happening, they were
24   really struggling to be able to get baby formula for
25   their babies, or maybe they weren't due a benefits

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1   payment until the following week, so weren't actually
2   able to stock up on the supermarket shop before they
3   closed.
4   And for a lot of our other young people who were in
5   the similar position where they may be reliant on maybe
6   food parcels or food banks, or going along to programmes
7   where there's food available for them to take home with
8   them, that was a real concern for them at the beginning,
9   was around how they were going to get their physical
10   needs met.
11   In terms of mental wellbeing for young people, that
12   was something that we were hit with very quickly very
13   early on. Like I mentioned before, young people were
14   very scared, because for a lot of them, what they were
15   hearing from the media was: you need to stay in your
16   house or people are going to die. And that was a big
17   responsibility for them young people, and I think it
18   scared a lot of them. So actually what we then done
19   very quickly was set up a phone line for young people
20   within Dumfries and Galloway where they were able to
21   phone, speak to a youth worker.
22   And sometimes that was a normal conversation that
23   was talking about Emmerdale or a TV show, or —— that was
24   just to keep them communications going, but equally so
25   that then when they were struggling with their mental

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1   health, if they were maybe starting to feel suicidal or
2   starting to feel their mental health was taking a
3   decline, that they were then able to speak to somebody
4   and get the support, that they were able to be directed
5   to that.
6   Because I think for a lot of young people, they very
7   quickly felt isolated and lonely, and I think we do work
8   with a lot of young people who live in difficult
9   circumstances, and youth work is a real lifeline for
10   them.
11   I think the other thing that was really clear for us
12   very early on again was that the communication that was
13   coming out wasn't necessarily youth friendly, so
14   actually for young people to be able to understand that,
15   that was a real challenge, and we felt that that was
16   something that was part of our role, was making sure
17   that young people were able to understand what this
18   meant, what these people on the TV were saying, what
19   that meant for them and their lives.
20   So we then set up a weekly thing that we put on
21   Facebook and Instagram and all the social media
22   platforms for young people, that then was giving them
23   information, so whether that was around what that meant
24   for their schooling, what that meant around —— whether
25   they were allowed to socialise at that time, whether

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1   they were able to go and get support and help.
2   And again, it was just trying to make sure that that
3   was accessible for young people because that was
4   something that really wasn't targeted at young people at
5   all.
6   We also were very quickly aware that there was hubs
7   set up for children of —— key workers' children, and
8   that was something that was really important. But what
9   we were also starting to be faced with was young
10   people —— so an example that we will be able to give is
11   that there was a family who —— of —— a family who live
12   within a flat. Within that flat, it was a three—bedded
13   flat, there was five kids and one parent. There was
14   very complex needs within that family, and actually it
15   was becoming unsafe for that young person or that family
16   group, because they didn't have a garden, they didn't
17   have anywhere else that they were able to go.
18   So there was lots of these different conversations
19   take place, so part of the impact from that was that we
20   were able to establish, working alongside colleagues
21   within education and social work, youth work hubs that
22   then allowed small groups of our most vulnerable young
23   people within Dumfries and Galloway to be able to attend
24   that to get the support that they needed, because again,
25   we were seeing real impacts in terms of where the young

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1   people were at, in terms of their mental health.
2   Q. Just on that, Ms Ross, was that in addition to the sort
3   of educational hubs, the school hubs, was that alongside
4   or integrated into that?
5   KELLY ROSS: These were separate, targeted at our most
6   vulnerable young people. So that was separate from the
7   key work hubs that were for key workers' children, who
8   would attend them ones.
9   I think in terms of one of the other big impacts
10   that we seen at the time, and that we're still dealing
11   with the consequences, if you like, is around the loss
12   of learning on social issues.
13   So actually like in terms of learning, learning was
14   lost for a lot of young people, but actually what we
15   have seen is young people started to return to school,
16   and for those who maybe didn't return to school, for a
17   lot of the social issues that they would maybe normally
18   get, so if I think of things like sex education or
19   education around domestic violence, a lot of them social
20   issues disappeared, because the focus then was on
21   curriculum—focused ones where they would be sitting
22   exams on.
23   And that's something even now that we're still
24   seeing the consequences of, of young folk not having
25   been informed on a lot of them social issues.

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1   And I think just lastly, around young people who
2 were disproportionately affected, I think certainly in
3 Dumfries and Galloway, there's two groups of young
4 people who really stood out for me. The first one was
5 around our young carers, so for a lot of our young
6 carers who are already isolated and already in a really
7 difficult circumstance, it was really challenging for
8 them to integrate back into school. It was really
9 difficult for them to integrate back into youth
10 services, because they had that added fear in particular
11 for those who maybe had vulnerable parents at home, who
12 very quickly could become sick, so it was an added
13 pressure for them.
14   And the second one was around our Gypsy Traveller
15 young people as well, who again were displaced during
16 that time at points as they were moving and lockdowns
17 came in, and they again were disproportionately affected
18 so ...
19 Q. Thank you very much. Ms Meehan, if we could turn to you
20   then?
21 MICHELE MEEHAN: Yes, I think Kelly has covered a lot of the
22   issues there but, yes, just to stress again,
23   particularly, you know, youth work traditionally works
24   with a lot of kind of more disadvantaged young people,
25   so again, like you said, their housing situations,

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1 cramped accommodation, not access to gardens, so they
2 were really impacted. So a lot of anxiety which we're
3 still seeing with young people, so that's been a
4 long—term thing. School refusal, so some young people
5 have not gone back to school or gone back, but haven't
6 been able to maintain school, so there has been some
7 long—term consequences of that as well.
8   And basically, you know, all that missing out on key
9 transition points, young people, you know, that primary
10 to secondary school transition that youth work
11 traditionally supports young people with, young people
12 at school—leaving age, so those kind of key transition
13 points in young people's development were missed by a
14 lot of young people, all the kind of outings, the trips,
15 the residentials.
16   So the loss of all those kind of social engagement
17 opportunities, the opportunities to learn different
18 skills and engage with their peers. So that is a huge
19 impact in terms of the sort of mental health. You know,
20 we run quite a big youth awards programme, as do others,
21 so for some of those young people who don't achieve well
22 in school environment, that loss of other educational
23 opportunities.
24   So we did —— again, we kind of created digital
25 awards that young people would do at home, so trying to

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1 kind of close that attainment gap, even during the
2 pandemic, so there were things that offered to the young
3 people but still that kind of loss.
4   And for the kind of 16 plus young people who
5 would normally be attending kind of employability
6 projects and things like that within youth work
7 services, again, they weren't getting access to that.
8 There was very little thought, I think, in terms of
9 provision given to those young people, so you were
10 outwith school and —— but not in the workplace either,
11 so there was definitely pockets of young people that
12 were very, very marginalised during the time, so ...
13 Q. Thank you very much. And just —— you spoke about is the
14   sort of disengagement with the school. We have heard a
15   little bit this morning about behavioural issues. Was
16   that something that you had noticed in relation to —— or
17   your members had noticed?
18 MICHELE MEEHAN: Yes, feedback. There's particular
19   groupings of young people, just that kind of —— what
20   would have previously been the primary 6 and primary 7
21   young people who had missed out in some of that. So
22   when then, they were coming in, they were, what we were
23   seeing, moving from junior youth clubs up to like high
24   school age provision, which —— a lot of young people
25   were still displaying maybe immature behaviours again,

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1 just because they had that loss of social interactions
2 with their peers at some of those critical developmental
3 stages.
4   So I think there definitely has been a kind of
5 increase in maybe challenging behaviour, and just ——
6 yes, just as a result. But again, the youth work sector
7 has provided —— there has been a lot of one—to—one
8 support offered, there's a lot of counselling being
9 offered. So again, we've tried to respond to young
10 people's emerging needs that have been developed —— yes.
11 Q. Thank you very much. Mr Luke?
12 GRAEME LUKE: So I'll not repeat myself again. I will pick
13   up on that last point. We are finding now, years on
14   from the pandemic, that our first section, the
15   four—year—olds, who were living through the pandemic as
16   really young children, some of their social skills are
17   really impacted, so things that you would have expected
18   a four or a five—year—old to do prior to the pandemic
19   because they had this loss of social skills, the feeling
20   of isolation has now impacted on them when they join our
21   clubs age four, because they are not where you would
22   expect them to be, and that's an impact of the pandemic.
23   I think the other thing was the impact —— we've
24   mentioned already things like isolation and social
25   skills, but there was parents working at home during the

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1   time when we were trying to deliver youth work, because
2   parents were also affected by different working
3   arrangements, different ways of working.
4   So there was a whole range of environmental issues
5   that were just not happening as a consequence of what
6   happened. The loss of connection with trusted
7   volunteers, with trusted people, who the young people
8   were able to work with.
9   And then the other thing was probably peer
10 interaction, because our —— core part of our programme
11 is about learning by doing, and that is usually by young
12 people working with other young people and gaining
13 skills from each other. But because of the activities
14 that were all repurposed really quickly, they were very
15 much for working on your own in your own home.
16   So we did have some really positives in that younger
17 children who hadn't been involved in Scouts had started
18 to do Scouts, because they were at home with their
19 peers, their siblings, and they were interacting, even
20 though they weren't in the age range or hadn't done it
21 before.
22   So there was a positive output of that as well, that
23 we were able to give access to our programme to young
24 people who had never had it in the past.
25   But I think ultimately the difference between —— the

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1   final point I would make was that there was no change in
2   the setting from what would normally be: you get up in
3   the morning, you go to school, you come back, you go to
4   youth club. You were at home for your school, you were
5   at home for your family, you were at home for your youth
6   club.
7   So there was no feeling of difference between school
8   education and youth work, and whilst the two should work
9   in harmony together, there is those different settings,
10 and because of the impact of what we were faced with
11 with the lockdowns, the young people were at home all
12 the time, and that became quite a pressure bubble. If
13 you were having difficulties with social skills, that
14 was impacting on your mental health and wellbeing as
15 well.
16   And that was the case for our volunteers as well as
17 our young people, because volunteers were having to also
18 juggle work, life, family, and also now volunteer on
19 computers. And it got to a point when being on the
20 computer all day was actually really quite challenging,
21 and very quickly —— probably pick on this later on, but
22 very quickly, when schools started to return, there was
23 a real animosity from young people about having to be on
24 screen for prolonged periods of time, but we'll possibly
25 pick on that later on.

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1 Q. Thank you. Mr Jordan?
2 BARRY JORDAN: Yes, so for us, I think probably the biggest
3   thing —— we talked about the relationship with youth
4   workers and stuff, but I think for us as well, it was
5   actually the relationship young people had with the
6   physical space, so for us, a lot of our young people
7   come to our services obviously to explore their gender
8   identity, their gender expression, and being able to
9   kind of try that out in different —— in our spaces, and
10 I think with the loss of that, that really impacted a
11 lot of young people, kind of goes back to what I said
12 earlier about not being able to be your fully authentic
13 self in the home environment.
14   We also conducted our life in Scotland research in
15 2022, and we asked young people —— we got about just
16 over 1,200 responses from that. That's young people
17 that access our service and don't —— any LGBTQ plus
18 young person can respond to this research. And we found
19 in that research that actually about 80% of respondents
20 said that education was the biggest thing that had been
21 affected for them.
22   Interestingly, in that research as well, a lot of
23 young people talked about the pandemic providing them
24 with space to be able to actually reflect on who they
25 are, and actually come to terms with their identity. So

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1   as much as there was that having to go home to perhaps a
2   homophobic environment, for some young people, actually
3   having that space away from the school environment, away
4   from, potentially, the work environment, and just having
5   time to reflect on who they are was really positive.
6   So, yes, I think a lot of the stuff that's already
7   been said, really, I think I echo that as well. So,
8   yes.
9 Q. Thank you very much, Mr Jordan, and Mr Molloy?
10 MARK MOLLOY: Thank you. I think the key bit for me was
11 that when the pandemic started, it really did exacerbate
12 the inequality in Scotland in between young people, and
13 particularly for some of our young people who really
14 live in families that are experiencing extreme poverty
15 and destitution in some cases, in that, you know, some
16 of the first things to open were the key worker hubs
17 within schools.
18   But if you've got families where neither parent is
19 working, or they're single parent families, or they
20 maybe aren't working, or in jobs that weren't classed as
21 key worker roles, that exacerbated the gap, because what
22 we had seen in a lot of cases was that the key worker
23 hubs were getting used by families that would maybe fit
24 into that middle class bracket, who are in decent
25 well—paid jobs, whether that be in the NHS, whether that

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1 be in the public sector etc.
2   And that was one of the reasons why —— I know it may
3 be called different things in different local
4 authorities, but the equivalent of maybe youth work
5 hubs, as Kelly described, for some of our most
6 marginalised young people, who actually fell below that
7 threshold of a key worker. So we had the challenge that
8 the government's policy was talking very much about the
9 key worker hubs, and the importance of that, of keeping
10 country moving on a daily basis, but we could see, as
11 youth workers, and somebody who leads that service and
12 within my role as well within the wider community
13 planning partnership, there's awareness there by a
14 number of organisations, from health colleagues, from
15 education colleagues, social work colleagues, that
16 actually this level of young person who didn't fit into
17 the criteria of going to the key worker hubs, but
18 absolutely needed support because of the impact —— and
19 wellbeing in its widest sense but particularly as we
20 started going into the weeks and months into this, in
21 terms of their mental health.
22   And I think a lot of organisations, both in the
23 third sector and local authorities, put in place a
24 number of interventions to try and support that.
25 I would maybe say with hindsight now that, you know,

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1 potentially if we had had something nationally that
2 allowed us to support them, it could be a consistent
3 offering for children and young people across Scotland,
4 because it was a wee bit of a postcode lottery,
5 depending on what was on offer in each area; where
6 people were doing their absolute best, but it did vary
7 across the country.
8   And then as schools opened, again, there's such a
9 focus, as other colleagues have said, on the academic
10 side of it, and that is important, but for a lot of the
11 young people that we would be working with within youth
12 work, even before the pandemic they were not necessarily
13 engaging with formal education or to go through, you
14 know, formal qualifications.
15   So it's other wider achievement awards, such as
16 those offered by Youth Scotland and some other national
17 organisations, we were delivering before the pandemic,
18 were then going to be even more critical to those young
19 people going ahead. But at that point in time, that was
20 still a million miles away because those young people
21 were not at the point of thinking how you sit down and
22 get a qualification. It was about the basic needs and
23 basic support.
24   And I think there was examples across Scotland of
25 work that focused on those young people and on their

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1 mental health and supporting them, whether that be
2 through phone lines, or through online provision. But
3 I know that once you're allowed to reopen, you know,
4 partially at the start, some of the most impactful work
5 in Scotland, I would say, came from the one—to—one
6 support that was delivered by youth workers with the
7 young people, because their schools colleagues were so
8 focused on the academic part, because that was what was
9 being pushed by Education Scotland, by the Scottish
10 Government, and probably by a number of them, by their
11 own families.
12   And it was then left to youth work in a lot of cases
13 to then pick up those young people that fell underneath
14 that, that didn't fit into those categories of being
15 high performers within schools, or those that were
16 focusing on academia and I think that —— youth workers.
17   And I'm stressing it in every point, it was within
18 third sector and the council, it wasn't one or the
19 other. I think at that point, it was the first time
20 I had ever seen us moving away from a discussion about
21 who was the third sector organisation, or who is the
22 council's youth worker. It was at the end of the day,
23 they were a youth worker working, and we hear the phrase
24 about "one trusted adult" quite often in public policy
25 at the moment.

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1   But to me what that means is the relationship with a
2 young person, with an adult they can trust, and for a
3 lot of our marginalised young people, that is with a
4 youth worker, and that is where we're still seeing the
5 impacts just now through behaviours with young people of
6 all ages, and people wondering why we have got teenagers
7 behaving in a certain way. And I say, look, you're
8 talking —— only to go back three years to the pandemic
9 and the brain development of those children and young
10 people, to see why we have the issues we have got now.
11   But I think there was a number of positive
12 interventions for mental health. As I said, I think it
13 was different in every local authority area, and I think
14 that the support for those young people who experienced
15 the most inequalities was exacerbated as it went —— as
16 the pandemic went on, and then as the pandemic —— we
17 ended and came out of the pandemic.
18 Q. Thank you very much.
19   The next on my list, but I think I'm going to skip
20 over it, just conscious of time and I don't want to miss
21 out on some of the other topics, I had the wider role
22 played by youth work organisations during the pandemic;
23 and that was the services you offered beyond traditional
24 youth work.
25   So I think if that's okay, we'll skip over that,

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1 we'll come back to it if we have time, but I would like
2 to move on now to return to face—to—face youth work and
3 some of the challenges around that, including, for
4 example, the lack of recognition of the value of youth
5 work services that we've heard a little bit about
6 already today, the lack of parity between youth work and
7 schools, which again —— which Mr Frew touched on, and
8 importantly, ability to access facilities and spaces for
9 youth work activities, and any other relevant key
10 issues, including what your particular organisations did
11 to address some of those challenges at that time upon
12 returning to —— when everyone else was returning to
13 face—to—face.
14   I think if we could start with Ms Meehan on this
15 one, please, and we'll go around, Mr Luke, Mr Jordan,
16 Mr Molloy and Ms Ross. So if we could start with you,
17 Ms Meehan?
18 MICHELE MEEHAN: I think one of the big challenges with the
19 return to face—to—face work was when it actually applied
20 to youth work, because again, there was quite a narrow
21 focus of youth work as maybe kind of leisure or social
22 activities, not really full recognition of the role
23 youth work plays in supporting the education of young
24 people, in supporting some of those welfare social work
25 services.

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1   So there was an initial bit about which guidance ——
2 we'll come on to the guidance, but to be really clear,
3 we fell into that, and when we could actually get back
4 to back. So there was an extended period where we were
5 allowed to do stuff outdoors, and that kind of went on
6 longer —— by the time schools returned, we in the youth
7 work sector were still doing outdoor stuff, so there
8 were some challenges around that. Again, because we're
9 in Scotland, the weather is terrible, and again, people
10 were really creative with gazebos, doing stuff in parks,
11 getting no access to toilets and things like that, so a
12 lot of real challenges.
13   But again, people were super creative, created
14 really engaging activities. As Mark said, that
15 one—to—one provision walk and talk of very vulnerable
16 young people very early doors, doing the kind of
17 walking, one—to—one counselling sessions, and then group
18 work in the outdoors, so a lot of innovation happening,
19 you know, things like, you know, hot chocolate and
20 chill, but in a park, and groups making their own
21 outdoor cushions and bean bags to sit on. So just very,
22 very practical issues to do with that.
23   But access to premises was a big issue. Then when
24 we were allowed to reopen indoors, there was a bit of a
25 two tier system, so organisations that owned their own

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1 buildings obviously could open up and could have control
2 of that, and the sanitation and everything. But groups
3 who relied on third parties, churches, local
4 authorities, schools for their premises were very
5 delayed in getting that access back to youth work.
6   So again, they were kind of in a prolonged period of
7 kind of outdoor or digital youth work, and as Graeme
8 said earlier, young people got very disillusioned with
9 the digital youth work the minute they were allowed back
10 outside, you know.
11   So I think that that was some of the key things,
12 yes. And just then just, you know, being able to kind
13 of do that gradual reopening, but I think just really a
14 recognition of the different aspects of youth work.
15 It's not just one thing, so there wasn't a full
16 recognition of that.
17 Q. Was that —— who was that by —— that lack of recognition
18 by?
19 MICHELE MEEHAN: I think by government, and in terms of some
20 of those guidance documents, that, yes —— that —— which
21 guidance we had to follow, and we ended up with a bit of
22 a matrix of where we fitted into certain things. If
23 youth work was being delivered in schools, some of it
24 could take place if it was in school hours, but then out
25 of school hours, it wasn't allowed. So there were a lot

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1 of anomalies that were there.
2   And then just all the practical and the cost factor
3 of reopening youth work with things like all the extra
4 requirements for, you know, extra cleaning, extra —— you
5 know, not being able to use certain equipment,
6 sanitation, all those kind of things were big factors
7 for groups that —— a lot of youth groups run quite tight
8 budgets, so just all these extra costs that they
9 incurred, you know —— be able to operate, and things
10 like when they couldn't share resources, so they were
11 having to provide extra provision, so that each young
12 person could have their own kind of like set of
13 resources that weren't being shared across the piece,
14 and then them all being cleaned down, so just very
15 practical things as well.
16 Q. Thank you. Mr Luke?
17 GRAEME LUKE: Again, much the same sort of things. I think
18 there was something around trust in what —— we are large
19 organisations, we had put, you know, for example in our
20 organisation, we had a UK—wide response to COVID within
21 a week of the announcement of the lockdown, and we were
22 meeting every Wednesday evening to talk about
23 significant guidance that we had put in. But there was
24 a feeling, certainly from our perspective, that neither
25 Scottish Government or Public Health Scotland had

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1   actually considered the impact of our large
2   organisations. We were used to running programmes that
3   are safe for our young people, we have an enormous
4   amount of policies in place, for risk assessment, for
5   child protection safeguarding etc etc. And there was
6   just a feeling of a lack of understanding of the
7   potential benefit from engaging with us, because
8   actually we did have across the UK 500,000 members.
9   I think, as Michele said, the spaces were a real
10   challenge; you know, really trying to convince
11   particularly local authorities that restarted schools
12   that it was still okay to have youth groups meeting in
13   those same schools, so young people were going to school
14   all day, but then were restricted from attending the
15   same place in the evening to do their normal youth work
16   activity. And that really was a barrier, and it felt
17   like a barrier, and as I said in my previous comments,
18   when we were trying to encourage young people to move
19   but stay in —— in a virtual environment when they were
20   with the same young people all day in their school
21   setting, that became really challenging.
22   So whilst we retained nearly all —— we lost 20% of
23   our members through the pandemic and retained —— got
24   back nearly all of them, not quite all of them, but a
25   lot of them in year one, that was because of the

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1   interaction that we had, but we lost some young people,
2   particularly very young children and teenagers who just
3   became despondent by having to stay online, when they
4   were meeting the same people, their friends or their
5   peers, even though it was socially distanced during the
6   school day.
7   So it was the mixed messages between the education
8   return and the youth work return that created
9   unnecessary challenge, and it would have been —— had we
10   been used as a sounding board for good practice, I think
11   we would have been able to engage young people much
12   quicker, and potentially stop young people from leaving
13   our organisations because of that.
14   I think the final thing I would say, and it will
15   probably come up in the guidance, but the other
16   challenge was unrealistic expectations, in terms of we
17   certainly —— we certainly created, as Michele said,
18   outdoor spaces, but some of our groups lived really
19   close to local authority boundaries, and they weren't
20   allowed to travel over them. Even though to travel over
21   them was a ten—minute journey, they weren't allowed to
22   do that within the rules, and actually that stopped some
23   of our youth groups meeting in campsites, which are
24   traditionally part of their meeting place, but because
25   of that boundary which was hard fast, as local

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1   authorities are five miles, really created a challenge
2   for our young people to engage, in spaces that would
3   have been safe spaces for them, had we been able to use
4   them.
5   Q. Thank you, and as you said, we'll come back in more
6   detail to discuss those specific issues around guidance
7   and rules. If I could ask Mr Jordan, then, to comment
8   on any of the issues that your organisation faced in
9   relation to the return to face—to—face?
10   BARRY JORDAN: Yes, so for us, what I particularly noticed
11   in terms of venues was when we were looking to return,
12   so in my team, we use like partner's venues, we don't
13   have our own office spaces, and this proved particularly
14   difficult. I think some of the stuff that Graeme
15   alluded to really, really impacted us, but also what
16   we've seen as well, was the full closure of some of
17   these spaces that have never reopened.
18   So I think a lot of the community centres and that
19   were shut down due to funding, and have just not
20   reopened. So we actually had to find completely new
21   spaces and new partnerships which to host our services
22   from, and it's actually taken us a long time to really
23   get back to what it was like pre—pandemic.
24   So I think that was one of the main issues. There
25   was also —— I know we are going to touch on the

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1   guidance, but for us as a national organisation, the
2   guidance was very, very unclear. That led to like a bit
3   of a cautious approach for us. We also did try and do
4   some outdoor activities, and some young people responded
5   really well to that, but also what we found was some
6   young people, particularly if they were not out or were
7   not —— were really worried about that, were really
8   worried about being seen in maybe the local park with
9   their LGBT group in case, you know, they saw their uncle
10   walking their dog and they got questioned about what the
11   group was.
12   So I think some of our young people were really
13   reserved in terms of doing outdoor activities —— sorry,
14   have I froze there?
15   Q. We didn't miss anything.
16   BARRY JORDAN: Just the last thing I would say was the ——
17   sorry, I have lost my train of thought now. That will
18   do. Sorry.
19   Q. No problem, thank you very much. Mr Molloy, I might ask
20   you to contribute anything that you have?
21   MARK MOLLOY: Thank you. I think the —— part of the issues
22   around this was around the lack of understanding of what
23   youth work is, and how essential it is in education in
24   practice, because it's maybe delivered differently from
25   our schools colleagues, but it still is an educational

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1 practice, and I think that this actually showed as the
2 lack of understanding of that nationally, between maybe
3 the government and national organisations such as Public
4 Health Scotland, but also within local authority areas;
5 because I think that —— if there had been a very clear
6 statement at the start from the government about the
7 role that youth work in its widest sense could play in
8 supporting young people's wellbeing, then we probably
9 wouldn't have had some of the challenges that we had.
10 I think that —— I think again it goes back, probably
11 the point I made in the last question around it being
12 different in every local authority area. So I can only
13 speak very clearly about Dumfries and Galloway, where we
14 were probably unique in that because of the temporary
15 role that I took on during COVID, I was able to bring a
16 youth work understanding and leadership role into a
17 wider community planning set, with discussions with the
18 chief executives of the council, NHS, third sector.
19 So as soon as schools were allowed to reopen, we
20 were very fortunate in that we were permitted to fully
21 reopen our youth work facilities across the region for
22 both third sector and our council. But my understanding
23 is that we were the only local authority at that point
24 who had done that, and it took away —— so I think it
25 would be important to acknowledge that again, it was

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1 that postcode lottery in terms of how it was done, but
2 we were then able to reopen that.
3 But that only came probably through the good fortune
4 of me being asked to take on that temporary role, as a
5 lot of others did during COVID, and being able to
6 influence within that space. It was not because of a
7 policy direction that came nationally, and also the
8 trust that our senior leaders had around understanding
9 what youth work was, because I was able to explain that
10 and articulate it to them.
11 But the challenge that still came with that was
12 that, you know, there was a lot of funding allocated
13 towards education to reopen around the requirements that
14 government had that, you know, whether about hand
15 sanitiser, whether about physical distancing, about
16 signage, none of that funding at the start came to youth
17 work in any sense for the local authorities, or within
18 the third sector.
19 So you're getting told you had to put in place A, B
20 and C to reopen, but you were expected to do that within
21 your existing resources, and from a local authority
22 perspective, and I could only think how much worse this
23 must have been for our third sector partners, we were
24 hugely fortunate in Dumfries and Galloway, that within
25 the week of opening, we managed to secure agreement to

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1 allocate 100,000 to reopening our youth work spaces.
2 But that again was not common across Scotland, and
3 it certainly wasn't common within our third sector
4 partners, but it allowed us to open, and what it did
5 allow was a number of other councils and third sector
6 organisations to then use Dumfries and Galloway as the
7 example, and be able to point and say: if they're doing
8 it, why are we not doing it. I know of at least seven
9 or eight local authorities that were able to lever money
10 from their council, partly because local authorities
11 were looking at each other to see what they were doing,
12 so we were able to point and say that D&G were doing
13 this. It allowed them to lever in —— have those
14 discussions and conversations in other places.
15 But again, to me, it goes back to that was probably
16 in spite of any policy direction that came nationally,
17 and it resulted in a different approach across all
18 organisations and local authority areas.
19 Q. Thank you very much. Finally, Ms Ross, on return to
20 face—to—face youth work and any issues?
21 KELLY ROSS: Just to pick up on from what other folk have
22 said, I think in terms of that return to face—to—face, a
23 couple of things, I think, maybe weren't taken into
24 account was maybe around young people who had been
25 shielding, or where families had been shielding, and the

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1 additional pressures that that would then have for them
2 young folk. So if I think of some of our —— again, our
3 young carers, our young people with additional support
4 needs and disabilities, I think it was really difficult
5 for them to integrate back into services.
6 So there was a recognition that for a lot of young
7 people, they had had enough of online learning or online
8 socialising, but there still needed to be that balance
9 to make sure that the service was accessible for all
10 young people. But again, they were still losing out on
11 that socialising with their peers in them settings.
12 I think just to pick up on something that Mark had
13 highlighted, was around the lack of the funding for
14 youth work reopening. But I also think in terms of
15 there seemed to be really clear, defined plans around
16 education reopening and what that would look like from
17 kind of mid to long—term, in terms of the support that
18 would need to be put in place for young people, and
19 I don't think that ever came for youth work, in terms of
20 the recognition of what youth work had done during the
21 pandemic, nor what that ongoing role would be.
22 And I think that's something that probably was just
23 really missed, because I do think at a lot of points, is
24 that return to face—to—face youth work became the
25 sticking plaster for a lot of things. Certainly for us

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1   within Dumfries and Galloway, we have really seen in
2   terms of that return to face—to—face an increase in
3   young people wanting to access services, so an increase
4   in demand of young people wanting that social
5   interaction .
6   And I think it was mentioned before, but young
7   people's behaviour was very different from what it had
8   been before we went into lockdowns, and we were really
9   lucky within our local authority that they invested
10 additional funding for a three—year project to try and
11 support the demand of that, both on the increase in
12 young people wanting to access services, but also
13 recognising the number of young people who were needing
14 just that little bit extra support in terms of low level
15 mental health. So that's what I have got in terms of
16 the return of face—to—face.
17 MS VAN DER WESTHUIZEN: Thank you very much. If we could
18 then move on to discuss issues around the rules,
19 guidance and communication which we've touched on
20 already, but I know there's a lot more to be said about
21 this, so if we could include, for example, issues around
22 timing, frequency, clarity and consistency of the
23 application of rules and guidance; differences or any
24 issues you experienced in relation to differences in
25 rules and guidance for Scotland compared to other parts

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1   of UK, across different parts of Scotland, and for youth
2   work compared to other sectors.
3   We have already spoken about education, but
4   education and any other sectors.
5   The accessibility of rules and guidance and the
6   extent to which communication was youth—friendly;
7   communication on pandemic information more widely, and
8   specifically in relation to guidance; and practical
9   consequences for your organisations of applying
10 particular rules of guidance when delivering youth work
11 and any other relevant key issues around that.
12   If we could perhaps start with Mr Luke, followed by
13 Mr Jordan, Mr Molloy, Ms Ross and then Ms Meehan.
14 MR LUKE: Thank you. I think the guidance was certainly an
15 area of real contention for all of us, because we
16 recognised the challenging environment in which any
17 government was operating and in terms of the pandemic,
18 but the —— we were all desperate to be clear about how
19 we got our services up and running, and to do that in a
20 safe environment.
21   And I think Mark already said earlier around the
22 challenge that we had from the public when we were doing
23 outdoor youth work particularly, because there was a
24 general message out that we had to socially distance, we
25 had to be safe, and then suddenly a group arrived in the

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1   middle of a park in the middle of a town. So the public
2   really struggled to get their head around how that was
3   safe, and we certainly had occasions where groups were
4   challenged by going back and taking part in activity .
5   I think YouthLink led the way in terms of making
6   sure that any guidance that came out of Scottish
7   Government was consistent for youth work, and there was
8   a group of people, of which I was one, put together
9   really quickly to try to determine what this looked like
10 in terms of safe return to face—to—face scouting or
11 youth work.
12   But the changing messages from different sectors was
13 really, really difficult to understand, and it was
14 really hard to explain to young people why they could do
15 something in one setting but not in another.
16   So, you know, I think we've mentioned earlier, the
17 first iteration of the guidance was 15 young people
18 outdoors in a space 2 metres apart. I have got these
19 figures wrapped in my brain, because we did find
20 ourselves going through our own local towns counting
21 young people, it was that stringent, and people were
22 concerned about were they following the right guidance.
23   I think for me the biggest challenge was to take
24 that guidance and then explain that to your own members,
25 because almost as soon as the First Minister sat down on

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1   the weekly briefings , we were getting messages from our
2   members, what does that —— what does that mean for us.
3   So getting to that clarity really quickly was really
4   important. We certainly didn't feel that our
5   organisations were considered as trusted partners in how
6   to deliver safe youth work, and so I think certainly as
7   far as the differing types of guidance, so for example,
8   we have over 200 activities as part of Scouts, some of
9   which are sports, some of which are adventurous, and no
10 guidance, no matter what you did in terms of the
11 guidance, was unique for what we did. And people
12 clambered to find the bit of the guidance that would
13 suit their needs, but actually we had to then bring them
14 back to the youth work guidance, which might have been
15 completely different from what a sports club was being
16 told. If you were meeting in a church then the spaces
17 for religious activity was very different from youth
18 work.
19   So you had to almost on a daily basis look at the
20 guidance and ascertain what that meant for our
21 organisation.
22   So I think in terms of then making sure that we then
23 put risk assessments in place so that all our volunteers
24 were following a safe practice was really important.
25 I think in terms of the UK, we obviously —— we're a

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1   national organisation across the UK, and the guidance
2   was different in England and Wales and Northern Ireland,
3   and it was really quite challenging to try to explain to
4   volunteers why they could do something in Scotland or
5   couldn't do something in Scotland, but they could in
6   England, so —— and then, of course, there was also the
7   issue of cross—border work, so if you happened to be in
8   Dumfries and Galloway, which is right on the border,
9   then there was an opportunity for volunteers to travel
10   across local authority boundaries, because that's where
11   they live, and they may volunteer in a different place,
12   but they couldn't do that because of the rules.
13   And I think the final thing I would say is I
14   mentioned earlier about the local authority boundaries.
15   There was some real challenge in terms of some of our
16   national campsites are based in one local authority,
17   literally a mile over a border, but we weren't able to
18   use them, and that was potentially safe spaces for young
19   people.
20   And I suppose my other point would be our national
21   activity centre, so we have three national activity
22   centres, but we have campsites all over the country, and
23   again, they all fell into different guidance as well, so
24   having to restrict young people's activity, and indeed
25   our finances, because obviously these centres all cost

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1   money, so we were able —— eventually able to open them
2   up, but that took a significant amount of time and a lot
3   of work, in terms of which elements of guidance.
4   And, sorry, I have just thought one last thing in
5   terms of the guidance. The final thing I would probably
6   say is it became an absolute minefield when it came to
7   looking for guidance, because you went on to the
8   Scottish Government website and clicked a link, and you
9   had no idea where you were.
10   So one minute you thought you were in the youth work
11   guidance, and because the links were all live links to
12   different bits of guidance, you had to really, really
13   read everything, and then you had to decide was that
14   actually written for a youth work setting, or had it
15   been written for some other setting, and the hyperlink
16   took you into a virtual space.
17   So I think a lot of our volunteers really struggled
18   to be safe, and it did create some —— you know, there
19   was people, I think as mentioned already, there was
20   people who were shielding, and they were very, very
21   nervous about getting back into that youth work setting.
22   So they wanted to be absolutely sure that the guidance
23   that they were following was the right guidance and was
24   going to keep people safe.
25 Q. Thank you, Mr Luke. Mr Jordan, would you like to come

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1   in on guidance rules, guidance and communication issues?
2 BARRY JORDAN: Yes, so I really echo what Graeme said.
3   I think the guidance was very confusing. I think this
4   led to LGBT Youth Scotland having a bit of a cautious
5   approach.
6   I think one of the biggest things was we felt a lot
7   of the time that we were trying to explain to young
8   people, as Graeme said, why they could do this there,
9   but not there; why this group was able to do that in
10   that school but not in that local authority, because
11   young people talk to each other across local
12   authorities. It was a very —— it was very confusing.
13   What I would say is that we were kind of left and we
14   really relied on, like I said, like Graeme said, about
15   the guidance from Youth Scotland.
16   So the other thing I would say as well is that
17   I don't think —— I don't think there was any, as far as
18   I can remember, communication that was directly to young
19   people to basically say, you know, this is what you can
20   and can't do, this is why. I think a lot of time youth
21   work was doing that job on behalf of, like, the
22   government, and I think a lot of schools were doing that
23   as well. It was really trying to translate and make the
24   guidance accessible for young people.
25   We work a lot with neurodivergent people, for

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1   example, and that —— we had a lot of experiences where
2   we were really trying to translate that guidance into a
3   level that they would understand. So I think, yes, it
4   just felt very, very confusing and led to a very
5   cautious approach from LGBT Youth Scotland.
6 Q. Thank you. Mr Molloy?
7 MARK MOLLOY: Thank you, and I probably really echo the
8   points that Barry and Graeme said there, but I think for
9   me that —— the role of YouthLink Scotland shouldn't be
10   underestimated at all. I think all national
11   organisations and local authorities were looking to
12   them, and they really stepped up to the plate in terms
13   of interpreting the Scottish Government guidance, but
14   also working alongside the civil servants and the
15   Scottish Government and Public Health Scotland to try as
16   best they could around the development of guidance. But
17   it wasn't enough because —— so they were fighting
18   against that, and I think that was something that the
19   sector did recognise that YouthLink did play that role.
20   So when the guidance was there, I know across
21   Dumfries and Galloway, a lot of —— particularly small
22   community—based youth groups that maybe aren't members
23   of national organisations were looking to us as the
24   council to provide them guidance, so then we had a group
25   locally who then was reinterpreting the guidance, and it

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1   came out nationally how that would impact and apply in
2   Dumfries and Galloway.
3   And I suppose that the risk with that always is then
4   that somebody interprets something differently from what
5   the intention is from Public Health Scotland, is the
6   lead professional in this, and around what that guidance
7   means for our local volunteers and staff, because
8   I think that —— there's two bits. I really completely
9   agree with what Barry said about the lack of guidance
10   aimed at young people. There was nothing produced in a
11   young person friendly format, or aimed at young people.
12   It was left to —— particularly some of the national
13   third sector organisations, such as Young Scot and
14   YouthLink —— and Youth Scotland to reinterpret that and
15   then help put it out. And I know that Young Scot did a
16   really good job with that as well over that time, but
17   there was always something about the protection of our
18   staff and volunteers.
19   Our staff and volunteers were looking at people
20   leading these services in national organisations to
21   reassure them that they're doing the right thing, to
22   reassure them that they're going to be safe, and —— that
23   were complying with guidance, and that put a heavy
24   burden on a lot of people that were leading those
25   services, to make sure that that was done correctly.

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1   And again, I think the collaboration at national
2   level from local authorities and third sector
3   organisations, it was some of the best examples of that.
4   And I think if there's a silver lining of COVID, I hope
5   it's a legacy that comes from that through that
6   collaboration that's there.
7   But again, I just think that the lack of guidance
8   that was there for youth work plays into the points I
9   have made before around the lack of understanding about
10   what youth work was, because if they knew the importance
11   that youth work could play in supporting young people's
12   wellbeing, then maybe more of a focus would have been
13   put on developing guidance that was suitable and
14   appropriate for the sector.
15   Q. Thank you. Ms Ross?
16   KELLY ROSS: I agree with what everyone else has said, and I
17   guess the only point I have got to add to that is
18   I think an additional challenge that we had, certainly
19   within Dumfries and Galloway, that has kind of been
20   raised is the fact that we are on the border, and I
21   think that became an additional thing for young people
22   to try and navigate, because for some of them young
23   people, they were trying to understand what it meant
24   here, but equally couldn't understand why ten minutes
25   down the road, their friends were maybe able to go to

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1   their youth club, or people were able to go and do
2   things that we still weren't able to do in Scotland.
3   And I think that was something that maybe just
4   hadn't been considered for those of us who were in the
5   kind of border areas between Scotland and England, of
6   where the difficulties of the rules being different
7   were, and I know very quickly that was picked up by the
8   government, as people started getting on trains to head
9   to England.
10   But I think for young people, that was really
11   difficult to navigate, because for some of them, it
12   could be that they lived, for example, in Gretna, but
13   for a lot of their socialising things, it would be that
14   they would be in Carlisle for that. So there was kind
15   of that part as well around having to find the balance
16   and operate between both sets of guidance.
17   Q. Thank you very much. And finally, Ms Meehan?
18   MICHELE MEEHAN: Yes, not a lot to add, but just, I suppose,
19   that there was a wee bit of a delay in that initial
20   youth work guidance, official guidance coming out, and I
21   know we, Youth Scotland, we created a post—lockdown
22   readiness guide, and the first version of that basically
23   was just reiterating that all you could do was digital
24   youth work at that point.
25   And then obviously as the phasing came in, and we

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1   took a bit of a steer from Youth Work Ireland who had
2   obviously produced that ahead of any guidance, official
3   guidance being available in Scotland, so there was that
4   initial delay in filling that gap, because when there
5   wasn't any official guidance, people were —— in the
6   absence of any guidance, were making their own
7   decisions. And we had some instances where groups,
8   youth groups from —— they were coming from a kind of
9   point of wanting to help young people, but were in
10   danger of actually breaching guidance, but because there
11   wasn't any official guidance, they were making their own
12   interpretation.
13   And I suppose just the other factor that the
14   guidance, some of it still stopped at too high a level,
15   and then there was still gaps, and so how do you
16   translate that if you're a part—time youth worker, if
17   you're a volunteer in a third sector organisation. So
18   we had to then do that next step and actually for our
19   membership, interpreting that, as Mark said,
20   interpreting it, and then basically saying: right, you
21   stick to our version of this, for good or bad, we've
22   taken the responsibility of doing that interpretation,
23   rather than leaving it up to individual kind of workers
24   or volunteers; you know, because that's too much
25   responsibility for them, because there were still quite

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1 a lot of anomalies within that, particularly around
2 things like transport, toilets, just very practical
3 things, the amount of phonecalls we got on a daily
4 basis, just around really practical issues, and people
5 just wanting an answer: can I do this, can I do that,
6 and us having to take some responsibility for that,
7 so ...
8 Q. Thank you very much.
9 MR LUKE: Just one final point there, and I think it relates
10 to the UK—wide approach. We took the view of having a
11 red, amber, yellow, green system, and the problem with
12 that, it did have a negative effect as well, because
13 other parts of the country were moving into different
14 stages of the guidance, and allowing to return to youth
15 work, but if you were in Scotland and you were in red,
16 and you weren't allowed to do anything other than
17 digital youth work, yet England were in amber, and were
18 moving forward with 15 young people, or whatever the
19 current guidance was, that had a double effect, because
20 the young people in different parts of the country were
21 seeing that they weren't able to do things their friends
22 were able to do, and that did have a knock—on effect.
23 Q. Thank you very much. I'm conscious of our time. We
24 have just over 15 minutes left. We have one more topic,
25 which is the other impacts on and challenges for youth

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1 work organisations, youth workers in the youth work
2 sector, but I would also like to give you all the
3 opportunity to say something about any potential lessons
4 to be learned.
5 So perhaps if I could ask you in this round just to
6 comment on both, so —— and just in terms of other
7 impacts, we heard a bit about this morning, so it can
8 include, for example, and not restricted to this:
9 impacts on mental health and wellbeing of youth workers
10 and volunteers; loss of youth workers and volunteers;
11 disparity in approach to funding between local
12 authorities during the pandemic, which I think Mr Molloy
13 has already touched on; and involvement in COVID—19
14 recovery planning or any other relevant issues that you
15 want to raise.
16 But then alongside that, if you could have your
17 second point being any potential key lessons to be
18 learned, and if we could start this perhaps with
19 Mr Jordan and work our way around the room, followed by
20 Mr Molloy, Ms Ross, Ms Meehan, and then finally Mr Luke.
21 BARRY JORDAN: Yes, so I think for us, our youth work team,
22 I think trying to deliver quite complex youth work —— I
23 notice certainly with our one—to—ones, trying to do
24 that, you know, in your home, I think someone alluded to
25 this earlier on, that that proved quite challenging at

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1 points for people. I think a lot of the youth work team
2 suddenly felt very isolated themselves, so we as an
3 organisation put a lot of things in place to try and
4 combat that, so we had a lot of reflection time for our
5 staff to come together online, we had different
6 activities and things for our youth work staff, just to
7 really have that space to kind of relax and catch up.
8 I would say as well that in terms of our volunteer
9 levels over the pandemic, they sort of —— they sort of
10 stayed the same, I would say, but what we noticed was as
11 things started to open up, our volunteer numbers dropped
12 quite significantly, and they've never really returned
13 to what they were before, so we sit at about 80 to 100
14 volunteers, whereas pre this pandemic, I think it would
15 be about 150 volunteers we had. And it's taken us a
16 long time to be able to retain volunteers at the same
17 level. We're getting there now.
18 What I would also say, though, is during the
19 pandemic, I think that a lot of young people, and I'm
20 speaking here just not within the LGBT Youth, but
21 I think a lot of young people really stepped up to the
22 mark and were volunteering in their communities, where I
23 think previously they might not have done that. I think
24 a lot of young people really, really were willing to
25 volunteer their time to do things, and I don't think

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1 there's —— just —— this sort of leads me on to things
2 the government can maybe do differently in the future,
3 is I think there was no real recognition of that, the
4 impact that young people had in giving their time and
5 volunteering their time during the pandemic and after
6 it, so, yes, I think that's pretty much all of it.
7 Q. Thank you very much, Mr Jordan. Mr Molloy.
8 MARK MOLLOY: Thank you. I think in terms of the first
9 point, I think that the role again that some sort of our
10 national voluntary organisations played in terms of
11 bringing people together from across the country so that
12 youth workers could, you know, have conversations with
13 each other, learn from each other, and just an
14 opportunity to share with peers in different areas and
15 to an extent share the pain that they were all going
16 through at that point with each other was really
17 pivotal. And I'm just going to leave it to Kelly to
18 touch on some of the local things because it was her
19 that led that during it as opposed to me, but I think
20 the key bit for me is that the lessons learned with this
21 is that, from my perspective, again goes back to a
22 national level, government, Public Health Scotland,
23 national organisations, is the parity of esteem between
24 youth work and education and understanding they're both
25 complementing each other and they're trying to achieve

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1   the same outcomes and actually it shouldn't be one
2   before the other, it should be around reopening and
3   supporting young people at the same time. The other key
4   lesson maybe something that has not been mentioned when
5   we talk about youth work particularly within a local
6   authority area, setting, is large numbers of our youth
7   work workforce within Scotland's local authorities were
8   redeployed to other roles within councils during the
9   pandemic so in some councils the youth work service
10 didn't actually exist because their staff were all
11 redeployed to do other things, whether it be delivery of
12 food parcels, or other things that were absolutely
13 well—meaning and important but that was maybe again
14 because of the lack of understanding at a senior level
15 around the impact that youth work could have and how it
16 can support the wellbeing of young people and the
17 education of them. So I think a key lesson for me would
18 be around the way that other workforces were protective
19 around those resources staying to work in certain areas
20 about the need to be doing that with our youth work
21 staff going ahead across local authorities. And the
22 final bit for me is I think to me this underpins a lot
23 of this is about government understanding that young
24 people did step up to the plate, young people were
25 responsible during this, young people did the best they

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1   could when they were hearing those scary messages coming
2   out of government about how they could transmit
3   COVID—19, how they had to stay in and save lives, et
4   cetera. Actually young people did step up to the plate.
5   They were the ones quite often going out and taking the
6   risk, if you like, to go to the shop or going to do
7   things for elderly parents and neighbors, et cetera, and
8   I don't think those young people were ever thanked in
9   Scotland for the role that they played but I think then
10 because they did that and because this, and touch wood
11 it never happens again, but if this happened again,
12 knowing that actually we do have a group of young
13 citizens in Scotland that are willing to step up, help
14 and support their communities and at the very least in
15 return for that government should be communicating with
16 those young people, putting a message out to those young
17 people directly during the pandemic to make sure that
18 they're informed of the information in a way that they
19 would understand and at the end of it and I think it is
20 still something that's missing at the moment is that
21 young people are now engaged in community activity and
22 social action across Scotland but it was never
23 positively impact —— positively seen even at the end of
24 the pandemic in terms of the role that young people
25 could do and I think that was something that was missed.

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1   Q. Thank you very much. Ms Ross.
2   KELLY ROSS: In terms of other impacts I think there was
3   just a couple of things that I had, was one of the
4   things that I think that where there was a negative
5   impact was potentially that of the health and wellbeing
6   of staff and volunteers within the youth work sector and
7   also around some services that seemed to disappear or
8   change to online that then just have never returned,
9   still leaving that gap. And I think just one of the
10 other things around potential lessons is I think like
11 anybody who comes from the youth work sector would see
12 they feel quite proud of how the youth work sector
13 responded during the pandemic and I think that is
14 because, like Mark mentioned before, there was training
15 offered, online things changed really quickly, but
16 I think some of that was never really recognised as a
17 key service or as a service that was having a direct
18 impact on people living in the communities and I think
19 that potentially is one of the lessons that needs to be
20 learned, touch wood, if we're ever in this situation
21 again, that youth work is seen as a key role within this
22 and also is able to support to make sure there was no
23 communication direct with young people. Again that's
24 something that really needs to change or improve next
25 time, and I think again that's a role that youth work

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1   then could be —— could be there in making sure that
2   we're able to work with young people to make sure that
3   that's understood. And I think that's it from me.
4   Q. Thank you. Ms Meehan?
5   MICHELE MEEHAN: Yes, just picking up on those points, so
6   I think just real recognition of how positive the
7   behaviours of the majority of young people were during
8   the pandemic given that, you know, their loss of freedom
9   and liberty and all these things that they did, you
10 know. We hear all the negatives about antisocial
11 behaviour of young people but I think there needs to be
12 a real recognition that during those key times that the
13 majority of young people were very, very responsible
14 citizens and like I say took active roles in their
15 community, doing food provision, doing all sorts of
16 other additional things, so I think to recognise that.
17 As Kelly said, the impact on the workforce, you know, a
18 lot of the youth workers were working excess of hours
19 to be there available for young people when they were
20 needed out of hours and with very little kind of ongoing
21 support, they upscaled themselves really rapidly, so
22 they took on board a lot of extra responsibilities when
23 some of the other statutory services weren't available
24 and certainly the feedback from us is that youth workers
25 have always been involved in young people's lives but

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much more direct engagement with the families,
particularly marginalised families, and all the stress
and burnout that comes with that so there is a real
issue about self care of the youth work workforce
ongoing as a result of that because I think it had a
kind of major effect on a lot of youth workers' kind of
health and wellbeing. And then finally just the issue
about funding. There were quite a lot emergency pots of
funding during the immediate pandemic which were very
welcomed by the youth work sector, most of those have
gone, and again all these lessons that we've learned
about the role of youth work, the funding landscape is
pretty dire for youth work at the moment so that hasn't
been sustained so it feels quite sad that even in the
immediate aftermath, we don't seem to have learned from
those lessons. And one of the comments that always
sticks in my head, in one of the reporters with STV
children's appeal, one of the funders that we worked
with closely during the pandemic, was the feedback that
people felt that youth workers were first to respond but
last to the table when decisions were being made about
recovery and, you know, so the role was valued in the
immediate term but not —— hasn't been valued longer—term
about the role and the knowledge they have of young
people and families and that the role that the

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intelligence they have got about young people so just
that kind of —— yes.
Q. Thank you very much. And finally, Mr Luke.
MR LUKE: Yes, again I won't repeat what everybody else has
said. I think there's something for me around clear
messaging. There was a real feeling of uncertainty in
terms of the difference between UK and Scottish
guidance. We had "hands, face, space" in England. We
had FACTS, which nobody understood. I couldn't now tell
you what all four letters or five letters stand for.
I could give you some of them. And I think in terms of
trying to encourage young people to engage in clear
messaging, I think clear messaging was really important.
In terms of volunteering, we saw —— we stabilised
volunteering quite well through the pandemic, we haven't
lost lots of adults but some people have definitely
taken less roles than they perhaps had before so where
they might have had two or three volunteer roles and
been out three or four times a week, they prioritised
family more during the pandemic because they had to so
actually getting them to come back to the more
volunteering space has been a bit more challenging. In
terms of community, there is no question that we
absolutely smashed it in terms of community involvement.
We had a huge amount of creativity of programmes that

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were developed by our amazing volunteers across the
country to engage local communities in a way that they
had never done before and although we have always been a
community—based organisation, this opportunity to go out
and do things for our neighbours, our friends, you know,
whatever it was, was really quite inspiring.
In terms of lessons for the future, I think we need
to trust the sector. We've —— I can only speak for
Scouts, we have 117 years worth of experience in working
with young people across all communities across the
country and it didn't always feel like that was
understood by people that were making decisions.
I think Barry made the point earlier, we need to engage
young people in their society and actually when we did
that, and Michele has mentioned that, some of the things
that came out of these young people were phenomenal.
They came up with the goods in what was a really
challenging situation. They did go on cameras. I have
got examples of young people in keep—fit classes across
their conservatories and houses in individual spaces
because they were desperate to reconnect with their
friends and family, so I think we have to recognise
that. And the power of volunteering is a huge
contribution to the economy. People volunteer across
the country week in week out. They add something which

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is rich to our country. And, you know, to recognise
that, it does feel, as Michele said, that that's gone
backwards slightly rather than forwards.
The financial implications of the pandemic,
certainly I can only speak for our charity, we got some
great funding but we had to fight for it in order to
be —— for our activity centres to be protected. The
outcome of that is that we're now seeing a really
challenging financial landscape in the coming years and
that worries me because I think in 2022 all local
authorities and youth work sector got access to funding
for what was called the "summer of play" initiative,
which was a fantastic way of getting all our young
people outdoors after having been restricted for two
years but that funding is no longer there so I think
there just needs to be lessons learned that actually you
have got —— we have got a group of people who are
absolutely committed across the whole nation to develop
our young people, you know, in partnership with
education because, you know, not all young people are
going to be academic but actually to get them to
positive spaces and give them those skills for life that
they deserve, we have to be prepared to invest in that
for the future, so I think for me the lesson is
recognise the power of volunteering, the power of youth

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1   work, as a positive contribution to society because
2   without it, we are relying on just education and not all
3   young people are going to have that experience and have
4   a positive output.
5 Q. Thank you very much. My Lord, we have one minute to go
6   until our deadline of half past. I understand we do
7   need a short break but not too short a break for the
8   stenographers. I understand we can run straight into
9   closing comments, which will not be extensive but we
10   need a few minutes to allow the witnesses to be escorted
11   out so perhaps I'll stay put and wait for the escort to
12   happen.
13 THE CHAIR: All right, I'm perfectly happy with that. How
14   long do you want? Do you want ten minutes or something
15   of that order?
16 MS VAN DER WESTHUIZEN: I understand that Opus doesn't need
17   a break at all; we just need a pause essentially to
18   allow the witnesses out.
19 THE CHAIR: Rather an imprecise measure of time, the word
20   "pause", but we'll never worry about that. Very good.
21   To the panellists, thank you very much indeed. We will
22   now take a short pause, whatever that might be.
23   (Short pause)
24 MS VAN DER WESTHUIZEN: My Lord, I think that might be the
25   pause. The witnesses have left the room so perhaps ...

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1 THE CHAIR: We're all set up for ...
2 MS VAN DER WESTHUIZEN: We are, I think we can just press
3   on. As I said, I will be under five minutes, it's just
4   really a couple of comments.
5 THE CHAIR: I'm sure if we're doing it wrongly, we'll be
6   told.
7   Closing comments by MS VAN DER WESTHUIZEN
8 MS VAN DER WESTHUIZEN: My Lord, that concludes the oral
9   impact evidence relating to the delivery of education
10   and certification. As I mentioned in my opening
11   statement at the start of the hearings, the impact
12   evidence we've heard during the course of the last few
13   weeks, the oral evidence as well as the rest of the
14   impact evidence that the Portfolio 4 team has gathered,
15   which as I said was in the form of 134 witness
16   statements, 73 responses to requests for information
17   under Rule 8, and the reports of 26 roundtable
18   discussions will form the basis of the narrative record
19   of all the impact evidence. That record will highlight
20   the key issues and impacts that have been identified and
21   is due to be published during the course of 2025. As I
22   also mentioned, my Lord, at the preliminary hearing,
23   your Lordship has issued a direction in relation to
24   closing statements for this set of hearings in terms of
25   which core participants those with leave to appear may

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1   if they so wish submit written closing statements to the
2   Inquiry. That, my Lord, by way of reminder for the core
3   participants, is to be by no later than 12 noon on
4   29 January 2025, is to be no longer than 2,500 words,
5   and should have regard to the end terms of the appendix
6   to that direction which is available on the Inquiry
7   website.
8   Finally, my Lord, I would like to express gratitude
9   for the Portfolio 4 team and the Inquiry to all those
10   core participants and non-core participants who have so
11   generously given their time to assist the Inquiry with
12   these investigations into the impacts relating to the
13   delivery of education and certification and that's been
14   both through engagement with the legal team and through
15   Let's Be Heard.
16   My Lord, that helpful evidence that we've received
17   in relation to impacts will continue to inform our
18   ongoing investigations in relation to implementation and
19   decision-making.
20   My Lord, unless I can be of further assistance, that
21   concludes these hearings from counsel's perspective.
22 THE CHAIR: Thank you very much indeed, Ms van der
23   Westhuizen. I think all I should say at this stage is
24   to both thank you and indeed praise you for the very
25   smooth and efficient way in which these oral hearings

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1   were heard. It has not passed my notice and I'm sure it
2   will not have passed the notice of everyone else that
3   you conformed more or less precisely to the timetable
4   every day and that assisted everybody; both behind the
5   scenes and myself here in hearing the evidence. I would
6   like you to thank your junior counsel who deserve credit
7   also for the smooth running of these hearings and to the
8   solicitors team who are not seen so much but work very
9   hard behind the scenes to assist you in delivering the
10   evidence that we've heard over the past three weeks or
11   so, so thank you all, and that brings this part of the
12   Inquiry to an end.
13 MS VAN DER WESTHUIZEN: I'm obliged, my Lord.
14 (3.33 pm)
15   (The hearing was concluded)
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