

Impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on young people in Sheffield

One-off task group with Youth Cabinet - 13th January 2021

In November 2020 members of Youth Cabinet attended Children, Young People and Family Support Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee to share their experience of impact of Covid-19. Following on from this some members of the Committee were able to meet with them again this month, attending were Cllrs Mick Rooney, Mike Levery, Jim Steinke, Alison Teal, and Diocese representative member Sam Evans. Attending for Youth Cabinet were Issac, Jude, Niamh, Nye and Rikzar, they were supported by Sarah Stevens and Emma Hinchliffe. The members of the Committee were keen to find out how it was now in January with Lockdown 3 and other announcements from government affecting schools, learning and summer assessment. Lines of enquiry included:

1. What are top priorities for Young People now in January 2021?
 - a. Any from November session?
 - b. New and overriding issues
2. How do you feel about exams being cancelled and alternative arrangements to be proposed?
3. What would be of most benefit for scrutiny to recommend and to who?

Committee Recommendations

Issue	Rationale, context, evidence, the ask	Action for Scrutiny Committee	January 2021 suggested recommendation from Scrutiny Committee to SCC Cabinet
Alternative Arrangements to exams 2021 - consultation	The Youth Cabinet commented the system of assessment was unfair before Covid, neither exams or CAGs (Centre Assessed Grades) alone is ideal, CAGs edges it as a preferred solution. Other measures are too complicated to be used as a moderation, for example level of disruption to an individual as a balancing measure - the disruption maybe unseen, such as home environment, or measure may be unreliable such as 2020 grade algorithm.	Scrutiny Committee to support Youth Cabinet to send submission on Alternative Arrangements to all local MPs.	RECOMMENDATION TO CABINET MEMBER/DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION & SKILLS The Committee recommends the Young People of Sheffield must feed into a national consultation on Alternative Arrangements; and the Committee supports the Youth Cabinet preference to be part of a Sheffield co-submission into the DfE/OFQUAL consultation on Alternative Arrangements currently underway. ⁱ

	<p>We heard that young people feel still likely to be sitting exams, another U turn but sounds like will still set exams, they see it as an indication of lack of trust in schools to grade right. First yes exams, no exams, little exams, that it is unfair and same as last year just said differently.</p> <p>The ask is a message to government to be clear and concise now on plans for young people and stick with it! And clear guidance for teachers now. There must be consideration of how and even if there can be curriculum Catch Up, or insist on assessment to match curriculum actually taught. Sheffield young people must be made ready to take any exam or assessment proffered – there are gaps in their learning of full curriculum because of school closures (not a teacher criticism) and accessibility to online learning, the lack of necessary tech – devices and infrastructure, such as capable laptops and home Wi-Fi.</p> <p>If CAGS worked, why change, just refine to manage curriculum and digital disadvantage. No lessons appear to have been learnt by government from summer 2020.</p>	<p>Assessment Alternative Arrangements must have certainty and clarity; no penalisation for curriculum not taught, for online learning barriers; and assessment should not include anything not taught sufficiently; what about resits</p>	<p>URGENT AS CONSULTATION IS ONLY OPEN FOR TWO WEEKS UNTIL 29TH JANUARY</p>
<p>Alternative Arrangements to exams 2021 – mental health</p>	<p>Reduce the pressure and mental health impact on young people, immense strain of uncertainty and knowing not adequately prepared, too much curriculum missed through lockdown and self-isolations. Alternative Arrangements must not assume children have completed the curriculum and must be tailored to recognise that. Evidence in mocks they were extremely difficult as not all curriculum covered prior e.g. teachers off and no learning in school, it was impossible to do unless managed to do at home e.g. Foundation Spanish</p>		<p>The Committee are concerned and saddened to hear young people say “Where is the Empathy / Sympathy for Young People’s learning situation” a message young people express as both local and national significance. We impress that this message is shared locally and nationally through the best channels.</p> <p><i>See Comms issue below</i></p>

	<p>over 50% modules not done, and mock included modules not done.</p> <p>We heard in regard mocks, experiential evidence that marked down levels if self-isolating and doing exams at Home – where is the trust.</p>		
<p>Support for students at home or in Isolation – wellbeing, home learning environment, home and digital barriers</p>	<p>Recommend that Sheffield students receive 1:1 support, recommend investment to makes this happen for all Sheffield Secondary phase students. These are specialists who help organise students day for them, for them to learn, and sleep routine (self-isolation impacts leaving student ill prepared for return to school), a check-in with each student on wellbeing and access to online learning barriers e.g. device, internet (bit like most people have had in the workplace). Evidence in local school of benefit of this in Lockdown 1.0 before schools reopened. Replicate this across the whole school estate. Note this was first suggested before Lockdown 3 and when schools were open again, however it has been reinforced as most definitely still needed.</p> <p>Young people are concerned, and with a sense that they are judged on IT ability now, not academic ability in subject.</p>		<p>RECOMMENDATION TO CABINET/DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION & SKILLS</p> <p>The Committee recommend that a 1:1 support approach is pursued and put in place for all of Sheffield Secondary Phase as a minimum and as immediate as possible to change digital isolation and mental wellbeing.</p> <p>The Committee want to raise awareness and draw attention to the suggestion that it is not just small numbers of young people affected by digital isolation. The context to this is that there are hidden numbers, experiential evidence that it is easier to be missing online than it is to be missing in class. A part solution is face to face, or regular offline non class contact to find out who is ‘outside’ of being online. The circularity of you don’t know what you don’t know, and how can we find out and change the digital isolation experience for young people in this critical stage of their life.</p>
<p>Support for teachers</p>	<p>It was suggested there should be support for Sheffield teachers in knowledge & experiential sharing (content and method), and financial support for teachers to deliver online, develop a way to deliver for all learning styles. Managing practical learning for those topics that need it, it is an important learning style for some students, a factor behind original subject choice, and some subjects don’t really exist without e.g. food tech and other technical subjects, sciences.</p>		<p>RECOMMENDATION TO CABINET/DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION & SKILLS</p> <p>The committee ask that if not already the Council find out what are the government departments expectations for a curriculum for whichever assessment option selected; and suggest this could be as part of Alternative Arrangement consultation response as well as ongoing; that it is crucial teachers know what they should be teaching or revising to make sure students are ready for assessment – whatever format is chosen by the Government.</p>

			The Committee ask that support to schools be considered to identify ways of delivering more practical learning in current situation, so as not to create inequality or disadvantage for those who online as a learning style is a barrier.
Catch Up in learning / curriculum	Consider that for current years it is essential and now; that the legacy impact for future years is acted on, the following on years are dropping further and further behind		See above
University Bottleneck	We heard of concerns regarding oversubscription as previous years defer, of worries that the grades obtained but not through exam may be questioned, feelings of being disadvantaged by just being the class of 2021		RECOMMENDATION TO CABINET The Committee recommend that the Council engage locally with our Sheffield learning institutions, and lobby nationally for changes to university criteria to ensure the classes of 2019/20 and 2020/21 are not disadvantaged, for example having to unfairly compete with previous years cohorts who have gained exam grades 'normally'; that future years who may take exams but whose learning is affected right now are not disadvantaged at point of application to university.
Entry requirements for post 16	We heard there are barriers to progression from Level 2 to Level 3 because unable to take exams for the A-C requirement. There is effectively a block on progression, this cohort will be left behind those who can finally take exams. Alternative Arrangements – what about resits.		Recommendation as above that cabinet engage with Sheffield learning institutions applies here to.
Digital Isolation	We heard that this is seen by young people as a big problem, as referred above in wider support for students, the hidden numbers, the notion that being missing online is easier than being missing in class but online. We want to know still how do we find out who is excluded? We heard it is more than devices, internet	Encourage and facilitate members of Youth Cabinet to sign up to Digital Divide Summit [NB – two have]	RECOMMENDATION TO CABINET The Committee cannot emphasise enough that we engage young people in the Digital Divide workstream sponsored by Cllr Terry Fox, over the full term of the project and ongoing to ensure a better digital access in the future for young people of Sheffield; that issues such as how do we

	too (no Wi-Fi, poor Wi-Fi, no contract, contract usage limits), do we know how many devices needed, what is the minimum spec, must be good laptops, – who can help provide? Can anything be done about the multitude of Apps and Systems		find out who is excluded, how many devices needed, what type of device and what infrastructure, who can help provide the devices and infrastructure need urgent solution and resolution, a potential for city wide collaboration.
Physical Resources	We heard if schools can't give out computers and Wi-Fi then they should send papers in post. Students need more physical resources - printed material. Suggestions are a single source for access to online resources, perhaps a Council web page, ask local companies like Twinkl if they can support with printed materials	Explore local solutions for printed materials. Share with cabinet Member/Director of Education and Skills	Suggestions came up in our meetings, and we would welcome executive view on this.
Mental Health	We heard mental health is only getting worse as go longer into pandemic, lockdown etc... Young people are finding ways to meet.	Seek a public health view on concept of can there be targeted guidance supporting young people's needs to meet, is it better than under radar	Other views needed on this, recognise it is multi-faceted, and subject to national guidance, is it possible to have a local policy.
Comms to raise awareness	Communications plan to help Youth Cabinet raise awareness of young people issues, for example comms that may engage Look North, The Star. A chance to reach a wider audience with issues.	Role of Committee / action still to be determined – explore with our comms team potentially	Open for discussion on best way to achieve or facilitate this.
	NEXT STEPS FOR COMMITTEE		CONSIDER THESE RECOMMENDATIONS, AGREE AND SEND TO CABINET AND DIRECTORS

CYP&FS Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee 21st January 2021

ⁱ Government Consultation on Alternative Arrangements – opened 15th January, closes 23:45 Friday 29th January (2 weeks) it is an online response form, main Government information page includes link to online response form: <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/consultation-on-alternative-arrangements-for-the-award-of-vtqs-and-other-general-qualifications-in-2021/consultation-on-alternative-arrangements-for-the-award-of-vtqs-and-other-general-qualifications-in-2021-html>

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