Questionnaire UK COVID-19 Inquiry: Module 2 - Rule 9 Request to YoungMinds

Reference: M2/R9R/YM/TJS

Please provide the following information:

1. **A brief overview of the history, legal status and aims of the organisation or body. Please explain whether the work of the organisation or body is UK wide, or is instead confined to England, Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland only.**

Young Minds is a leading mental health charity for children and young people, founded in 1993. Our registered charity number is 1016968.

Our aim:

We want to see a world where no young person feels alone with their mental health. For this to happen, we believe that the wait for support has to end. If all young people can get the mental health support they need, when they need it, we can stop an emerging mental health need becoming a crisis.

To achieve this we work across three strategic programmes:

1. Never Alone: a digital programme helping young people to look after their mental health.

2. Someone to turn to: making sure young people have adults around them who can really help when they are struggling. This includes the Parents Helpline service.

3. Powerful Young Voices: working with young people to build a youth-led movement to make sure support is there for everyone who needs it.

2. A brief description of the group(s) which the organisation or body supports or represents.

We work with Children and young people up to the age of 25, who are struggling with their mental health or who may be looking for coping strategies and ways to manage their mental health. YoungMinds' work reaches the whole of the United Kingdom, with people answering our Parent Helpline survey from Aberdeen to Plymouth. Online resources are accessed across the UK, and we have young people participating in Activists Programme and Youth Panel from across the UK. Policy and service information often has an England focus due to differences in governments and structures. Typically, we only work to influence the overarching UK Government, and will only answer the (a) sections of this questionnaire as a result. This is because health is devolved and we don't have capacity to run devolved nation campaigns and influencing work.

3. A brief overview of the work of the organisation or body in supporting or representing the relevant group(s) between January 2020 and Spring 2022 as it relates to the response to Covid-19 of (a) the UK Government; (b) the Scottish Government; (c) the Welsh Government; and/or (d) the Northern Ireland Executive.

In the time period specified we continued with our major schemes of work:

- Online resources and advice for young people as well as parents and teachers, including a guide to supporting your child with their mental health during Covid-19, as well as young people sharing their experiences in our young person blogs, and resources for teachers supporting students transitioning back into normal school life. (See more in question 4)
- Providing free online training courses offered for teachers and those working with young people to access remotely, to support them to support young people's mental health
- Continued to run our Parents Helpline service supporting parents and carers through phone calls, email and webchat.
- We also moved our work with young people on our Activists Programme online and continued to engage them in co-production of policy and public affairs work.
- We continued our policy and influencing work, as explained in question 4, and we surveyed 14,000 young people (Nov-Dec 2021), including questions relating to the impact of COVID-19 and other factors on their mental health.

4. A list of any articles or reports the organisation or body has published or contributed to, and/or evidence it has given (for example to Parliamentary Select Committees) regarding the impact on the group(s) which the organisation or body supports or represents of the response to Covid-19 by (a) the UK Government; (b) the Scottish Government; (c) the Welsh Government; and/or (d) the Northern Ireland Executive. Please include links to those documents where possible.

Select Committee submissions:

- https://www.youngminds.org.uk/about-us/reports-and-impact/policy-reports/what-impact-is-the-covid-19-pandemic-having-on-education/ (and submission: https://www.youngminds.org.uk/media/arnjgvxu/youngminds-submission-to-education-committee-the-impact-of-covid-19-on-education-and-children-s-services-docx.pdf)
- https://www.youngminds.org.uk/about-us/reports-and-impact/policy-reports/how-is-the-covid-19-pandemic-impacting-young-people-s-mental-health/ (and submission:

https://www.youngminds.org.uk/media/42qpfjd2/youngminds-submission-to-women-and-equalities-committee-coronavirus-and-protected-charactisterics.pdf)

- Other select committee responses (attached to email) to the COVID Committee, to Department of Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee inquiry, to Health and Social Care Select Committee on delivering core NHS services and on inquiry on children and young people's mental health

Other policy documents:

- Various policy priority and briefing documents (attached to email)
  - Beyond Tomorrow and A Vision for Renewal (both focused on rebuilding post-pandemic)
  - An April 2020 briefing on the impact of COVID-19 on children and young people's mental health (based on research under taken 20-25 March 2020)
  - A briefing for a roundtable in June 2020, on schools and COVID-19, on the Resilience Fund (a YoungMinds policy recommendation)
  - A briefing on the impact of returning to school post-COVID-19 on children and young people's mental health (October 2020)

Other key communications:

- Our COVID-19 homepage was kept updated – you can see the latest version here: https://www.youngminds.org.uk/young-person/coping-with-life/coronavirus-and-mental-health/
- Over the time period specified we published 78 blogs (from parents, staff, young people) which are indicative of the issues we were hearing from young people.

Published	Title	Link
Mar-20	What to do if you're anxious about coronavirus	https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/what-to-do-if-you-are-anxious-about-coronavirus/
Mar-20	Talking to your child about coronavirus	https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/talking-to-your-child-about-coronavirus/
Mar-20	Looking after your mental health while self-isolating	https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/looking-after-your-mental-health-while-self-isolating/
Mar-20	Tips for coping with OCD during the coronavirus pandemic	https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/tips-for-coping-with-ocd-during-the-coronavirus-pandemic/
Mar-20	Coping with an eating disorder during the coronavirus pandemic	https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/coping-with-an-eating-disorder-during-the-coronavirus-pandemic/
Mar-20	Supporting your family's wellbeing during isolation	https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/supporting-your-family-s-wellbeing-during-isolation/

Apr-20	Young people's self-care tips for self-isolation	https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/young-peoples-self-care-tips-for-self-isolation/
Apr-20	How to look after your mental health in a difficult living environment	https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/how-to-look-after-your-mental-health-in-a-difficult-living-environment/
Apr-20	Looking after your mental health while studying from home	https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/looking-after-your-mental-health-while-studying-from-home/
Apr-20	Tips for creating a routine during self-isolation	https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/tips-for-creating-a-routine-during-self-isolation/
Apr-20	Coronavirus, autism and my mental health	https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/coronavirus-autism-and-my-mental-health/
Apr-20	How I'm coping with exams being cancelled	https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/how-im-coping-with-exams-being-cancelled/
Apr-20	How I'm coping on down days in self-isolation	https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/how-im-coping-on-down-days-in-self-isolation/
Apr-20	Struggling at school: my mental health journey	https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/struggling-at-school-my-mental-health-journey/
Apr-20	A parent's tips for managing family life in isolation	https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/a-parents-tips-for-managing-family-life-in-isolation/
Apr-20	Getting through Ramadan under lockdown	https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/getting-through-ramadan-under-lockdown/
Apr-20	Developing OCD after an infection: my mental health journey	https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/developing-ocd-after-an-infection-my-mental-health-journey/
Apr-20	Parent's tips for looking after yourself in lockdown	https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/parents-tips-for-looking-after-yourself-in-lockdown/
Apr-20	How to stay connected during lockdown	https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/how-to-stay-connected-during-lockdown/
Apr-20	Why self-forgiveness is so important during lockdown	https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/why-self-forgiveness-is-so-important-during-lockdown/
Apr-20	Tips for parents in a difficult living situation during lockdown	https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/tips-for-parents-in-a-difficult-living-situation-during-lockdown/
May-20	What to do if you're struggling to sleep in lockdown	https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/what-to-do-if-youre-struggling-to-sleep-in-lockdown/
May-20	My experience of online counselling	https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/my-experience-of-online-counselling/

May-20	A letter to myself when I was self-harming	https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/a-letter-to-myself-when-i-was-self-harming/
May-20	Young people's self-care tips for self-isolation	https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/how-my-friends-and-family-have-been-supporting-me-during-lockdown/
May-20	Recovering from an eating disorder in lockdown	https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/recovering-from-an-eating-disorder-in-lockdown/
May-20	Finding the right medication for me: Seren's story	https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/finding-the-right-medication-for-me-serens-story/
May-20	How I practise mindfulness to improve my mental health	https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/how-i-practise-mindfulness-to-improve-my-mental-health/
May-20	Tips if you are struggling with body image in lockdown	https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/tips-if-you-are-struggling-with-body-image-in-lockdown/
May-20	How being deaf affects my mental health	https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/how-being-deaf-affects-my-mental-health/
May-20	A parent's tips for home-schooling	https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/a-parents-tips-for-home-schooling/
May-20	Coping with the end of school in lockdown	https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/coping-with-the-end-of-school-in-lockdown/
Jun-20	What we've learnt about our mental health in lockdown	https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/what-weve-learnt-about-our-mental-health-in-lockdown/
Jun-20	Racism and my mental health	https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/racism-and-my-mental-health/
Jun-20	Black Lives Matter: Standing with the Black community	https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/black-lives-matter-standing-with-the-black-community/
Jun-20	How I'm coping with anxiety about going back to work	https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/how-i-m-coping-with-anxiety-about-going-back-to-work/
Jun-20	Supporting a child returning to school after lockdown	https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/supporting-a-child-returning-to-school-after-lockdown/
Jun-20	Supporting a child with grief and loss during the Covid-19 pandemic	https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/supporting-a-child-with-grief-and-loss-during-the-covid-19-pandemic/
Jun-20	Coping with the end of university in lockdown	https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/coping-with-the-end-of-university-in-lockdown/
Jun-20	Finding support as a gay trans man from my rugby team	https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/finding-support-as-a-gay-trans-man-from-my-rugby-team/
Jun-20	Black mental health matters	https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/black-mental-health-matters/

Jun-20	Coping when Father's Day is difficult	https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/coping-when-fathers-day-is-difficult/
Jun-20	Parents tips for supporting an anxious child in lockdown	https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/parents-tips-for-supporting-an-anxious-child-in-lockdown/
Jun-20	How racism impacts my mental health	https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/how-racism-impacts-my-mental-health/
Jun-20	Mental health support in schools: An open letter to the Government from a college student	https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/mental-health-support-in-schools-an-open-letter-to-the-government-from-a-college-student/
Jun-20	Supporting a young person when they come out	https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/supporting-a-young-person-when-they-come-out/
Jul-20	What it's like to develop health anxiety	https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/what-its-like-to-develop-health-anxiety/
Jul-20	Why young people will need more mental health support after lockdown	https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/why-young-people-will-need-more-mental-health-support-after-lockdown/
Jul-20	How to look after your mental health when involved in activism work	https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/how-to-look-after-your-mental-health-when-involved-in-activism-work/
Jul-20	How I manage my mental health alongside chronic illness	https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/how-i-manage-my-mental-health-alongside-chronic-illness/
Jul-20	Looking after my mental health while questioning my sexuality	https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/looking-after-my-mental-health-while-questioning-my-sexuality/
Jul-20	Why I don't want lockdown to end - for my mental health	https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/why-i-dont-want-lockdown-to-end-for-my-mental-health/
Jul-20	Paying tribute to our Chair, Dr Elizabeth Vallance	https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/paying-tribute-to-our-chair-dr-elizabeth-vallance/
Jul-20	Coping with anxiety about leaving the house	https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/coping-with-anxiety-about-leaving-the-house/
Jul-20	Celebrate your achievements with #EndOfSchoolSelfie	https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/celebrate-your-achievements-with-endofschoolselfie/
Jul-20	Coping with social anxiety as lockdown eases	https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/coping-with-social-anxiety-as-lockdown-eases/
Aug-20	Coping with anxiety about going back to school	https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/coping-with-anxiety-about-going-back-to-school/
Aug-20	How COVID-19 has affected my health anxiety	https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/how-covid-19-has-affected-my-health-anxiety/

Sep-20	Coping with anxiety about the future due to COVID-19	https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/coping-with-anxiety-about-the-future-due-to-covid-19/
Oct-20	Tips if you are struggling to settle into uni during the COVID-19 pandemic	https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/tips-if-you-are-struggling-to-settle-into-uni-during-the-covid-19-pandemic/
Oct-20	Tips for starting uni during the COVID-19 pandemic if you have a mental health condition	https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/tips-for-starting-uni-during-the-covid-19-pandemic-if-you-have-a-mental-health-condition/
Oct-20	Supporting your child at university during the COVID-19 pandemic	https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/supporting-your-child-at-university-during-the-covid-19-pandemic/
Nov-20	Chronic pain, coronavirus and my mental health	https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/chronic-pain-coronavirus-and-my-mental-health/
Nov-20	Dealing with hopelessness in the COVID-19 pandemic	https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/dealing-with-hopelessness-in-the-covid-19-pandemic/
Nov-20	Activities to do with your teenager during the pandemic	https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/activities-to-do-with-your-teenager-during-the-pandemic/
Dec-20	Tips for coping during 'Covid Christmas'	https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/tips-for-coping-during-covid-christmas/
Jan-21	Dealing with the January blues in lockdown	https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/dealing-with-the-january-blues-in-lockdown/
Jan-21	How we're managing our mental health in the third national lockdown	https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/how-we-re-managing-our-mental-health-in-the-third-national-lockdown/
Jan-21	How social media has helped me feel less lonely during lockdown	https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/how-social-media-has-helped-me-feel-less-lonely-during-lockdown/
Jan-21	How to connect with your feelings in lockdown	https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/how-to-connect-with-your-feelings-in-lockdown/
Jan-21	Staying motivated at uni during the Covid-19 pandemic	https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/staying-motivated-at-uni-during-the-covid-19-pandemic/
Feb-21	Three tips for coping with loneliness in lockdown	https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/three-tips-for-coping-with-loneliness-in-lockdown/
Feb-21	Why you're not "wasting time" in lockdown	https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/why-you-re-not-wasting-time-in-lockdown/
Mar-21	Tips for starting a conversation around mental health in lockdown	https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/tips-for-starting-a-conversation-around-mental-health-in-lockdown/

Apr-21	Tips for going from shielding to lockdown easing	https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/tips-for-going-from-shielding-to-lockdown-easing/
Apr-21	Coping with anxiety about the easing of lockdown restrictions	https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/coping-with-anxiety-about-the-easing-of-lockdown-restrictions/
Apr-21	What I've learnt about my mental health a year into the pandemic	https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/what-i-ve-learnt-about-my-mental-health-a-year-into-the-pandemic/

5. The view of the organisation or body as to whether the group(s) it supports or represents was adequately considered when decisions about the response to Covid-19 were made by (a) the UK Government; (b) the Scottish Government; (c) the Welsh Government; and/or (d) the Northern Ireland Executive. Please also explain the reasons for the view expressed by the organisation or body in this respect.

YoungMinds' position is that although we supported the measures the Government took to limit the spread of the virus and save lives (see letter to the Prime Minister, dated 18 May 2020), we also have concerns that the crisis' longer term impacts on children and young people's mental health were not sufficiently taken into account when decisions were being made by the (a) UK Government.

We were concerned in particular about young people who were experiencing bereavement, abuse and/or domestic violence, and those who belonged to groups that already experienced marginalisation or disadvantage. For those young people, access to school and other educational spaces, community spaces and groups, were vital for their safety and wellbeing. These spaces also often provided access to some mental health support. These young people could have been better supported by more nuance in regulation to allow those in most need to still have access to these spaces, much like the children of key-workers were allowed to remain in school.

We also had significant concerns about those young people who were already receiving or were waiting to receive formal mental health treatment when the pandemic hit. To investigate the impact that the crisis is having on young people's mental health, we carried out a survey with 2,111 young people with a history of mental health needs. The survey was conducted between 20 March 2020 (the day on which schools closed to most students) and 25 March 2020, when further restrictive measures had been put in place. While the findings only show a snapshot, the concerns of those surveyed were echoed in further research as the pandemic continued.

The research found that among the respondents who were accessing mental health support in the lead-up to the crisis, 74% said that they were still getting some level of mental health support (in March 2020), despite the immense challenges services are facing. 26% of young people who had been accessing support said that they were not currently able to access support. This means a quarter of young people who were accessing some support before the crisis had lost their access to support within weeks of the first COVID-19 case occurring in the UK.

Among those who were no longer able to access support, some had experienced cancellations due to schools closing, not being able to attend peer support groups or because services that had been delivered face-to-face could not be provided online or by phone. Others had been offered remote support but reported concerns around privacy, access to technology or anxiety over talking on the phone or via video calls. These young people could have been better supported again by nuance in regulations, such as we saw for emergency medical care, which could have allowed them to continue to access some form of support, and for mental health services to have had additional emergency funding to build up the technological and personnel resource required to adequately provide more support online.

We also surveyed 1,135 teachers and members of school or college staff to ask them how they viewed young people's mental health in the context of the pandemic around Easter 2020.

The key findings of this survey were that:
- **74% of respondents** agreed that schools being closed to most students over the period of lockdown had had a negative impact on young people's mental health.
- **88% of respondents** agreed that a lack of structure and routine had had a negative impact on student wellbeing; 79% agreed that increased anxiety as a result of the pandemic had had a negative impact.
- When asked what measures would be most helpful for the mental health and wellbeing of young people on their return to school or college, **78% of respondents** reported that additional pastoral support, such as counselling services, would have been helpful.

While we supported lockdowns and schools closures as a method to save lives – including those of clinically vulnerable children and their families – the absence of pastoral care in particular could have been better addressed. Schools should have been supported - both financially and in terms of direction from central government indicating this was a worthwhile endeavour – to prioritise pastoral care alongside attempting to continue children's academic progress. This could have been achieved via ring-fenced funding for in-school and online mental health support, delivered through a whole school approach to meeting their needs through tried and tested best practice. Depending on the needs of the school, this may include increased hours for key staff across the school, evidence-based interventions or resources, and/or the use of school counsellors, Mental Health Support Teams, online counselling services or partnerships with voluntary sector providers.

We believe that in the midst of the crisis, the nuances of the impact of the national response – nuances which had a drastic impact on children and young people's mental health – were forgotten.

6. Whether the organisation or body raised any concerns about the consideration being given to the group(s) which it supports or represents with (a) the UK Government; (b) the Scottish Government; (c) the Welsh Government; and/or (d) the Northern Ireland Executive, when the Government(s) and/or Executive were making decisions about their response to Covid-19. Please provide a list of any such correspondence or meetings with the UK Government, Scottish Government, Welsh Government and/or the Northern Ireland Executive, including the dates on which the body or organisation wrote or such meetings were held, to whom the correspondence was addressed or with whom the meeting was held, and any response received from the UK Government, Scottish Government, Welsh Government and/or Northern Ireland Executive addressing such concerns.

We, along with a number of other organisations in the mental health sector, wrote a letter to the Prime Minister (attached to email), dated 18 May 2020.

We met with the DHSC External Affairs team in March 2020 [Name Redacted] to share the findings of our initial research into the impact of COVID-19.

In April-June 2020 we regularly met with MPs to share our concerns – Munira Wilson MP, Kate Forbes MP and James Murray MP (April), Jane Hunt MP and Dr Rosena Allin-Khan MP (in May), Cat Smith MP (in June). We also placed a number of Parliamentary questions (another example) about the impact of the pandemic at this time. This meeting programme continued into the autumn.

We know the Government was aware of our work, given then Health Secretary Matt Hancock mentioned us in a daily COVID-19 briefing in May 2020 in reference to financial support for mental health charities.

7. A brief summary of the views of the organisation or body as to any lessons, if any, that can be learned from any consideration which was given to the group(s) that the organisation or body supports or represents by (a) the UK Government; (b) the Scottish Government; (c) the Welsh Government; and/or (d) the Northern Ireland Executive when they were making decisions about their response to Covid-19

YoungMinds believes there were a number of lessons to be learned about how to better support children and young people and their mental health. We made a series of policy recommendations throughout the early months of the pandemic, which would have gone a long way to meeting this aim. Please also see our answer to question 5, regarding learnings in particular for vulnerable children and young people, children and young people receiving mental health support, and pastoral care in schools.

In May 2020 we called for 5 changes to be made to better consider the impact of the response on children and young people:

1. Offer immediate emergency funding to increase young people's and families' access to mental health support through youth organisations charities and helplines; and ensure that clear routes are available for young people to access NHS mental health services while restrictions are in place.

2. Launch a national campaign to reach 10 million children and young people, and their families, to promote positive approaches for maintaining mental wellbeing, working alongside the voluntary sector to do so.
3. Deliver a wellbeing support package for schools, enabling them to prioritise wellbeing now and over the next academic year, and providing guidance and resources on how to manage transitions when it is safe for students to return to school.
4. Commit to introducing additional support for young people's mental health as we move out of the pandemic to meet rising demand, including re-committing to the measures outlined in the NHS Long Term Plan in full and funding additional early intervention services.
5. Launch a cross-government strategy for young people's mental health, taking a 'young people's wellbeing in all policies' approach to future policy-making and addressing inequalities that can contribute towards worse mental health

Unfortunately these actions were not taken, with the exception of 5, the cross-government strategy for young people's mental health, which has been partially fulfilled by the announcement in April 2022 of an all age 10 year plan for mental health.

We also had more specific calls around supporting the continued provision of mental health support for children and young people, from as early as April 2020:

- Ensure that the NHS, schools, charities and other providers have the funding and resources they need to deliver services, including digital, virtual, text-based and telephone therapies, to children, young people, parents and carers.
- Enable a coordinated effort across the NHS, schools and other providers to support those young people who are hardest to reach, who are unable to access remote support, or who do not find it helpful for their needs.
- Prioritise clear and ongoing public health messaging aimed at children, young people and families about what they can do to look after their wellbeing and mental health.

Finally, in September 2020 we called for a £125m Resilience Fund to be created for the new academic year, to allow schools to invest in the mental health and wellbeing support their pupils needed, without having to divert funding away from essential additional academic support. This would have been vital in preventing a serious long-term mental health crisis for our young people and ensuring they can fully engage with their education and catch up after months of lost learning.

It is our position that had these policy recommendations been acted on, children and young people's mental health would have been better supported throughout the pandemic.

Our recommendation for future pandemic-preparedness is to create a youth advisory panel within the relevant team in the Department for Health and Social Care. This panel could provide further insights into how the Government's response could better have supported this group's mental health, in order to create a guide for future governments to use in future crises. We are aware that it would have been very difficult for the Department to recruit for and

consult with a panel of young people, without delaying the life-saving measures being brought in. We should not wait for the next crisis to occur to adequately consult with children and young people.

This preparation is particularly pertinent given what we now know about the enduring impact of COVID-19 on our children and young people. In a survey undertaken by YoungMinds of 14,000 young people in November-December 2021, we found that the majority of young people were still worried about COVID-19 and its impact on them personally: 24% of young people were 'always' worried, 36% 'often' worried, and 33% 'sometimes'. It is of paramount importance that when the next crisis hits, the Government does more to shield children and young people from its short and long term effects..