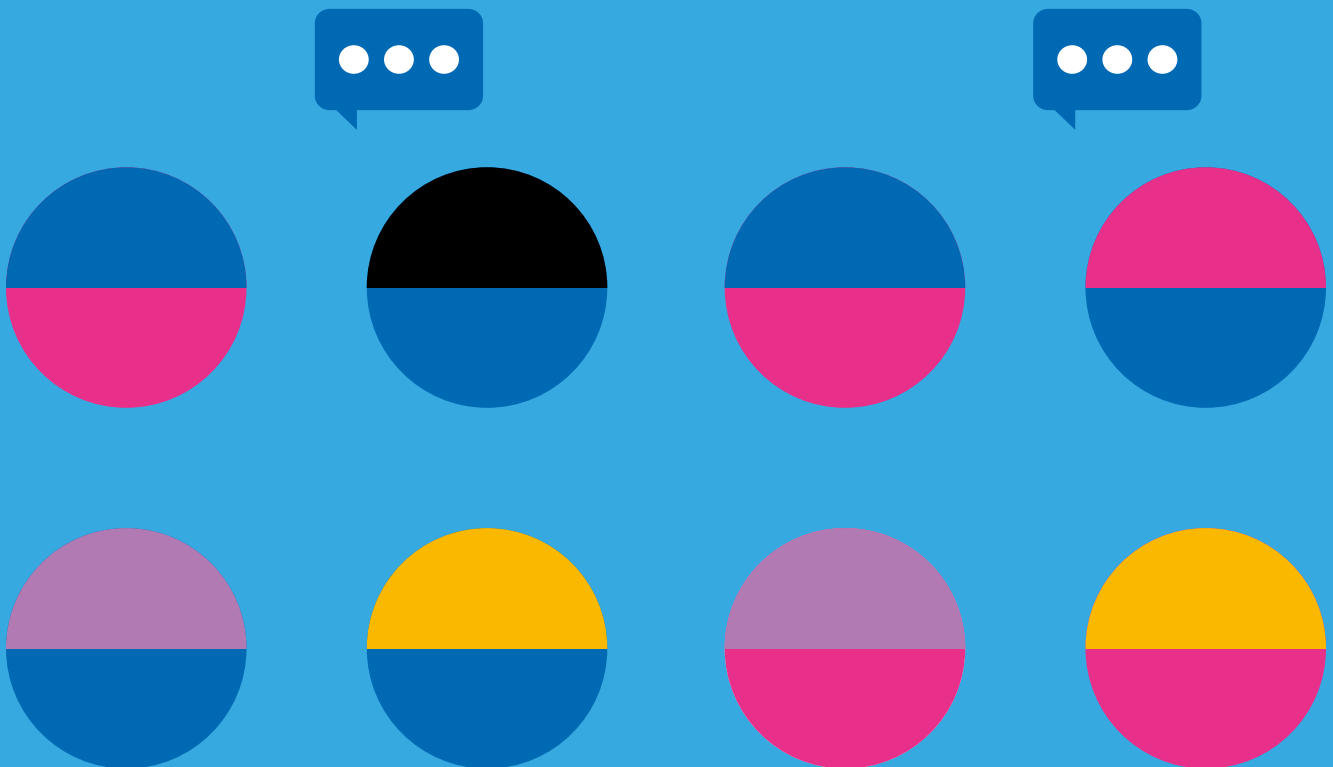


Coronavirus and Me:

Survey Responses from
young people aged 15-18



On 13th May 2020, the 'Coronavirus and Me' survey was launched to find out about the experiences of children and young people in Wales. This survey captured information about the lives of over 23,700 children between the ages of 3-18, and ran for a two-week period during which restrictions to keep communities in Wales safe had been in place for two months.



The Coronavirus and Me survey was a partnership between four organisations:

- **Welsh Government**
- **Children's Commissioner for Wales**
- **Welsh Youth Parliament**
- **Children in Wales**

The Children's Commissioner's office led on all project management with financial independence from Welsh Government and other partners. The Children's Commissioner is the data owner for this project and is responsible for the production of this report.

In early June 2020 we published a report with headline findings from this survey¹. In that report we committed to further analysis of the findings. One strand of analysis we have undertaken is to explore the impact of the restrictions on everyday life in Wales for young people aged 15-18. We are also producing reports on the findings from the survey results from children, according to self-declared ethnic group and children and young people who identified as having disabilities.

This report relays the experiences reported to us by a total of 4,417 young people aged 15-18, who represent 18.6% of the total survey respondents. The original survey was designed as a broad, whole-population survey, and this report comes from a subset of the overall data. The survey

questions focused on broad experiences for this reason, and although we asked some questions about children educated other than at school, educated at home, college or university, and apprenticeships and training, the majority of the responses reflect the experiences of children usually educated at a school. We have acknowledged this within the paper and sought to draw out the experiences of all young people in this age group wherever possible. Some responses specifically related to the school experience and therefore the analysis of those responses is restricted to those respondents only.

The analysis for this report has been carried out in-house by CCFW staff.

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank Sylfaen Cymunedol and Colegau Cymru for reviewing and offering their advice on this paper before publication.

1. Children's Commissioner for Wales (2020) Coronavirus and Me. Available at: https://www.childcomwales.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/FINAL_formattedCVRep_EN.pdf

Introduction from

Professor Sally Holland

Children's Commissioner for Wales
October 2020

This briefing provides an in-depth look at the experiences of young people aged 15-18 who responded to our survey, *Coronavirus and Me*. The survey took place in May 2020 – long before the exams results controversy - but it reveals that the uncertainties faced by this age group started long before results day. For years these young people had been told about the importance of their GCSEs, A levels and equivalent vocational qualifications. In this briefing young people's feelings about their cancellation are explored.

But these young people's lives are not just focused on exams and neither is this briefing.

As a result of the Coronavirus pandemic and public health measures, older children have experienced a significant shift in the way they live their lives, ranging from how they see their friends and family, to how they learn, go to work and support their families. Whilst many young people of this age have not been worried about becoming ill with Coronavirus themselves, they have shown concern for vulnerable members of their families and communities, and have shown us that they face huge uncertainties in their futures. Exams disruption, an abrupt end to school and college life for many, economic uncertainty, and what some young people have reported as unclear advice and guidance from the Government, all have shown to have had a significant impact on the way this group of young people perceive the future.

I am pleased that young people have shared in this survey how they have used this time to be compassionate, productive and creative and that so many have shown resilience in the face of unprecedented change. But we cannot ignore how young people have shared with us how their emotional and mental health has been negatively affected by this uncertainty, have at times felt unmotivated due to the lack of clarity regarding their education and want assurances that their future prospects – for education and employment - will not be disadvantaged in the months to come.

The following quotation, drawn from the briefing, highlights the huge upheaval that our young people have faced:

“Not being able to see family and friends, especially my boyfriend. I've missed out on seeing my new baby cousin, I wasn't able to go to my grandmother's funeral ... It's been really hard. All of this mixed with the uncertainty of getting my grades to go to uni and if uni will even start on time in September, it's been a really difficult 7 weeks.”

— (Girl, 18, South Wales Central)

Coronavirus and Me Survey: Responses from young people aged 15-18



This briefing paper draws solely on the information provided to the Coronavirus and Me survey from young people aged 15-18. Young people of this age group were invited to participate in our 12-18 Survey, or our Accessible (symbols) survey (7-18).

We received responses from 4,377 young people aged 15-18 to our 12-18 Survey. Of those 41% were aged 15, 28% were 16, 21% were 17 and 11% were 18. 85% were in school, 11% in college or university, 2% were in a traineeship or apprenticeship, with 1% educated at home and 1% not in education.

40 young people aged 15-18 participated in our accessible survey. This version of the survey was intended for children and young people with additional learning needs or those who preferred a survey with less reading involved, and it included symbols to help young people understand the contents of the survey. Of those 40 young people, 25% were aged 15, 28% were 16, 23% were 17 and 25% were 18. Throughout this document, percentages are drawn from 15-18 year olds who answered the 12-18 Survey, unless otherwise specified. This is because the questions were worded slightly differently in each of the surveys. Free text responses are used from both surveys however, and where possible we have used statistical findings from both surveys to demonstrate similarities or differences in experiences, where young people were asked similar questions. The accessible survey was open to all young people aged 7-18, so we did not ask specific questions about exams in this version.

A note on terminology: This survey took place in May 2020, while the most severe restrictions were still in place. Many young people during this time were unable to attend their educational settings, as they were temporarily closed at this time, with the exception of offering provision for children whose parents were “key workers” and vulnerable learners. This is why in our survey, we asked young people about the closures of their education settings, as for many, settings were not open for them to attend. We also avoided using the term “lockdown” as some children were unsure of this term or found it worrying. We are aware however, that settings were not “closed” and in fact, were operating remotely and in a different way from before. Using the term “closure” was an accessible way of capturing many young people’s experiences at this time.

Feelings about Coronavirus and the impact on young people's lives



Just over a quarter (28%) of young people aged 15-18 said that they were not worried about Coronavirus on the day of taking the survey. 46% of respondents said that they felt the same as the week before and 16% said they felt more worried than last week. For those who responded to our accessible survey, 15% said they were not worried about Coronavirus on the day of the survey. 31% of these said they were more worried than last week.

In the free text responses, some young people shared that whilst they were not overly worried about the virus, they were worried about the impact it could have on others, such as their older family members, with many worried about the uncertainty about the future.

In our analysis of the 3,221 free text responses, we applied a coding framework to try to understand why they felt the way they did. Of these free text responses, 16% said they had faith in guidance, whilst 11% were concerned about getting back to normal and 6% were worried Coronavirus was not getting better. 5% told us they were worried about a family member and 5% told us they were worried by people disobeying the rules. 4% said there was no point worrying.

Within these free text responses, many young people showed a strong sense of understanding why social distancing measures were in place, were following the guidelines to stay safe and were making efforts to stay busy and productive at home. The free text responses demonstrated that some were not only concerned for their own futures, in terms of employment and education opportunities, they were also concerned of the impact on others and the state of the nation.

“Unknown, horrible time, can't see any family or friends, can't hug, can't touch, can't celebrate all my friends 18th's, couldn't do my exams after 2 years of a levels, couldn't finish my last few months in school after 7 years, people are dying, and the government is by far not doing enough.”

— (Boy, 18, North Wales)

“I am worried about the virus, not that it will effect my health as I'm young and fit and have been staying safe, but worried how it will impact my life. I can't get a job and I'm meant to be going to uni in September.”

— (Girl, 18, South West Wales)

“Whilst there are things to be concerned about, like the impact on health and the economy, I do not feel concerned about COVID-19 because I am observing government advice.”

— (Boy, 15, West Wales)

“Both my parents are still in full time work. My father works for (LA) transport and my mother in retail. I am worried that maybe one day they will come home with the virus and give it to me and maybe other people etc. The threat will always be there if there is no vaccine. I am worried.”

— (Boy, 17, South East Wales)

“I need to be able to go out more often where there are very few people around...I am autistic and need quiet places...this makes me feel safe...but there are more people on the pavements and more bicycles. So I stay indoors more now.”

— (Boy, 16, South West Wales)

“My dad is an essential worker so he’s still going out to work with no protection equipment of any kind because he’s a builder. There isn’t anything to support his business either so that brings in the worry of money.”

— (Preferred not to give gender, 15, South West Wales)

“Both parents are key workers therefore are at risk of catching and spreading the disease. I’m not very worried as long as people are following guidelines.”

— (Boy, 17, Mid Wales)

“Worried about my grandparents since my grandfather has a lung condition. Worried about having to go back to work after such a long break from seeing people. Social anxiety sucks.”

— (Girl, 18, Central South Wales)

“I worry a lot about the effect this virus will have on the less fortunate (homeless, people using food banks) and the effect it will have on society as a whole.”

— (Girl, 16, South West Wales)

“I am less worried than last week due to Wales being on lockdown for a further three weeks in comparison to England. I feel more confident about staying safe now that I know I am protected for longer.”

— (Girl, 17, Central South Wales)

“There is no point in worrying, I just follow the government issued policies and get on with my life.”

— (Boy, 17, Central South Wales)

When sharing worries or concerns about Coronavirus, several young people of this age group demonstrated high awareness of devolution and the varying approaches taken by the four nations in managing Coronavirus. Young people expressed frustration and concern in their responses if Government guidance was unclear.

“Overall, the pandemic isn’t causing me much direct anxiety but I am concerned about the way the UK government has handled things. I am aware that health is devolved in Wales and we have continued the lockdown but the UK government has more influence (daily briefing, more coverage in the media) therefore more people are going to follow what they say.”

— (Girl, 16, North Wales)

“We are constantly being given contradicting advice from the Welsh assembly and the UK government, I think there needs to be greater co operation between the 4 nations to make messages clearer.”

— (Girl, 16, Central South Wales)

“It’s really frustrating that the guidance on how to stay safe from the virus has been inconsistent, eg our rules differing from England. I understand why we have our devolved government but I feel like now is the time for our country to be pulling together as a whole. It was confusing that the PM’s speech addressed the whole country, all 4 nations, and then straight afterwards the BBC Wales reporters claimed that it didn’t apply to us. How are we supposed to know who to trust?”

— (Girl, 18, Central South Wales)

As well as demonstrating awareness of political decision-making in relation to the virus itself, there were a number of comments about the environment, particularly in response to the question about positives as a result of the Coronavirus “Stay at Home” measures:

“I still have the worry of what will happen. But the stress of the exams is kind of gone and I’m actually quite thankful for that. I also saw the environment is getting better? I think that’s amazing.”

— (Girl, 16, South East Wales)

“The environment is benefitting. I want the country to change for the better, not carry on as it was before.”

— (Boy, 18, South West Wales)

“Other problems such as the environment should not take a backseat. We are currently seeing what happens when we leave a problem until it turns into a disaster. We need a planet for our future and our children’s future.”

— (Girl, 17, Central South Wales)

“It is clear how people staying at home and factories closing down has already had a massive impact on the environment. If this corona virus is not an eye opener to the fact that the government needs to make a step to reduce pollution then i’m afraid nothing will ever happen.”

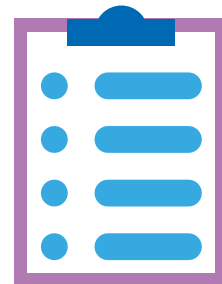
— (Boy, 17, North Wales)

“That climate change is being effective in a good way as of less gas emissions be used.”

— (Girl, 15, South East Wales)

“I worry a lot about the effect this virus will have on the less fortunate (homeless, people using food banks) and the effect it will have on society as a whole.”

Some young people have been taking on additional responsibilities



For some young people, it was clear from their responses that they had taken on additional responsibilities during the strictest of the “Stay at Home” measures. They shared with us a mix of experiences, such as looking after or caring for vulnerable relatives. Some were looking after younger siblings, often because parents were working.

This highlighted that some young people were experiencing challenges in balancing their responsibilities, such as caring, supporting others and learning.

“Because I am with Young Carers it is hard for me because I don’t have a car and my dad can’t come out. I got to walk to the shops and get food for me mum and dad.”

— (A trans young people, 18, Central South Wales)

“I am a young carer for a sibling so my responsibilities are more than usual, this had been challenging, and I think a lot more support needs to be out there for young carers and the children who usually would have extra support at school. Children with a care plan are allowed childcare at school however more needs to be done for the children without a care plan.”

— (Girl, 17, North Wales)

“It’s easy to feel alone and isolated as a young carer.”

— (Boy, 16, South West Wales)

“My mother forces me to look after my baby sister while she works from home.”

— (Boy, 18, North Wales)

“Sometimes school work can get stressful because both of my parents are still working. I have to do my own work and help my younger siblings when they get stuck.”

— (Girl, 16, Mid Wales)

“Feel like I am looking after my brothers and sister all the time because my mam is working upstairs and the 2 little kids can’t go to childcare in their normal place. It’s not fair, I am not their mother.”

— (Girl, 16, North Wales)

“Because I am safe at home but my 2 brothers are autistic and my mam works from home so I have to help look after them.”

— (Girl, 16, North Wales)

“Home Learning is difficult when your parents are essential workers and/or don’t speak English very well. I need to take care of my little sister all day and explain the worksheets her teachers have sent to her and It’s difficult to do all this while sharing one device for all of us.”

— (Girl, 17, Central South Wales)

“[I’m worried] Because I’m a young carer looking after my nan that has underlying health conditions.”

— (Boy, 15, Central South Wales)

“Having to care for my 2 year old brother whilst still trying to educate myself as both of my parents are key workers.”

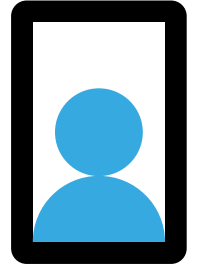
— (Girl, 15, Central South Wales)

“I miss going to Young Carers Group and being able to see all of my friends, and the workers too. i feel a bit lonely as in not able to see my friends and close family, so it is kind of hard to stay positive some of the time.”

— (Girl, 16, South East Wales)

“Sometimes school work can get stressful because both of my parents are still working. I have to do my own work and help my younger siblings when they get stuck”.

How have young people's lives been impacted by Coronavirus?



We asked young people which changes had had the most impact on how they felt. 71% said not being able to spend time with friends, followed by not being able to visit family members (53%) and school or college closing (50%) were having the greatest impact. This reiterates the importance of relationships for young people and them wanting to engage with education. 138 young people who selected 'other' were asked to specify what other changes had had the most impact. Changes described included experiencing difficulties at home with their family (16%), feeling their mental health and wellbeing was being negatively impacted (14%) and the closure of places in their community, like businesses and services (13%).

In our accessible survey, we asked "is there anything positive about staying at home because of Coronavirus?". We coded their answers. Of the 29 who responded to this question, 38% said spending time with family was positive. 31% of young people informed us that there were "no good things" about staying home because of Coronavirus.

Happy, healthy, safe

It has been reassuring to hear that 74% of young people aged 15-18 felt safe most of the time, and 41% reported feeling happy most of the time. However, 45% said they had been worried some of the time and 46% felt sad some of the time. 19% said they had felt worried most of the time, and 21% said they felt sad most of the time. 14% said they had not been happy very often. For those aged 15-18 who responded to our Accessible Survey, 59% said they had been worried, 54% sad, 28% said they felt safe, and 15% said they were happy.

We asked young people if they knew where they could get help for their emotional and mental health should they need to. The majority of young people said they would get help online or on social media (53%), teachers or other school/college/university staff (51%) or their doctor (51%). 62% of young people who responded to our accessible survey said they knew how to get help if they needed support to feel happy and well.

When we asked young people how they were keeping a healthy body and mind, the top three activities selected were, using social media to stay in touch (74%), speaking with friends (70%) and outdoor exercise (walking, running, cycling etc.) (68%). Many young people were using the time to occupy themselves, with many doing their school work (53%), reading and writing (37%), cooking healthy meals (36%) learning new skills (24%).

Of those who responded to our accessible survey, 26 young people told us what they were doing to stay healthy. Exercising (73%), speaking with friends (68%) and doing school work (63%) were the top three activities these young people selected when we asked what they had been doing to keep a health, body and mind.

“It gives me time to finally sleep and rest after missing so much in the school year due to revision and mock exams. I hadn’t had real sleep for a while until lockdown. I have done some art, I have done workouts, I have done gymnastics, I have been reading, I have been cleaning, I have been looking at careers...”

— (Girl, 16, North Wales)

“I have more time to devote to hobbies and learning languages. I can also think more clearly about my future (despite the uncertainty of my exam results).”

— (Boy, 17, Central South Wales)

“I’m learning a variety of new skills and learning how to appreciate myself more to work for the best of my abilities. I also feel closer to family members and friends.”

— (Girl, 16, North Wales)

“Learning how to help with jobs around the house.”

— (Girl, 15, South West Wales)

“I’m spending more time practising instruments and I’m learning BSL.”

— (Girl, 16, South West Wales)

Life online

Many young people informed us in their survey responses that they were making the most of the opportunities to leave home where possible, such as taking opportunities for outdoor exercise and going to work in essential roles. However, young people, as many others, have had to adapt to important elements of their lives being accessed online, for example, seeing friends and family and for learning. 85% of young people aged 15-18 in our survey were using social media to stay in touch with friends and 77% used video calling. 76% responded that talking to friends online was a way to relax for them, this was followed by exercise or physical activity (59%).

Many young people told us that they missed their friends and were looking forward to seeing each other when it was safe to do so but were making the most of the remote ways of speaking to each other. Many said they were speaking with family members more. Some young people shared with us how they were missing their partners as a result of the Coronavirus “Stay at Home” measures due to them living in another household.

“I am spending more time with my family (in my household). Me and my friends are appreciating the time we spend with each other over video call more. I have more time to do activities I wouldn’t do if I were in school. The community is being brought together (clap for carers and delivering food to neighbours). I try to speak to my Mum and Dad on the phone, but it isn’t easy. We Skype sometimes, but I prefer to type and won’t always show my face.”

— (Girl, 15, North Wales)

“[There is] Nothing really positive [about the situation] except glad I have my phone to stay in touch with my friends.”

— (Girl, 18, Central South Wales)

“I use social media more to stay in touch and I appreciate the little things in life more.”

— (Girl, 16, Central South Wales)

“The virus doesn’t worry me but not seeing my friends is upsetting me.”

— (Girl, 15, Central South Wales)

“Social media is being used more than ever right now.”

— (Boy, 15, Central South Wales)

What next for young people with learning and work?



The temporary closure of businesses and educational settings, along with the shift to remote or online learning, has meant that many young people have experienced a significant period of uncertainty in regards to learning and their futures. This uncertainty is reflected in the responses we received from young people. For those in this age group who responded to our survey, more young people lacked confidence in their learning than those who felt confident. 21% did not feel confident at all, 26% were not confident; 21% were confident and 7% very confident.

Young people shared concerns about how their education and future prospects would be impacted by Coronavirus and the closure of public spaces, like schools and businesses. Many explained the challenges they faced in adjusting to new ways of teaching, were unsure about their exams, their jobs and whether they would be able to go to university.

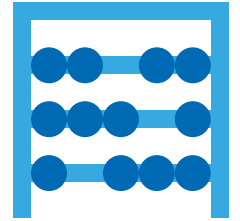
Young people were shown a list of sentences and asked to select which were true for them. 4,344 responded. The top three most selected options were: I'm worried about how this could affect my exam results (72%), I'm sad about missing out on experiences I was looking forward to (61%) and I'm worried about falling behind with learning (52%). Overall, 51% informed us that they did not feel motivated to do school work at home. This was selected by 51% of young people who chose "school" as their education setting, and 56% for those who said they were in college or university.

The following sections will explore the different experiences young people faced dependent on their education setting or employment situation.

51%

informed us that they did not feel motivated to do school work at home.

How did young people in school feel?



The closure of schools to the majority of pupils has had a significant impact on many young people, who have had to adjust to new ways of learning with many young people facing uncertainty over whether they will be able to take their exams. Many young people understood why schools had temporarily closed, but many felt a sense of frustration and loss of control with their learning. Some young people were enjoying the opportunity to learn from home. The following data is informed by the responses of the 3,715 survey respondents who usually go to school.

Young people aged 15-18 were asked about contact from school. The most common forms of contact from school was by email (76%), by phone (35%) and on the school website (32%). 3% of young people said their school hadn't been in contact.

Of the 29 respondents to our accessible survey who were in school, the most common forms of contact from school were phone (54%) followed by email (46%) and the school website (46%). 8% of these young people said their school hadn't been in contact.

The young people's responses to our survey revealed mixed experiences in regards to how young people received their education during this time. Whilst 6% informed us they did not have any worries about their education, 24% informed us they did not understand the work they had been sent. 35% were worried about starting a new year or education setting in September. When we asked young people if there was anything they needed help with, 24% responded that they would like more support to go online to do school work. Young people gave suggestions as to how they could be better supported with school work, and shared their experiences of home learning.

The first two quotations illustrate how some young people valued time out of school:

"I am considerably less stressed than I would've been at school and feel that my overall wellbeing has improved considerably. I feel more connected with my family, and also feel that I am now more in control of my learning."

— (Girl, 16, Central South Wales)

"School used to cause me a lot of stress and anxiety but since they've closed i've been a lot happier and more relaxed i now no longer have school stress and my mental health has improved a lot not being under so much pressure and having more free time is amazing."

— (Girl, 16, Central South Wales)

Others were struggling with home learning:

“Potentially more contact with my school in order to maintain the sense of school community before it (understandably) ended abruptly.”

— (Girl, 18, Central South Wales)

“Being able to speak to my teachers rather than through emails and comments on google classroom.”

— (Girl, 15, North Wales)

“More support for tech as online classes are hard without computers or up to date tech.”

— (Boy, 15, South East Wales)

“I cannot do my work as my laptop is broken and I can't afford another one.”

— (Boy, 17, South West Wales)

“Too much work to be done with not enough help. I'm not getting the help I'd usually be getting and it's hard to explain over email.”

— (Girl, 16, South East Wales)

“If my mum didn't have to work while I am home, she could help me more with my work. Sometimes miss having a teacher to ask in person.”

— (Girl, 15, Central South Wales)

Some young people were keen to return to school as soon as possible:

“Due to the fact I don't feel that I am learning as well as home, I want to go to school and get help off the teachers, I feel that my education is getting thrown away at the moment.”

— (Girl, 15, Mid Wales)

“Return to school as soon as possible, or re run school year.”

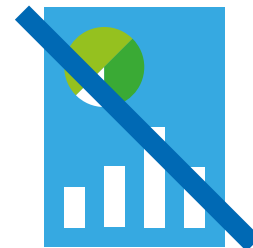
— (Girl, 17, Central South Wales)

While many comments, as illustrated above, suggest a desire for more direct support from teachers, the following quotation demonstrates that home circumstances can make 'live' online teaching or support a challenge for some:

“Sometimes I cannot hear what the teacher and Lsa's are saying and there is some noise in the backgrounds and I cannot work somewhere quiet and I get irritated, and stressed and some frustration.”

— (Girl, 16, Central South Wales)

How did young people in school feel about the cancellation of exams?



This survey took place several months before the controversial release of exam results in August, but many young people were already uncertain or anxious about the results following the cancellation of exams.

Of the young people who responded to our survey and were at school, 92% said they were expecting to take exams this summer. These young people were asked how they felt about them being cancelled. 51% said they felt uncertain, 17% felt worried and 16% happy. Some young people were feeling that there was less pressure on them to revise and sit exams, but many also felt a sense of loss of control over their final grades and were finding it difficult to stay motivated with learning when there was such uncertainty over their exams.

2,688 young people who were in school responded to a question about how they felt about their exams being cancelled. We coded their free-text responses. 16% wanted to sit their exams to prove themselves and improve their marks. 16% were worried about how their results and grades would be decided. 13% were relieved as they did not want to sit exams. 13% were concerned they would not be reaching their potential. 11% felt that their hard work has been wasted. 10% felt there was confusion and a lack of clarity from schools. 8% were concerned about the impact on their future jobs and university.

Several young people who responded to this survey explained how this has been a time of uncertainty for them. Some young people expressed that they want clarity on what impact the cancellation of exams will have on their future, clear information on how they will be affected and they wanted to know more about how decisions about their grades and results will be made.

“Exams being cancelled means that I am stress free however next year I will have to focus more on my work to achieve the grades I want.”

— (Boy, 15, South West Wales)

“As I am in a fairly secure position I am fairly relaxed about my results and I enjoy not having the pressure.”

— (Boy, 18, Central South Wales)

“The stress is off my shoulders but I’m still worried about college or if over this pandemic I’ll forget everything I’ve learned in school and won’t pass in collage because of it: I’m not motivated to revise.”

— (Girl, 16, Central South Wales)

“Well, I feel since that coronavirus has come it has knocked my opportunity in getting the grade I want from the exams that I was meant to do in June and May. We have been preparing all of the years in high school to do the final test which was the exams at the end, now that coronavirus has come all the exams have been cancelled and were getting grades juggled by our classwork and what grades we attained from a test in class which most people don’t even put the effort in studying. It’s unfair as other years got to do their exams which they have been preparing for years and our year not be allowed that opportunity to show our true potential, you feel betrayed not having to go through something that will decide what opportunities you get in the future.”

— (Boy, 15, South East Wales)

“Don’t know what my grades will be and there’s nothing I can do to change what my teacher thinks even if I disagree with them.”

— (Boy, 17, Unknown)

“Online learning requires technology that my family simply can’t afford which school normally provides me with. furthermore, the lack of knowledge about how our grades will be awarded, they know kids work harder during easter break rather than mocks and grades go up by one or even two grades.”

— (Boy, 16, Central South Wales)

“I spent most of y10/11 helping my disabled sibling as they transitioned to high school... I have been doing brilliant at the dozens of past papers I’ve done at home since January. If I had done the exams I would have ACED them I know I would. But with the new rules I will get a poorer grade and I won’t even be able to appeal. Why should I be penalized because I helped and supported my disabled sibling.”

— (Boy, 17, Unknown)

The impact of Coronavirus on transitions for young people in school

The closure of schools because of Coronavirus came at a time when many young people were thinking about what they will want to do in the future, such as going to sixth form or college, starting a job or internship, or going to university. Many will have been thinking about what options they have and what topics they would like to study. This is an important time of transition for many young people. For young people in Year 11, 91% of respondents said they had decided what and where they wanted to study in September 2020.

However, 106 young people told us they were undecided about what they would do next with their education. 39% wanted more advice to understand their options, 25% would like support to apply to sixth form and 15% would like support to apply for an internship. This has demonstrated the importance of needing to provide ongoing support and advice for young people in this age group who are able to leave full time education, as some may become disengaged without fully understanding the options available to them. It is clear some want to continue with education and training, but are unsure how.

For young people who responded to our survey and were studying A-Levels, 44% (379) were in Year 13 or in their second year of A Levels. 92% of these young people had decided what they wanted to continue into education or training in September 2020.

Young people who are in the first year of A-Levels and studying for AS level qualifications at the time of completing the survey expressed concerns about having to cram in two years of work within on academic year in school when they return.

“I finally realised that school isn’t just a place to learn but a place where i socialise and grow closer bonds with my friends. I wish i could just see my friends all together before they all move to different schools.”

— (Girl, 15, Unknown)

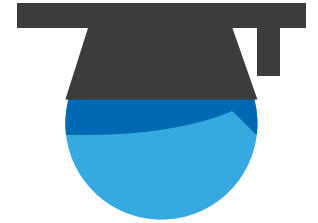
“I feel there should be more explanation and reassurance on what’s going to happen with grades and our future, especially to year 12 pupils who are expected to apply for university before the end of this year.”

— (Girl, 16, South West Wales)

“For young people right now especially those who were going to sit exams in a crucial part of their education who were likely going to be taking a new step in their education are being faced with uncertainty in what will happen next for them and the government is not giving enough information on what will be the next step for those people and how their results for A levels and GCSEs will work.”

— (Girl, 17, Mid Wales)

How did Young People at University and College feel about their learning?



472 young people who responded to our survey told us they were at university and college. Of these, 2% were age 15, 15% age 16, 49% age 17 and 34% age 18.

We asked young people how confident they felt with their learning at this time. 362 young people at college or university responded to this question. 10% said they felt “very confident”, 19% felt confident, yet 27% felt not very confident, with 25% not feeling confident at all.

We coded free text responses from 204 young people in college or university, who told us which changes were having the greatest impact on learning remotely. 79% of these said not being able to meet friends, 54% said not being able to go outside as much and 40% said not being able to see a tutor or join a class.

Of this group, 467 young people responded to the question “were you expecting to take exams this summer?”. Of these, 69% were expecting to take exams in the summer. 323 young people told us in more detail how they felt about exams being cancelled. 47% were uncertain about them being cancelled and 21% were worried. 13% of young people were happy about the cancellation of exams. We coded responses from 254 young people who were at college or university on why they felt the way they did about exams being cancelled. Of these, 19% said they wanted to sit exams to prove themselves and improve their marks, 18% were concerned that their projected grades would not reflect their potential. 17% were concerned about the effect on future jobs and university. 8% said they felt relieved, as they didn’t want to sit exams, and 5% were concerned about their coursework.

“Because mock exam results and college work up until the 20th of March does NOT reflect my ability to do well in an exam. no information has been clear enough for students taking their GCSEs at college and it’s unfair that we are kept in the dark during all this.”

— (Girl, 18, South West Wales)

“I was prepared for exams and so prioritised revision over homework assignments. Now our homework is being assessed instead of revision notes or exams.”

— (Girl, 18, North Wales)

“I feel uncertain as my predicted grades were not as high as I was later working on to achieve in exam (more revision and learning in between mocks).”

— (Boy, 17, Central South Wales)

85% of young people said they had been contacted by their setting by email, 32% by phone, 31% via the setting website. 3% said they had not been in contact with their setting.

Some young people told us they were adapting well to learning at home and were able to experiment with ways of learning that suited them and enjoyed spending less time travelling to college.

“You can learn at your own pace and look into the things that interest you instead of being forced to learn useless stuff too quickly.”

— (Girl, 17, South West Wales)

“I feel a lot more comfortable and relaxed learning from home instead of having to make a commute every day.”

— (Girl, 16, South West Wales)

Many were still concerned about their exams and the impact on their future:

“It has been hard, particularly with college work as I feel there is a lot being set but we have been told that it is not being graded. I feel that from what my class mates have said there is a lot of anxiety and uncertainty around school work and the whole situation could have been explained to us far better.”

— (Girl, 17, South West Wales)

“I went though [a] rough patch due to personal reasons around the time of my mock exams so would like to know the exam boards will take into account thing like this when doing predicted grade, i would also like the government to put more pressure on unis to tell us what will be happening with education next year.”

— (Girl, 17, Mid Wales)

“I’m missing university Placement hours and have had no clarity how the course is going to be completed without a delay of 6 months and university haven’t provided any reassurance.”

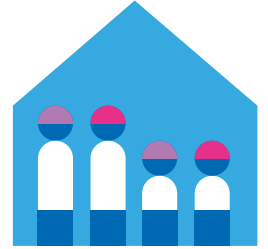
— (Girl, 18, South East Wales)

Some young people explained how the practical elements of their courses were being affected:

“Uncertainty about my future, I’m just as uncertain as I was last week. I will have to drop out of uni if my course stays online because I’m studying music and I need in person tuition, collaboration and access to specialised rooms (eg Music Studios etc). I’m not sure what I will do next year if I drop out or defer.”

— (Girl, 18, Central South Wales)

How did young people who were home schooled feel?



29 young people aged 15-18 who were educated at home responded to our survey. Six of them (21%) told us they would like more help to go online to do their work. Young people informed us of their mixed views on the situation with their learning and the impact Coronavirus was having on their lives. Some were concerned how Coronavirus could affect exam results and were concerned about falling behind. Others were sad to be missing out on experiences. Some had no worries about their education and the majority of young people had decided what and where they wanted to study in September 2020.

Home educated young people also told us they were impacted by the loss of not being able to see their friends and the lack of outdoor places they could go to.

“I just want to say that everyone thinks this is what home schooling is like all of the time ... It’s not. We had huge social lives.”

— (Girl, 16, South West Wales)

How did young people who were on apprenticeships and traineeships feel?



97 young people who responded to our survey told us they were doing an apprenticeship or traineeship. 66 young people who were apprentices or trainees shared with us information on how confident they felt with their learning. 24 young people told us they were confident in their learning (36%), with 10 saying they felt very confident (15%).

Of 91 young people who responded to our question, “which of the following sentences is true for you?”, one in three selected “I don’t feel motivated to do school work at home”. Only 8 young people (9%) in this group were expecting to take exams in the summer.

83 young people (90%) had been given on-line training, resources or support to keep learning in the last month.

“Not being in work has effected the way I’ve been spending my days, not being in a routine is boring me.”

— (Girl, 16, Central South Wales)

“I just want things to get back to normal I like routine but it feels like we’re waiting on the sidelines not knowing what the next step is going to be.”

— (Boy, 18, South West Wales)

90%

**of those on apprenticeships/
training had been given
on-line training resources or
support to keep learning in
the last month.**

How did young people who were not in education feel?



46 young people responded to our survey, who told us they were not in education. Of these, 7% were age 16, 35% age 17 and 59% were age 18.

45 of these young people shared with us how they felt about Coronavirus. 27% said they were not worried, 29% said they were more worried than last week and 9% said they were less worried than last week. These young people told us what was having the most impact on how they felt about Coronavirus. 76% said not being able to spend time with friends, 67% not being able to visit family members and 44% said not being able to take part in usual activities and hobbies.

We asked young people what extra help they thought they needed during this time. For those who would like more help, the top 3 items selected were more information on things to do when you are staying at home (35%), support to help you feel happy and well (35%) and support to make sure you feel safe at home (24%).

Of this group, exercising outdoors (67%), using social media to stay in touch with friends (67%), and speaking with family (62%) were the top three activities young people told us they were doing to keep a healthy body and mind.

All young people in this cohort said they were not in education, however, 35 young people responded to the question "If you are thinking about staying in education, what would support you to decide"? They told us that they would like more advice to understand their options (12), with some young people wanting support to apply for college (8) or apprenticeships (5). Some told us they would like support to learn outside of a school and some were concerned about their job. Below are some of the responses young people not in education shared with us:

"I'm worried about what will happen to EOTAS children like myself I'm worried about weather I'll be able to access education after this. In relation to the below question, yes I'm in year11 but I HAVE Not been given a choice or option in regards of choosing where I study next year. I've been told I will loose all provision next year."

— (Girl, 16, Central South Wales)

"I am no longer going to work, which means I have no income."

— (Girl, 17, South East Wales)

"Lack of money which means I went homeless and had no support from government."

— (Boy, 17, South West Wales)

Some young people told us that they had experienced barriers in accessing support because of the closures of their workplace. This has reinforced concerns about the potential adverse economic impact on young people who may be in part time work or casual work.

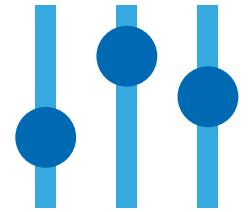
“I am currently unable to go to work, I work part time in a shop and have had to take 12 weeks unpaid leave.”

— (Girl, 17, South West Wales)

“I’m not being paid as I don’t have a contract with my part time job. I’m very worried about money and I’m no longer able to drive my car which was a lot to insure. The apprenticeship that I was meant to be starting in September has been withdrawn so there’s a lot of uncertainty in regards to my future, which has had the biggest impact on how I feel.”

— (Girl, 18, Central South Wales)

Behind the data: how have young people's rights been impacted?



We asked young people broad questions about their experiences of the Coronavirus crisis and how they had been impacted. Some young people used this as an opportunity to raise individual concerns about their circumstances, which reflect how differently some young people have experienced the last few months.

Whilst many young people told us they were mindful of their mental health, some young people told us of the changes they had experienced in their mental health support and the challenges this had presented. In their free text responses, many young people told us that they felt their mental health had been adversely impacted by the Coronavirus safety measures. From our coded responses 73 young people informed us they were worried about access to mental health services.

"I rely on mental health services and have done for the past 4 years. I've had most of my support ripped away, yes I get video calls but they're not the same."

— (Girl, 16, Central South Wales)

"I am currently in an adolescent ward, being treated for my mental health and since coronavirus, this has made my mental health deteriorate even more due to the fact that we aren't allowed visitors, which has therefore put a hold on my treatment continuing."

— (Girl, 16)

"I'm struggling with an eating disorder and I don't feel like I could tell anyone anymore. Before the lockdown I let my GP know but now because of corona, the GP appointment was cancelled and so I'm stuck with this all alone."

— (Girl, 15)

"Camhs have not been helpful. They ring to ask if support is needed and don't give any help apart from increasing medication. But then that's been the case for 2 years so why would I expect them to be of any use!"

— (Boy, 16, Central South Wales)

“I think that u need to put more detail reports forward and clear rules to how we move forward I feel that as a young person we are worried and some of us depressed from nt being able to see friends it has a lot of impact on people who suffer with depression or anxiety or even people who don’t doing the unknown is difficult for anyone.”

— (Girl, 16, South East Wales)

Some young people told us that they had not seen family for extended periods of time, because of where they lived:

“The [residential] facility went into lockdown just after I had been discharged from hospital after a serious illness. My Mum and Dad had been with me at the hospital and suddenly were asked to leave me. I haven’t seen them now for 11 weeks. My mental health has suffered. I do not know what my rights are in relation to seeing my family. I miss them so much.”

— (Boy, 17, Central South Wales)

“I am more worried than last week as im concerned about my parents, my dad has COPD, High Blood Pressure and Arthritis; my mum has a mental health illness and therefore, not being able to go out and visit them worries me more as time goes on in the lockdown. I am also worried about when the lockdown is lifted as i would be wary of going to see people after not going out after a long period of time. The only time i go out is once a week maybe twice a week as I am very concerned about catching it and passing it on to the people in hostel.”

— (Girl, 18, South East Wales)

“I’m in foster care so I can’t visit my own mum. I had also been referred to camhs and counselling but that had been a bit messed up. They are supposed to make calls but usually forget it are too busy so what’s the point? And anyway, a phone call doesn’t really help. I feel like I’d need to speak to some one in person.”

— (Girl, 16, South East Wales)

“1 month before lockdown I was taken into foster care and now I can’t see my family at all.”

— (Girl, 15, North Wales)

Some young people shared that they were missing support networks and friends, and were finding the extended time at home difficult.

“I feel sort of suffocated with my family. I know you won’t really care about this but I’m a closeted member of the LGBTQ community and my parents don’t exactly agree with that and my friends are usually there’s to offer me support but they can’t be here anymore... My mental health has also gone downhill because I’m not sure who to talk to. My parents don’t believe me but I am just so sad...”

— (Girl, 15, North Wales)

“It has been stressful. I spend 2 weeks with one parent and 1 week with the other. It has caused tension and arguments between my parents. It isnt the best situation but I understand it could be worse.”

— (Girl, 16, South East Wales)

“I think most families are arguing at this time and that’s really difficult for the children and I think a lot of people forget about that.”

— (Girl, 15, Central South Wales)

What do the responses tell us about the impact Coronavirus has had on young people's rights?

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is an international human rights treaty that applies to all children and young people up to the age of 18. Children and young people have 42 rights under the UNCRC.

The Welsh Government has adopted the UNCRC as the basis of all policy making for children and young people and the Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure 2011 places a duty on Welsh Ministers, in exercising their functions, to have 'due regard' to the UNCRC.

It is clear that the impact of the virus and public health measures have led to many young people in this age group facing barriers to accessing their rights.

The responses we had received from young people aged 15-18 in this survey reveal that:

- Young people's rights to have information (Article 13) and to access honest information from newspapers and television that you can understand (Article 17) have been impacted. Whilst 38% of young people did not want any extra help, many young people in this survey told us that they would like more information, such as information on how to stay well (25%), support for online school work (23%), more information on Coronavirus (17%) and more information on rules to keep safe (14%). Many young people have commented that information about their learning and exams, and guidance from Government, has at times been unclear, which has contributed to their worries about the future.
- Young people have a right to family life (Article 8). Young people, as is the case for all of us, have experienced a significant change in the way we see family. Whilst many young people enjoyed spending more time with their families living in their household, 53% of young people told us that not being able to visit family members was having the most impact on how they feel. Some young people, such as those living in foster or residential care, or those whose parents and siblings live in different households, may have experienced long periods without seeing their families.

- Due to the 'Stay at Home' Guidance, young people were not able to enjoy their right to meet with friends and join groups and clubs, as they would usually, (Article 15). Despite many young people using social media to speak with friends (70%); not seeing friends was reported to be the biggest impact for 71% of young people.
- Young people have experienced a significant shift in the way they access education as much of their learning has been delivered remotely. As a result, many young people have felt their right to learn has been impacted (Article 28). Of all the young people who responded to our survey aged 15-18, 50% of young people told us their school or college setting closing has had the biggest impact on how they feel.
- Many young people have felt their right to reach their full educational potential (Article 29) has been impacted due to not being able to attend their educational setting, adjusting rapidly to new ways of learning and being unable to sit exams. This was demonstrated by young people's lack of confidence in their learning. 72% of young people informed us they were worried about how Coronavirus would affect their exams results and 52% were worried about falling behind with learning.
- We are also aware that for some young people, their right to receive support for their health and wellbeing (Article 23) has been impacted by the changes in the way services, like health and educational support, have been delivered. This included young people who require support for Additional Learning Needs, young people who were required to shield due to a physical health condition, those who need support from Mental Health Services and the ability for young people in foster care or residential homes to stay in touch with their families.

This survey was an important way of ensuring children and young people across Wales had their right to say what they think should happen and to be listened to (Article 12).

Summary of key duties of Welsh Government and others

As Wales navigates its recovery journey out of the Coronavirus pandemic, and develops contingency plans for the future, it is important that Welsh Government truly hear, listen to, and embed young people's wishes into their policy decisions and future guidance. It is really positive that our survey was a joint endeavour with Welsh Government and that the results of the survey have directly contributed to decision-making since June. However, listening and involving is an ongoing process and this briefing highlights some key areas to involve young people in as new policies are developed.

With young people returning to learning from September 2020 it is important that the educational guidance developed by Welsh Government is robustly monitored to be effective and promote young people's rights. It is vital that young people are encouraged to share their views on how they experience the delivery of services that are integral to their rights. This will include giving feedback on the effectiveness for example, of Back to School Plans for September, Operational Guidance for Schools and Guidance for Supporting Vulnerable and Disadvantaged Learners and Coronavirus Guidance for Further Education Settings and Higher Education Settings

I also encourage Welsh Government to ensure that any decision impacting children and young people is assessed for its impact on their rights, with robust Children's Rights Impact Assessments being undertaken and published in a timely manner. This helps to give transparency to how decisions are made and can reassure young people that their circumstances are being considered.

Summary of the Commissioner's priority actions / recommended next steps:

In response to the concerns raised by young people aged 15-18 in the Coronavirus and Me Survey, I believe the Welsh Government, public services and educational settings should consider taking the following actions.

In response to the educational concerns young people raised with us, Welsh Government, local authorities and educational settings in Wales should:

1. Ensure that young people's experiences and views are listened to as part of the independent exams review, and, ensure that any candidate wishing to re-take qualifications should be informed that they are able to do so without any personal financial cost;
2. Consider how young people can be best supported with learning going forward. Young people who have already missed out on significant teaching should not face undue pressure to complete full courses;
3. Ensure that all young people can access the devices they need to support learning from home, and access to the internet;
4. Recognise that examinations have a significant impact on young people's confidence, self-esteem and wellbeing. The Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Bill should also be scrutinised as an opportunity for Wales to put in place a legislative framework that requires external assessment to operate in the best interests of children and young people. A due regard duty to the UNCRC would be one way to achieve this.

In response to concerns raised by young people aged 15-18 that the information they receive is not always clear, or young people centred, Welsh Government should:

1. Promote young people's right to information by ensuring any changes in guidance can be accessed by children and young people in an appropriate format that takes account of their circumstances. We have seen positive examples, such as the Minister for Education, Kirsty Williams, taking questions from young people. Welsh Government should build upon this and continue to engage directly with children and young people and ensure young people's voices and experiences are reflected and considered in any decisions.
2. Robustly assess how decisions will impact children and young people, even if guidance is not developed with children and young people in mind, for example, guidance relating to working practices. It is clear that some young people have taken on additional responsibilities in their homes, such as supporting siblings whilst parents are working, either from home or attending key settings. Guidance must be mindful of unintended impacts on children.

In response to young people's concerns regarding well-being and emotional and mental health support, Welsh Government should:

1. Ensure pathways for emotional and mental health support are clear for young people who are seeking support, should they need it. This must mean implementing a "No Wrong Door" approach to services offering support for young people who, and that services work collectively to provide the most suitable type of support for young people.
2. As young people return to their learning settings, it is important settings recognise that many young people have felt that their emotional wellbeing has been negatively impacted by the Coronavirus measures and may need additional pastoral support. It is more important than ever that Welsh Government progress with schools to implement a whole-school approach to mental health support.

In regards to the concerns young people raised in relation to how they access services, Welsh Government should work with public services to:

1. Ensure any changes to the way services are delivered are clearly communicated to young people. For example, many young people will have experienced receiving support remotely, such as mental health support, support from their social worker or support worker and peer support groups. It is important that young people are informed regularly of any changes in the way their support is to be accessed so they know how they can access this should they need to.
2. Continue to monitor guidance for young people who do not live in the same households as their families and may have experienced long periods without seeing their families, for example, care experienced young people and children whose parents are separated, so their rights to family life can be regarded.
3. Ensure safeguarding messages and support are clear and accessible for young people. For some young people, home is not the place they feel safest and some young people are missing the support networks that help them feel safe. It is hugely important young people know how they can access support and advice should they need to access this.