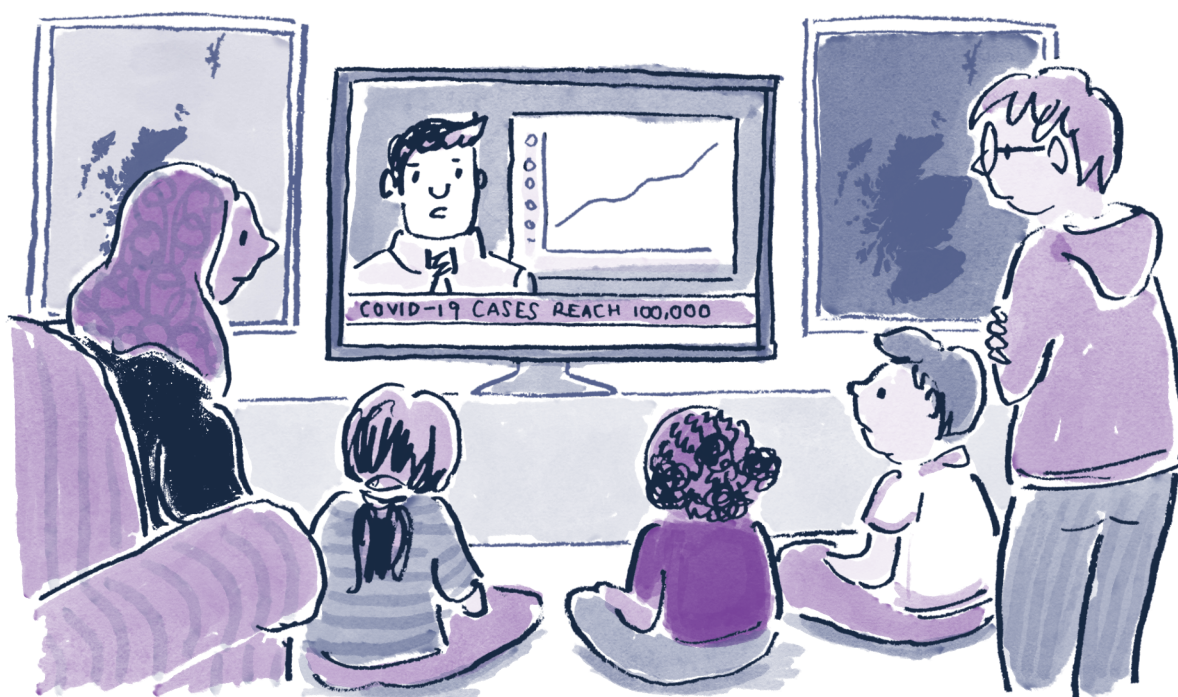




What is Let's Be Heard?

Let's Be Heard is the Scottish COVID-19 Inquiry's public participation project. The independent public inquiry is investigating the devolved strategic response to the COVID-19 pandemic in Scotland between 1 January 2020 and 31 December 2022. It will establish the facts, identify lessons to be learned and make recommendations to Scottish Ministers, so Scotland is better prepared in future.



Let's Be Heard has been established to give people living in Scotland, or affected by decisions made in Scotland during that period, the opportunity to share their experiences and the lessons they believe should be learned from them.

Participating in Let's Be Heard is the main way in which people can engage with the Inquiry to help inform its investigations, reporting and recommendations. It would not have been possible for the Inquiry to hear as many experiences of the pandemic from the people of Scotland without Let's Be Heard, and the Inquiry is grateful to those who have shared their experiences.



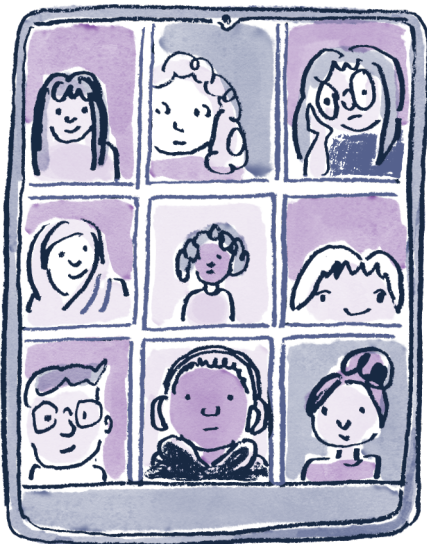
Purpose of this case study

Let's Be Heard has given a voice to children and young people who wanted to share their experiences of the pandemic. Engaging directly with Let's Be Heard offered them an opportunity to participate in the Inquiry in a way that suited them. It would not be possible to hear from everyone at oral hearings but Let's Be Heard created bespoke engagement methods for children and young people and successfully captured the voices of more than 2,000 children and young people across Scotland. This case study shares key themes emerging from these experiences. As one respondent said:

"Just listen to us.

Listen to us, please."

(Excerpt from a poem sent by a respondent, age 18)

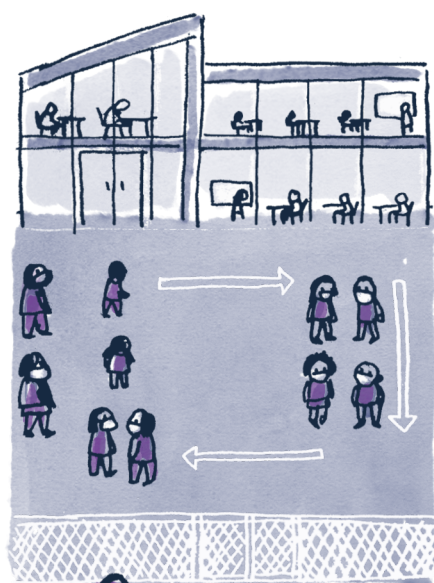
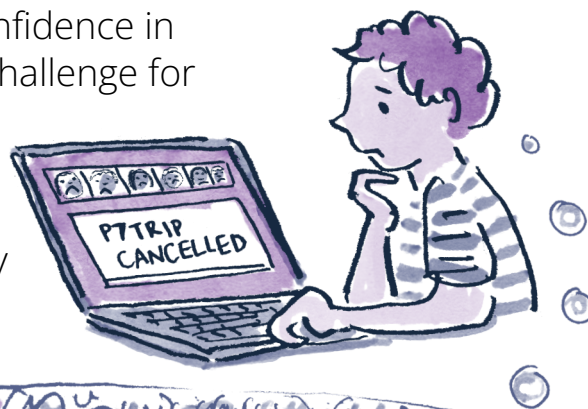


These key themes represent the views of those who engaged with Let's Be Heard. They do not represent, nor anticipate, the Inquiry's conclusions or recommendations. People who engaged with Let's Be Heard did so voluntarily and this case study does not claim or seek to reflect the voices of all children and young people in Scotland.

Main observations

Education delivery

Children and young people expressed various challenges with the shift to remote learning when educational institutions closed. Some found the lesson delivery and teaching support did not meet their needs, and many had to rely on support from home, which was not always available. Access to and confidence in using digital tools was also cited as a challenge for learning at home. Many respondents felt the second lockdown was a smoother shift to remote learning than the first, but all expressed dismay at missing out on key educational rites, events, and transitions.



Outbreak prevention measures and guidance in schools

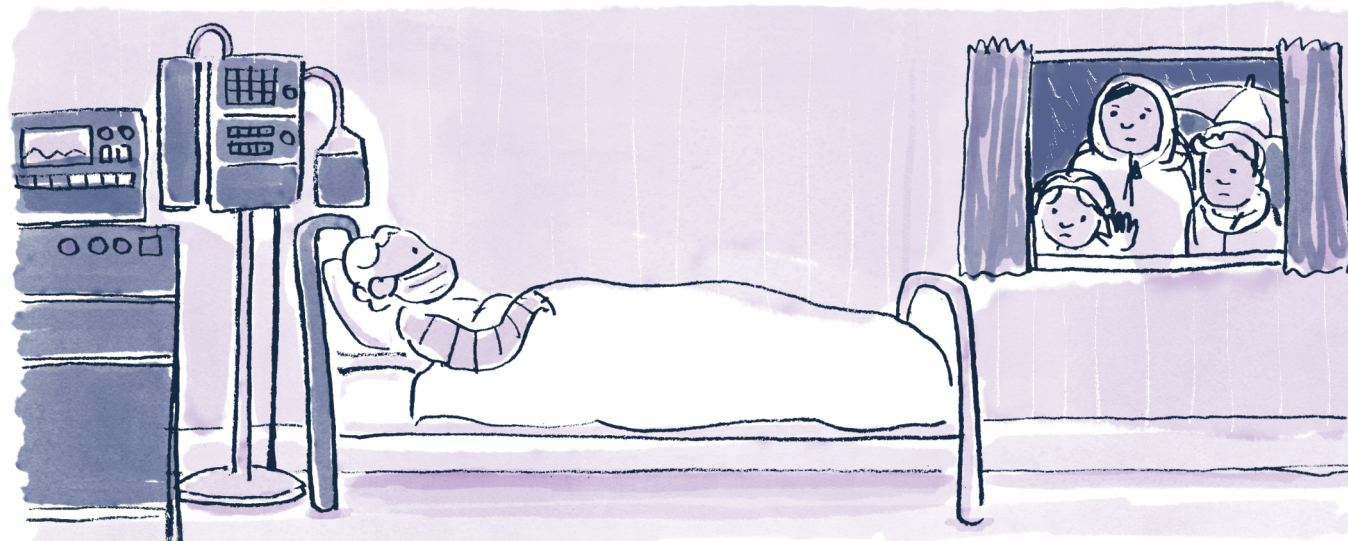
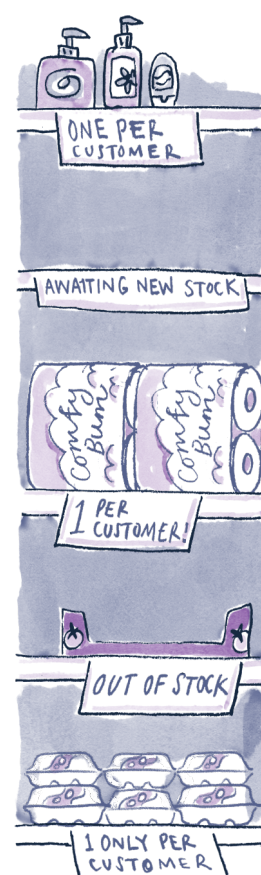
Many of the experiences shared by children and young people centred on the return to schools and in-person learning, including challenges in understanding outbreak prevention measures used in schools. Some found these measures – such as mask-wearing, one-way systems in corridors, and playground separation – challenging and socially restricting. For example, some respondents described masks as uncomfortable, with some saying masks made it hard to communicate.

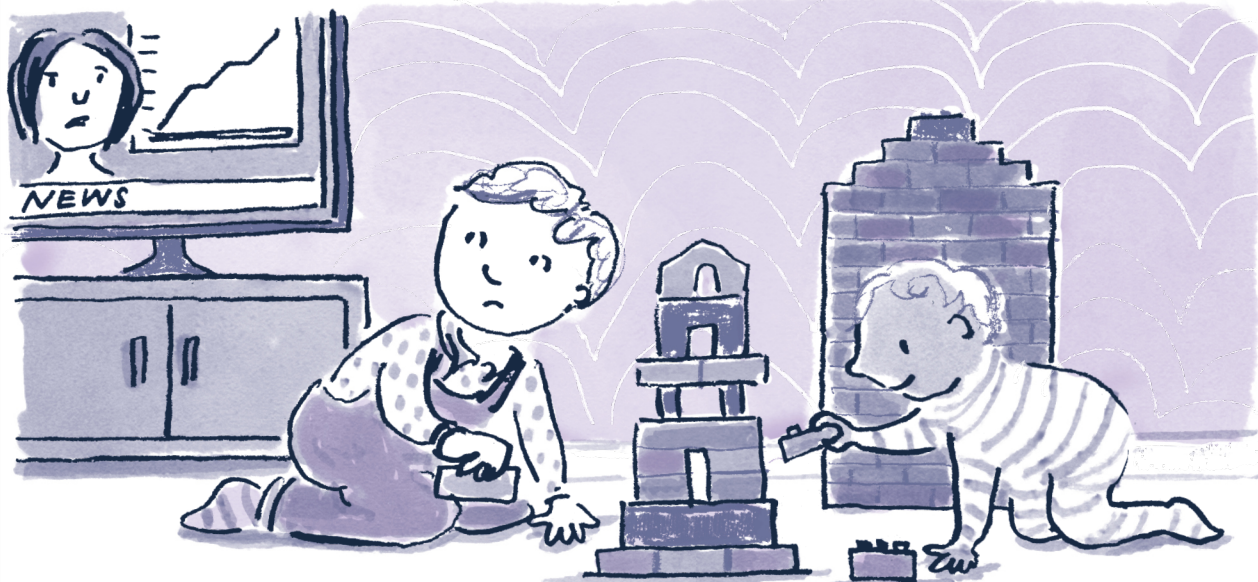




The Scottish Government's pandemic response and decision-making

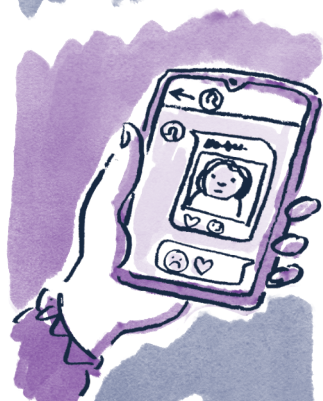
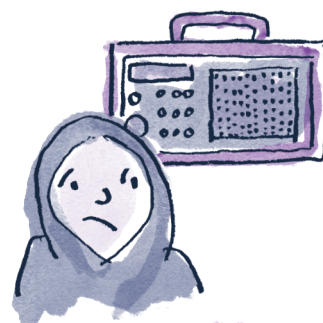
Many children and young people described the communication of rules and guidance as unclear and sometimes confusing, contributing to feelings of fear and uncertainty. Some respondents said schools should have been kept open due to their importance for both education and socialisation, and many felt this could have been done with infection control measures in place. They shared sadness at not being able to go outside and not being able to see family and friends. This was particularly difficult for respondents who were bereaved. Respondents also experienced challenges shopping for food and commented on shortages. There were mixed views on the delivery of vaccinations.





Mental health and wellbeing

Mental wellbeing was a dominant theme in the responses from children and young people. References to mental health permeated people's recollections of navigating education, social networks, home and family life during the pandemic, as respondents reflected on the emotional impact of the pandemic on their lives. Boredom was expressed as a key issue, often linked to feelings of isolation and loneliness. Many respondents described feeling anxious and uncertain about a variety of things during the pandemic, including their safety and the safety of loved ones, feeling helpless in the face of ill or dying family members, and hearing bad news about the pandemic and the number of deaths. Feelings of uncertainty also impacted respondents' mental health and wellbeing. Some respondents described worsening mental health, including obsessive hygiene rituals and eating disorders, suicidal thoughts, and self-harm.



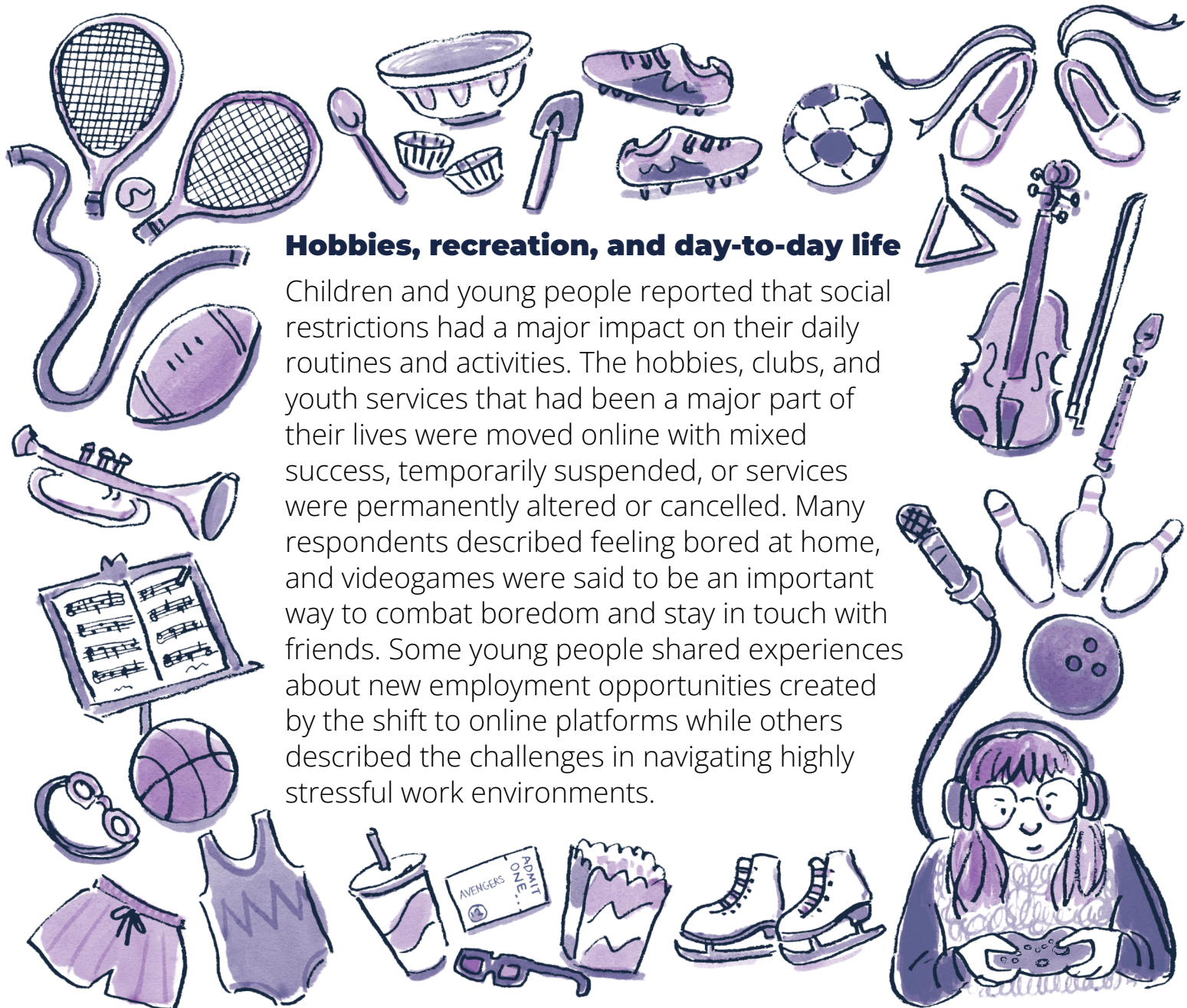
Social development

Many children and young people talked about the negative impact of the pandemic on their social skills and new feelings of social anxiety, as well as feeling they had missed out on important and formative years of their life. Some respondents reflected on the impact the pandemic had on their body-image, with some saying that staying at home led them to exercise less and eat more, with some mentioning weight-gain or saying they became more self-conscious.



Home and family life

Children and young people's experiences of the pandemic varied widely depending on personal circumstances. While some respondents expressed positive experiences of family support and bonding, others expressed negative emotional experiences such as sadness, isolation and worry about themselves and their loved ones. Particular mention was made of their concern for parents who were key workers, the inability to see loved ones, and missing out on important events such as holidays and birthdays. Some respondents spoke about the challenges dealing with the shielding requirements of family members, which could result in further isolation or increased responsibilities. Some respondents described home as a place of comfort and safety while others reported not feeling safe, either emotionally or physically. A few respondents shared that they faced aggression or abuse, while others felt trapped, or unfairly treated in their communities.



Hobbies, recreation, and day-to-day life

Children and young people reported that social restrictions had a major impact on their daily routines and activities. The hobbies, clubs, and youth services that had been a major part of their lives were moved online with mixed success, temporarily suspended, or services were permanently altered or cancelled. Many respondents described feeling bored at home, and videogames were said to be an important way to combat boredom and stay in touch with friends. Some young people shared experiences about new employment opportunities created by the shift to online platforms while others described the challenges in navigating highly stressful work environments.

Positive perspectives on outcomes of lockdown

Some children and young people expressed how the pandemic provided opportunities for positive developments, including allowing more time for relaxation, leisure activities, and the development of new skills. Some respondents shared positive descriptions of new-found independence, increased sleep, and using digital tools to stay in touch with friends and loved ones.



Spotlights

This case study draws focus to different communities and groups who experienced unique or unequal impacts, in line with the Inquiry's Terms of Reference. 'Spotlights' are featured on children and young people from rural and island communities, minority ethnic perspectives, very young children, those who had caring responsibilities, male and female insights, neurodivergent children and young people, and long COVID.

Children and young people from rural and island communities



Minority ethnic perspectives



Very young children

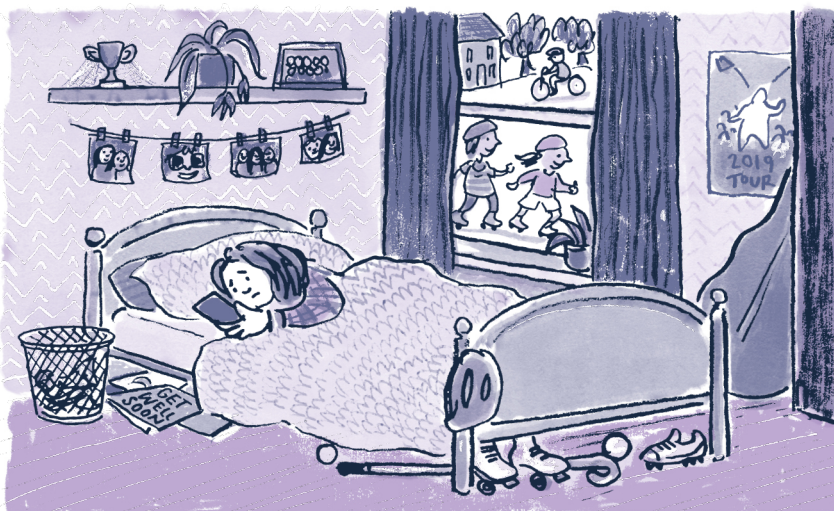


**Those who
had caring
responsibilities**



**Male and
female insights**

**Neurodivergent
children and
young people**



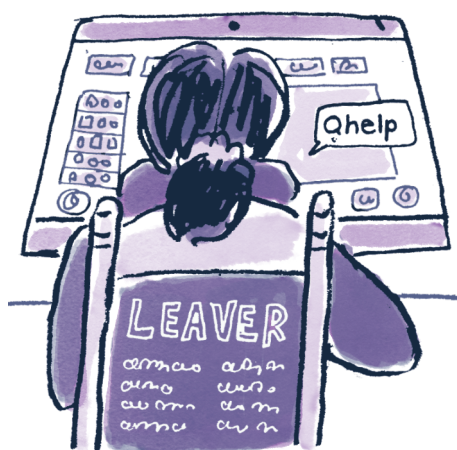
Long COVID

Children and Young People's views on lessons to be learned

Children and young people gave their views to Let's Be Heard on the lessons they thought should be learned from the COVID-19 pandemic, including:

Better support in education

Respondents wanted more academic support from teachers during the pandemic as well as support for mental health and wellbeing. They said this should have included specific support for those with additional support needs, and those in P7 preparing to move to secondary school. Similarly, respondents in higher education said they felt there should have been more student-specific support and wanted to be consulted in the decision-making on issues surrounding their education.



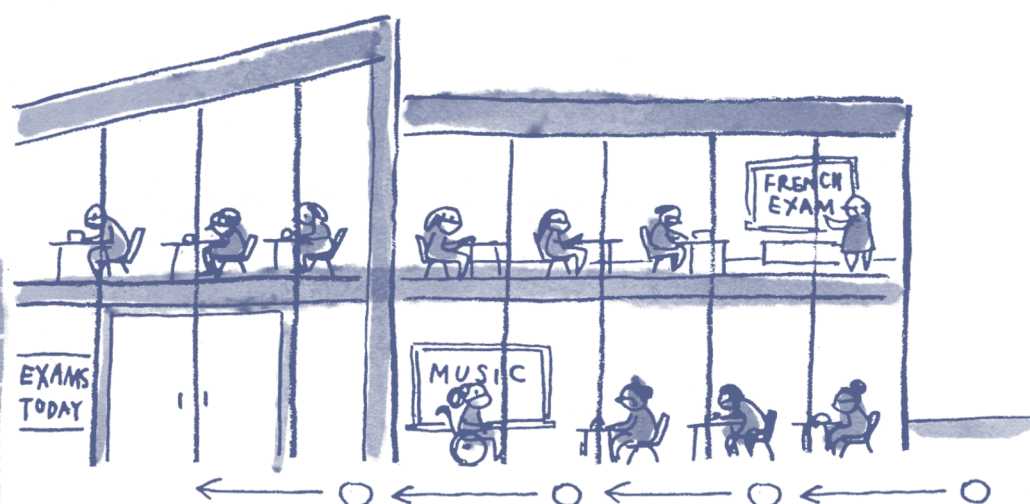
Education delivery

Respondents said that if there were another pandemic that led to school closures, they would need more engaging online lessons and remote learning. This should include more online calls with teachers and timetables which reflected normal school days. Respondents said that teachers should have received adequate training on how to confidently use technology to deliver their classes online. Respondents also said there should have been better arrangements to ensure all young people had access to the equipment and technology required to participate in online learning.



Alternative arrangements

Respondents shared they wanted wider access to hub schools, in particular for children and young people from challenging domestic situations including young carers, those living with relatives who were shielding, and those living with parents who were key workers. Respondents said they wanted clearer communication on alternative assessment arrangements. This should have included information specifically tailored to children and young people, outlining the alternative arrangements and how they would be impacted by the changes.



Mental health and wellbeing

Respondents said they wanted better mental health support for children and young people generally as well as from specific groups such as schools, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), and public health services. This support should include better signposting of available resources, wider CAMHS eligibility criteria, and shorter waiting times. Respondents also said there should be measures in place to support those living in challenging domestic situations, including young carers, those shielding, and those living with relatives who were shielding.



Closures and restrictions

Respondents felt that certain restrictions could have been less strict during the pandemic, such as allowing more access to outdoor spaces and having schools open more by enforcing better infection control measures. Respondents also said they would have liked more flexibility to visit family from other households, as well as more access to visit family in hospital or care settings.



Information and communication

Respondents felt more effort should have been made to keep children and young people informed about what rules were coming into force, and why they were needed.



Providing food support

Respondents also shared suggestions on how to improve food support for those who couldn't access shops or were facing financial hardship.



OUT OF STOCK

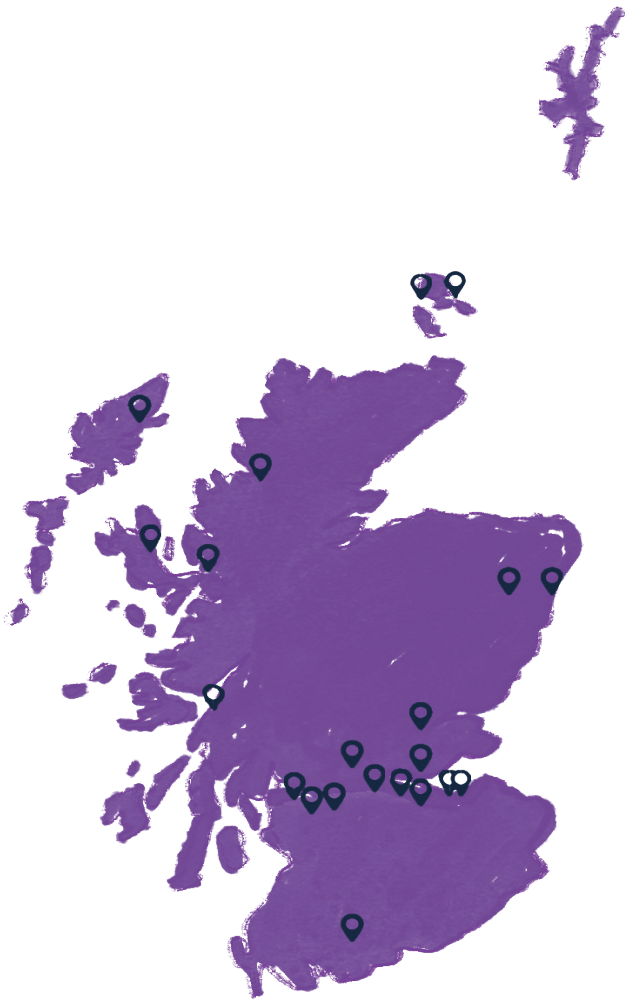
Participants in Let's Be Heard

Where Let's Be Heard held events with children and young people

Since May 2023, more than 12,500 people have shared their experiences with Let's Be Heard, including over 2,000 children and young people across Scotland.

This case study examines the responses from children and young people aged up to and including 25 years.

This map of Scotland has 21 location markers showing where Let's Be Heard held a total of 10 awareness raising and 28 in-person engagement events with children and young people.



Based on the demographic information Let's Be Heard received...

- fewer than 1% of respondents were aged 7 years or younger, 14% aged 8-11 years, 46% aged 12-15 years, 13% aged 16-18 years, 7% aged 19-25 years and 19% did not provide their age.
- 53% of respondents were in primary school during the first lockdown (March 2020), 13% were in secondary, 3% in early years education and fewer than 1% were in other educational settings, for example, homeschooling. The remaining 30% did not share this information.
- 44% of respondents were female, 35% were male, 2% selected 'prefer not to say', 1% reported other identities (for example, non-binary) and the remaining 18% did not answer the question.
- 11% of respondents across surveys E, A and B, were from minority ethnic backgrounds, 53% of respondents were not. The remaining 36% did not report their ethnicity.

Help and Support

If you have been affected by the content of this summary, there may be organisations which can provide support, including the organisations listed below. All of these organisations are independent of the Scottish COVID-19 Inquiry.

Breathing Space

Link: www.breathingspace.scot or call 0800 838 587

Chest Heart & Stroke Scotland

Link: www.chss.org.uk/coronavirus/coronavirus-information-and-support/long-covid/ or call 0808 801 0899

Childline

Link: www.childline.org.uk or call 0800 1111

Citizen's Advice Scotland

Link: www.cas.org.uk or call 0800 028 1456

Cruse Scotland

Link: www.crusescotland.org.uk or call 0808 802 6161

Marie Curie Scotland

Link: www.mariecurie.org.uk/help/support or call 0800 090 2309

Money Advice Scotland

Link: www.moneyadvicescotland.org.uk/help-for-people-with-money-worries or email info@moneyadvicescotland.org.uk

Samaritans Scotland

Link: www.samaritans.org/scotland or call 116 123

Scottish Association for Mental Health

Link: www.samh.org.uk or call 0344 800 0550



“Just listen to us.
Listen to us, please.”

