Evidence for Module 2A of the UK Covid-19 Public Inquiry

January 2023

About Children in Scotland

Giving all children in Scotland an equal chance to flourish is at the heart of everything we do. By bringing together a network of people working with and for children, alongside children and young people themselves, we offer a broad, balanced and independent voice. We create solutions, provide support and develop positive change across all areas affecting children in Scotland.

We do this by listening, gathering evidence, and applying and sharing our learning, while always working to uphold children's rights. Our range of knowledge and expertise means we can provide trusted support on issues as diverse as the people we work with and the varied lives of children and families in Scotland.

Children in Scotland's response

Children in Scotland is pleased to contribute to the request for evidence to Module 2A of the UK Covid-19 Public Inquiry. Our response focuses on the experiences of children and young people living in Scotland through the pandemic and their right to have their experiences and suggestions heard and considered by decision-makers, in line with Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child[1].

[1] https://www.unicef.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/05/UNCRC_PRESS200910web.pdf

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the lives of children, young people and their families from the very first lockdown and through subsequent waves of restrictions. We know from research published during this period that the pandemic affected many different areas of their lives, including education and employment, relationships, play, mental and physical health[2]. It affected all children from birth into early adulthood.

There have been challenges for children accessing their right to education, especially those with additional support needs[3]. For school aged children, the closure of schools was one of the most significant changes they experienced. Many expressed their frustration about decision making relating to school closures, online learning and examinations, which did not appear to sufficiently consider the views, preferences or needs of children and young people. For those in the senior phase of education, lack of clarity over arrangements for the 2020 and 2021 exam diets was a particular cause of stress and uncertainty[4].

On the back of public concerns about decision making in education and looking forward towards a post-covid future, a number of independent inquiries and reviews were established[567]. Children in Scotland has welcomed these developments as an opportunity to ensure that the views and priorities of children and young people are central to education decision making in the future[8]. It is essential that these inquiries result in significant and lasting change within the education system.

Outwith education we are aware that there have been challenges with access to support services such as social work or mental health support for children and young people[910]. There have also been significant delays and

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[2] https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-children-young-people-families-evidence-summary-june-2021/pages/2/

[3] https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/08856257.2021.1872844

[4] https://childreninscotland.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Education-Recovery-Youth-Panel-Final-Report.pdf

[5] https://www.gov.scot/publications/putting-learners-centre-towards-future-vision-scottish-education/

[6] https://www.gov.scot/news/national-discussion-on-education/

[7] https://www.gov.scot/publications/independent-review-of-qualifications-and-assessment-terms-of-reference/

[8] https://childreninscotland.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Manifesto-briefings_Education.pdf

[9] https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5cee5bd0687a1500015b5a9f/t/5ebc2206ee7a6919fe41a562/1589387823919/LockdownLowdown+Results+by+Demographic+Breakdown.pdf

[10] https://www.youngminds.org.uk/media/01epl0t1/coronavirus-report-spring-2020.pdf

challenges within the Children's Hearings System[11]. This has compounded pre-pandemic problems, particularly around capacity within children's mental health services (CAMHS) in Scotland.

Specific groups and communities across Scotland have been more adversely impacted by COVID-19 than others – these include children and young people experiencing poverty, children with disabilities and additional support needs, care-experienced children and young people and children and families from black, Asian and ethnic minority backgrounds[12]. Children in Scotland believes it is vital that any future work to plan for resilient communities must understand and explore the significant inequalities that exist for different communities, and adopt a person-centred, human rights-based approach to developing new proposals. This includes engaging with children and families with lived experience and involving them in service co-design.

We recognise that the Scottish Government was under considerable pressure during the pandemic to make vital decisions quickly. We appreciated the efforts that were made by the First Minister, Deputy First Minister and National Clinical Director to communicate directly to children and young people through videos and letters about decisions that had been made. We also commended steps taken to collate evidence about the impact of the pandemic on children and young people's lives, through the production of regular research briefings[13]. We understand from our members that feedback from children and young people and the organisations that supported them resulted in some changes being made, such as prioritising the reopening of playgrounds for example.

Nevertheless, while these steps were appreciated, we strongly believe that more could have been done to ensure that the views and needs of children and young people were prioritised through the pandemic period. If Scotland was a society that fully embedded children's rights across all aspects of civil live, it would have had mechanisms in place to ensure that children and

[11] https://strathprints.strath.ac.uk/76147/7/Porter_etal_IJCR_2021_Children_s_rights_in_children_s_hearings_impact_covid_19.pdf

[12] https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-children-young-people-families-evidence-summary-june-2021/pages/2/

[13] https://www.gov.scot/publications/report-covid-19-children-young-people-families-october-2020-evidence-summary/pages/8/

young people's needs and priorities could have been better taken into consideration. For Children in Scotland therefore, commencement of UNCRC Incorporation is in our view, the most effective route to ensuring that any future national emergency planning can consider how the needs and rights of the youngest in society are best addressed.

For more information, please contact:

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