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Department for
Digital, Culture,
Media & Sport

Youth Evidence

Deep dive focus group findings

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29 March 2021

At **NatCen Social Research** we believe that social research has the power to make life better. By really understanding the complexity of people's lives and what they think about the issues that affect them, we give the public a powerful and influential role in shaping decisions and services that can make a difference to everyone. And as an independent, not for profit organisation we're able to put all our time and energy into delivering social research that works for society.

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Executive summary

Introduction

The Government is committed to investing in young people's futures and to helping all young people fulfil their potential. The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) commissioned a 'Youth Evidence Review' to understand the challenges and opportunities facing young people today and, in the future, and to inform Government thinking on youth policy. This report presents findings from the second stage of the review, deep dive qualitative research. It summarises findings from eight focus groups with young people aged 13-24 in urban, rural and coastal locations of England. The findings from the focus groups were analysed to answer five questions:

- **How do young people spend their time outside of school?**

- **What is missing from local provision in their area?**

- **What are the barriers young people face in accessing activities / services or engaging in the way in which they would like?**

- **What benefits do they feel it would bring if they could access the things they would like to do?**

- **Do they feel empowered to make the changes they wish to see in their local area/beyond?**

Key findings

How young people spend their time outside of school

Young people spent their time outside of school in two main ways:

- **Leisure activities:** these included (a) sports and physical activity (as part of a club and / or informally on their own or with friends); (b) youth clubs and creative groups (drama, dance, music, arts and crafts); (c) socialising with family and friends (in parks, at each other's houses, going shopping, meeting for a drink or meal, or the cinema or theatre); (d) solo activities (such as: playing a musical instrument, learning a language, listening to music, reading, studying and cooking); using a range of media, particularly social media (e.g. *YouTube*, *TikTok*, *FaceTime*, *SnapChat, Instagram*).

- **Social and community-focused activities:** these involved uniformed groups (Scouts, Guides, Cadets); volunteering, citizenship groups (Duke of Edinburgh Award, National Citizen Service, Youth Councils; community groups (e.g. faith groups); activism (only mentioned by young people with learning disabilities e.g. campaigning for disability rights). These activities were important for shaping employment and career pathways and providing young people with life skills. Notably, young people in the 16-19 group predominantly said they felt they grew out of Scouts and Guides by their age.

What is missing from local provision for young people?

Gaps in local provision was described in terms missing services, activities and spaces.

Missing services included:

- **Mental health support** – young people across all age groups identified this gap, or said they were at least not aware of any mental health support available to them outside of school. Not all young people felt that they had someone they could talk to about their mental health and wellbeing. Young people thought a variety of forms of support are needed to meet different mental health and wellbeing needs, including self-help and one-to-one support.

- **Career and future planning support** – young people aged 16 and above from all areas said there was a lack of local support to help them make informed decisions about their future or to equip them with

important life skills. Post-school careers support and financial management, such as budgeting and dealing with bills, were considered especially important.

- **Reporting experiencing racism** – there was a reluctance among young people to report incidents of racism because they did not think the police would take them seriously. Young people thought support with dealing with racism and other forms of discrimination were lacking in their local area.

Missing activities and spaces included:

- **Spaces to hangout / socialise** – except for parks, young people across all age groups said there was nowhere welcoming that they could just hang out with friends. They liked the idea of outdoor and indoor spaces where there was an option for informal activities as well a place they could just sit.

- **Spaces to study outside of school / home** – some young people did not find school or home conducive places to study. Local libraries had sometimes closed by the time young people arrived after school and/or did not feel like safe spaces for young people.

- **Activities for older teens** – age-specific activities for young people 15 and above were thought to be missing locally, with too much focus on activities for younger children or those at a basic level of activity (e.g. in relation to dance).

- **Access to a wider range of activities available locally** – while sports like football were generally well catered for at a local level, other sports and non-sporting activities were not. These activities required travel that was then prohibitive because of cost, time, the need to involve parents or carers, or perceptions of safety when travelling.

- **Activities to prevent anti-social / criminal behaviour** – more needed to be done to prevent formation of gangs, with this being especially mentioned in smaller towns and rural areas.

- **Accessible and inclusive spaces and activities for all young people** – more also needed to be done to make sure young people know that activities and spaces are inclusive and welcoming, reflecting diversity among young people. Free or cheaper activities were considered important for enabling participation among young people from lower income households.

Barriers faced in accessing activities, services and spaces

Young people of all ages and from all areas identified practical, personal and social barriers that prevented them from accessing spaces, activities and services. They also suggested possible solutions to them.

Practical barriers

- **Cost** – of travelling to and from, or accessing activities and services prevented young people from attending them. Where they were not old enough to work, where studying prevented them from working, or they did not have a job, they were reliant on parents or carers to pay. *Free or cheaper travel and access to activities would improve young people's participation in activities or allow them to do them more frequently. Free or reduced membership rates at leisure centres for under-20s were regarded as a good idea.*

- **Distance and transport** – distance to travel to an activity became an issue for young people when: (a) they could not reasonably walk to the activity because of distance or safety concerns; (b) they could not afford the cost of travel and/or the activity; (c) public transport did not take them near to where the activity was taking place; (d) they did not have access to a parent, carer or someone else with a car to take them and/or collect them. *Providing a more diverse range of activities within walking distance, making public transport free or cheaper (especially for young people still in full-time education), and providing independent travel support for young people with learning disabilities were put forward as solutions.*

- **Safety** – was identified as an issue across all age groups, both when travelling to an activity or service or when they were there. Passing through areas where groups were known to congregate (e.g. specific underpasses, areas known to be associated with gangs), and accessing services alongside older young

people or adults who made them feel unsafe could act as barriers to access and participation. *Introducing cycle lanes was suggested as a way for young people to pass through troubling areas more quickly. Age-specific activity groups were regarded as making younger people feel more comfortable participating.*

- **Knowing what is available** – young people, especially those aged 16 and over, said they lacked information about what activities or services were available to them locally. They tended to find out about activities via word-of-mouth (from family, friends, neighbours, friend's parents, faith groups), school, social media and community notice boards. *Targeting information at age-specific groups, using social media such as Instagram to promote awareness of young person-friendly spaces, and offering taster sessions to promote activities and services were put forward as ways to improve knowledge of available activities and services. Advertising through schools was considered a good way to ensure all young people in education were aware of them.*

- **Other practical barriers** – young people aged 13-19 said balancing studying, work and spending time with family and friends was difficult. Having to book facilities (e.g. tennis courts), rather than just turn up, could act as an additional barrier to access. COVID-19 and associated lockdowns had acted as a barrier. While it was possible for some activities or services to continue virtually, for others it was not. *No solutions were put forward to address these barriers.*

- **Additional practical barriers for young people with a learning disability** – these were the prohibitive cost of requiring a carer to accompany them to some activities, and the fact that suitable equipment was sometimes not available (e.g. not being able to participate in a cycling activity because adapted bikes were not available). In some cases, parents were also thought to be overprotective of the young person, not allowing them to visit friend's homes. *Greater funding for carers and better information of how to make activities and services more inclusive for all were identified as solutions.*

Personal and social barriers

- **Anxiety about treatment by others** – young people were anxious about attending spaces or being involved with activities where they included older young people or adults. They expressed the concern that the level of skill would be more advanced and that they would not be as good at an activity as others. *Offering age-specific spaces and activities and taster sessions were suggested as the answer.*

- **Fear of not fitting in** – not knowing anyone else attending a space or activity, or knowing how people would respond to them or treat them, was a barrier for some young people. *Young people, especially those aged 13-15, said having someone who they knew or trusted accompany them was the solution.*

- **Social desirability** – how a group or activity was viewed by peers could stop young people engaging with it. *Getting young people involved in activities when they were younger before peer pressures grew in their teens was regarded as a possible way to address this.*

- **Lack of diversity** – Black, Asian and minority ethnic young people in the groups were worried about not being accepted in some spaces or for some activities because there was not ethnic diversity amongst those who attended or ran the groups. Young people with learning disabilities were also put off participating in activities when other participants stared at them or treated them differently. *It was suggested that groups and activities needed to do more to be inclusive and welcoming and ensure that anyone can participate. Diversity education and representation of minority ethnic groups in leadership roles in activities were suggested as ways to improve diversity.*

Benefits gained from participating in activities and clubs

Young people of all ages, across the groups, reported the following benefits to them: (a) meeting new people and socialising with friends; (b) physical and mental health benefits; (c) increased confidence; (d) improved social skills; (e) enhanced life skills; (f) educational and career benefits; and (g) something to look forward to. Of especial note were:

- **Wider social contacts** – they met people from other schools and areas and participated in a wider range of activities than at school, which served to widen their friendship network, experiences and

knowledge. For young people who were shy in some contexts, it also helped them improve their social skills.

- **Physical health and mental wellbeing** – playing sports helped keep them fit and mentally healthy. Participating in drama and dance, attending support groups, and spending time with friends also lifted their mood, reduced stress and helped them unwind.

- **Personal development** – young people learnt new skills through uniformed groups and citizenship and volunteering initiatives, developed life skills and increased their confidence.

- **Educational and career development** – some young people found taking part in the Duke of Edinburgh Award or volunteering helped them find jobs by being able to put it on their CV, gain work experience, gain entrance to university, or guide their career pathway.

Empowered to make changes to their local areas

Several themes emerged:

- **Desire to be involved in decision-making** - across all focus groups and therefore age groups and area types, participants thought it was important that young people were involved in decision making that affected them, whatever the topic.

- **Time to be involved** - young people said they did not have a lot free time and were sometimes uncomfortable speaking to people in person. Being able to share their views via a one-off engagement online, or in a written format, was preferable.

- **Where to involve young people** - schools were regarded a good place to advertise opportunities or conduct activities to involve young people in decision making. This was because it would allow everyone to be involved and not cut into their free time.

- **Offering young people choices** – while being able to share their views via a one-off engagement online was preferable to many, participants thought it was important that young people were offered a range of ways be involved in decision-making so they could choose a format that suited them. Discussion groups and youth councils were other suggested modes of engagement.

- **Reducing the voting age** - young people aged 16-19 thought that the voting age should be lowered to 16 to enable young people to be involved in choosing who are in positions of power to make changes.

Conclusions

The rapid evidence assessment of issues and concerns among young people in the UK conducted in May 2020 was the first stage of the Youth Evidence Review. The findings from the rapid evidence assessment were grouped into five areas: experiencing positive wellbeing; safe and treated fairly and equally; mentally and physically healthy; learning and prepared for work; and active members of society. There are a lot of similarities, and a few differences, in the findings from the rapid evidence assessment conducted in May 2020 and the deep dive research.

- **Experiencing positive wellbeing** - The rapid evidence assessment found that while most young reported being happy and satisfied with their lives, a proportion of young people experience dissatisfaction with elements of their lives. Examples from the focus groups included: young people not having access to friendly and affordable spaces where they can build and develop their friendships; and young people who could not afford the cost of travel or attendance cost of activities being disadvantaged in terms of the positive benefits of being involved in sports, clubs and other activities for their wellbeing. Bullying was not as prominent in the accounts of the focus groups participants as in the evidence review however, focus groups participants expressed anxieties about how they would be treated by others when attending activities and whether activities would be inclusive.

- **Safe and treated fairly and equally** - The rapid evidence assessment and focus groups both found that despite a decline in the number of young people being cautioned or sentenced for a crime in

England and Wales, some groups still felt unsafe because of their race, religion, sexual orientation or gender identity. Black, Asian and minority ethnic young people were reluctant to report incidents to the police because they didn't think their complaint would be taken seriously. In addition, focus groups participants felt unsafe in places where groups congregated or in areas known for gang activity. They felt more activities were needed to divert some young people from gangs and crime. Young people wanted others to be better educated about how to include them in activities, to enable them to feel welcome, treated fairly and safe.

- **Mentally and physically healthy** - While official statistics show that more than one in seven young people in England have a diagnosable mental health disorder serious enough to impact on their daily lives, young people across the focus groups thought that there was not enough support (or they were unaware of support) available for their mental health and wellbeing and that more self-help and one-to-one support was needed. Furthermore, while obesity and inactivity were concerns identified in the evidence review, this contradicts the high reporting of sporting and other activities in the focus groups. However, young people did identify a number of practical, personal and social barriers to participation in sports and other activities which could lead to inactivity.

- **Learning and prepared for work** - The rapid evidence assessment and focus groups both found that young people are worried about finding work in the future. Focus group participants felt that there were not enough support services or opportunities available locally to help them with post-school planning or to develop work-related and life-related skills such as financial management. Participation in uniformed groups such as the Cadets, and citizenship and voluntary initiatives, helped young people develop skills and confidence, and provided them with future careers pathways.

- **Active members of society** - Despite only around half of young people aged 18 to 24 voted in the 2019 election, young people in the focus groups thought that it was important for young people to be meaningfully involved in decision-making about policies and services that affect them. To make decision-making inclusive, young people should be given a choice of ways to engage including both short one-off engagement (via school or online) and ongoing engagement.

1   Introduction

Young people today face a range of challenges, including concerns about their mental and physical health, their future employment prospects, financial stability, and about crime and security. Young people are also faced with a number of opportunities, for instance to engage with the online world, to participate in a rapidly changing political environment and to tackle social issues including climate change. Some of these challenges are new, such as new forms of social media, whilst others have faced previous generations.

The Government is committed to addressing the challenges facing today's youth and to helping all young people to meet their full potential. It is in this context that the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) commissioned the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen), an independent and impartial social research organisation, to conduct a Youth Evidence Review to inform Government thinking on youth policy in the coming years. This deep dive research is the second phase of the review[1]. This report summarises the findings from eight focus groups with young people aged 13-24 from urban, rural and coastal areas in England.

1.1   Research aims and objectives

The aim of the second phase of the review was to gain a greater understanding of the ways in which young people spend (or would like to spend) their time outside of school. The qualitative research with young people aged 13-24, was guided by the following research questions:

- How do young people spend their time outside of school?
- What is missing from local provision in their area?
- What are the barriers young people face in accessing activities / services or engaging in the way in which they would like?
- What benefits do they feel it would bring if they could access the things they would like to do?
- Do they feel empowered to make the changes they wish to see in their local area/beyond?

DCMS are interested in the opportunities available to young people and whether the availability and accessibility of opportunities relate to geographic location or age.

In this report, we present key findings from focus group discussions with young people. Where possible, we have analysed similarities and differences in young people's experiences by age and area type (urban, rural, coastal). The aim of the research was to examine young people's experiences from their point of view and generate rich insights. Qualitative research maps the range and diversity of experience within a population, but small sample sizes mean it is not possible to say how statistically representative those experiences are of the wider population (see Table 2).

1.2   Methods

1.2.1   Recruitment and sampling

To involve a diverse mix of young people in the research, NatCen agreed a purposive sampling frame to select and recruit participants based on the following primary sampling characteristics:

- Geographical location: one urban, one rural, and three coastal locations[2]

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[1] The first phase of the review was a Rapid Evidence Assessment. The final report can be found here: <mark>INSERT LINK TO PUBLISHED REA</mark>

[2] Three coastal locations were used to ensure ethnic diversity amongst participants.

- Age: grouped by age 13-15, 16-19, 20-24

We also aimed to capture a spread of young people according to the following secondary sampling characteristics:

- Gender: male, female, self-described gender identity
- Ethnicity
- Socioeconomic background: measured by currently / previously received free school meals
- Engagement in activities: a mix of those involved and not involved in structured activities outside of education

Participants were recruited by *Criteria,* a specialist recruitment agency for research with seldom heard groups. *Criteria* were provided with detailed sampling quotas and information to share with participants.

Participants aged 13-15 received £25 and participants aged 16-24 received £30 in recognition of their time and contribution to the study.

1.2.2   Participant demographics

Eight focus groups were completed with young people aged 13-24 in urban, rural and coastal areas. Table 1 presents a breakdown of the achieved focus groups by age group and geographical area.

Table 1: Achieved focus groups by age and location

Focus group composition	No. of focus groups by area			
	Urban	Rural	Coastal	Total
Aged 13-15 years	1	1	1	3
Aged 16-19 years	1	1	1	3
Aged 20-24 years	1			1
Aged 13-21 years living with a learning disability	1			1
Total	4	2	2	8

Table 2 presents a breakdown of the achieved sample by key primary and secondary sampling characteristics.

Table 2: Achieved sample by key sampling characteristics

	n	%
Area type (n=46)		
Urban	20	44
Rural	13	28
Coastal	13	28
Age (n=46)		
13-15	20	44
16-19	19	41
20-24	7	15

Gender (n=46)		
Female	28	61
Male	18	39
Prefer to self-describe	0	0
Ethnicity (n=46)		
White British	23	50
Mixed ethnicities	7	15
Asian British	7	15
Black British	4	9
British Filipino	2	4
Black Caribbean	1	2
Indian	1	2
Nepalese	1	2
Previously or currently eligible for free school meals (n=46)		
Yes	20	44
No	22	48
Did not respond	4	9
Currently involved in out of school activities (n=39)[3]		
Yes	15	38
No	22	56
Did not respond	2	5

1.2.3   Data collection, analysis and reporting

Eight focus groups were conducted with young people aged 13-24 between 5th December 2020 and the 29th January 2021. Seven of the focus groups were conducted online using *Zoom* video conferencing software. The focus group with young people with learning disabilities was the only group to take place face-to-face. The organisation we recruited through advised that the participating young people would find it easier to engage face-to-face and in a location they felt comfortable. Therefore, the focus group was arranged in line with government COVID-19 restrictions to be undertaken at the support organisation's location. Focus groups were organised by age group and location.

Each focus group was moderated by two researchers[4]: a lead moderator guided the discussion, and a co-moderator took notes and provided technical support where needed. All focus groups were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim[5]. We obtained participants' consent for audio-recording of the discussions and the use of their anonymised data for analysis.

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[3] The seven participants aged 20-24 were not asked this question as they had already left school.
[4] The exception to this was the focus group with young people with learning disabilities was moderated by one NatCen researcher and a worker from the organisation who provided support. This was to ensure that all questions asked during the focus group were accessible to participants and to help participating young people feel comfortable.
[5] The recording of the focus group with young people with learning disabilities was not suitable to be transcribed because of the nature of the responses and recording quality. But detailed notes were made and used for analysis.

Ethical approval for the study was granted by NatCen's Research Ethics Committee.

Focus group transcripts were systematically and thematically analysed using *NVivo* to explore the range of participants' experiences and views, identifying similarities and differences based on key characteristics, where possible.

2   How young people spend their time outside of school

The young people we spoke to spend their time outside of education or work in a range of ways.

2.1   Leisure activities

Across all focus groups, and ages and areas, there were young people who said that in their free time they:

- Participate in a range of **sports and physical activity** either as part of a club and / or informally on their own or with friends. Sports and activity mentioned included: football, netball, rugby, cricket, badminton, basketball, cheerleading, tennis, swimming, sailing (and other water sports), working out at the gym, martial arts, running, ice skating and walking.

- Attend a range of **youth clubs and creative groups** most often on their own rather than with existing friends. Clubs young people participated in included: youth clubs, drama clubs, dance classes, playing in a band, and arts & crafts groups. While there were young people involved in clubs and groups close to their home, others said they had to travel to be able to attend the club of their choice because it was not provided locally. This was particularly the case for activities such as cheerleading, ice-skating and drama groups.

- Spend time informally with **family and friends**. Time with family and friends included: hanging out in parks, going to each other's houses, going shopping, going out for food, going to the theatre or cinema.

- Spend time on **solo activities** such as: playing a musical instrument, learning a language, listening to music, reading, studying and cooking.

- Use one or more forms of **media, particularly social media**. Young people described spending time playing computer games on their own or with friends, watching TV (e.g. Netflix), watching videos on YouTube and TikTok, and speaking to their friends on their phone via SnapChat or FaceTime, and spending time on Instagram. These activities were predominantly mentioned by young people aged 13-15.

2.2   Social and community-focused activities

In addition to leisure activities, young people spent their free time participating in community-focused activities such as uniformed groups, volunteering and citizenship groups.

Being involved in a uniformed group such as Girl Guides, Scouts or Cadets, was particularly widespread among those aged 13-15. Young people aged 16-19 across all areas said they had previously been involved in a uniformed group of some sort, but that they had largely grown out of them as they got older.

Young people mentioned either currently or previously spending their free time volunteering or being involved in citizenship or community groups such as National Citizen Service (NCS), youth councils, advisory groups, Duke of Edinburgh Award or Faith groups. The Duke of Edinburgh Award was accessed by young people through their schools, while young people accessed their other activities in their community. There were young people aged 16-19 who said they had previously spent time volunteering at a nursery and a day centre which had since turned into paid jobs.

Young people with learning disabilities discussed being involved in activism activities, campaigning to help young people with disabilities to be treated fairly and inclusively. Activism wasn't mentioned by any other young person in the other focus groups but it is unclear whether this is because they were not involved in activism or if it just didn't come up in the discussion.

3   What is missing from local provision for young people

3.1   Existing local provision

In order to understand what is missing from local provision we first asked young people to describe what spaces, activities and services were available in their local area, whether or not they had personally used them. Young people identified a range spaces and activities available for young people in their local area, including:

- Green and blue spaces: parks (all areas), countryside (rural), the beach and sea (coastal), canals (urban)
- Sports clubs (including martial arts)
- Indoor sports facilities: leisure centres, swimming pools, gyms
- Outdoor sports facilities: green gyms, tennis courts, basketball courts, AstroTurf
- Libraries
- Youth clubs
- Creative youth groups: drama and dance
- Citizenship groups: Duke of Edinburgh Award and National Citizenship Service
- Faith groups
- Volunteering

Young people also recalled a number of activities and groups that used to be available but no longer exist. These included youth clubs, martial arts clubs and dance studios. Some had closed down due to lack of funding, while others had closed when the person running it moved away.

Young people did not mention support services while discussing what was available in their area.

3.2   What's missing from local provision

Young people of all ages and from all areas identified a number of spaces, activities and services they thought were missing from their local area. These are summarised in Table 3 and discussed in more detail below.

Table 3: Missing spaces, activities and services from local provision

Missing services	Missing activities and spaces
- Mental health support - Career support - Support to develop life skills for their future - Support for those experiencing racism and discrimination - Opportunities to have their voices heard (discussed in section 7)	- Spaces for young people to hangout / socialise - Spaces to study outside of school / home - Activities for older teens - Wider range of activities available locally - Activities to prevent anti-social / criminal behaviour - Accessible spaces and activities

3.2.1   Missing services

Mental health support services and services to help prepare young people for their future were identified by young people as being missing from local provision.

Mental health support

Young people across all ages groups thought that there was not enough mental health support for young people available locally, or at least they weren't aware of any support that was available. When asked where they would go for support if they were struggling, some young people said they would go to someone they trusted in school or in the community such as a religious temple or youth group. However, it was acknowledged that not all young people would have someone they felt they could talk to about their mental health. To ensure that support is available to everyone, young people thought mental health support should be provided in a range of ways so young people can choose what works best for them. In addition to one-to-one support, young people thought group support and self-help techniques should be made available.

> "I think one-to-one support would be really good, and definitely online support, because some people, it's hard for them to talk about things. So if there's someone that they can just talk to anonymously online about whatever problems they're having, they might be able to help, or just offer suggestions. That would be something that would, yes, really benefit people." (16-19 year old female, White British, coastal area)

Support for the future

Young people aged 16 and above from all areas, felt there was no support locally to help young people make informed decisions about their future or equip them with important life skills. Young people would like there to be local services which can help them to think about future careers and post-school destinations and help them to understand what options and opportunities are available to them. In addition, there were young people who said that they would benefit from a service or group that helped them to develop life skills to prepare them for becoming an adult, such as financial management in terms of budgeting and dealing with bills. There was recognition that not all young people receive this support and guidance at home.

> "I think they should do a club. This isn't necessarily for me personally, but maybe for less fortunate kids they could do life skills or something like that because some people's parents don't want to, or aren't able to, teach them life skills, for example cooking…how to set up banking or something, your online bank…just life skills that you need but are so simple that people wouldn't even think of. I don't know." (16-19 year old female, White British, urban area)

Reporting experiences of racism

Young people thought services to provide support for those experiencing racism and discrimination was missing from their local area. There were young people who had experienced racism in their local area and when asked if they had reported it or spoken to anyone about it, they said they didn't think there was anywhere to go to. Young people were reluctant to report incidences of racism to the police because they didn't know if it would be taken seriously and they thought the police had other issues to deal with. Young people would, however, appreciate a way to report racist incidents and have someone to speak to if they needed it.

> "I was on my phone, and then this old man behind me was talking about, 'Oh, why is her phone in a different language? This is England. We speak English here,' and obviously, I didn't really know what to say…Just things like that, there's nowhere you could go or anybody you could speak to. You just have to kind of take it…Yes, it upset me, but I don't think I was going to the police. He was talking about people going back to their country, which is like, where?...Just stuff like that, it makes people not want to go out and use the facilities." (16-19 year old female, Black Caribbean, rural area)

3.2.2 Activities and spaces

Young people identified a number of spaces and activities they thought were missing from their local area.

Spaces to socialise with friends

Young people of all ages thought informal spaces where they could socialise with friends without having to do an organised activity were missing from their local area. This reflected their experiences of feeling unwelcome in their local area, as young people described wanting to have spaces where they could sit with friends without being perceived by others to be making trouble. The only space young people felt they currently have to do this, is the local park. Young people liked the idea of indoor and outdoor spaces where there was the option for informal activities as well as just spaces to sit.

> "I think that a problem in our area is that the only places to go are outdoors. Apart from the town centre, you can go to a park. That's it really, and especially in winter, it's cold…so I think if you're hanging out with your friends, I think it's important to have somewhere indoors that we can go. We have a town centre, but that's not really a place for people to hang out. I think people get kicked out and stuff, just because they want somewhere to hang out." (16-19 year old female, White British, rural area)

Spaces to study outside of school and home

Young people would also like safe and welcoming spaces where they can study outside of school as they felt their home wasn't a conducive place to study. While some areas had local libraries, young people found that the opening times were not accessible (by the time they got to it from school, it would be closing), or they didn't feel safe being there with some of the other people that used it (see section 5.1.3).

Activities and spaces for older young people

Age specific activities and spaces, particularly for those aged 15 and above, were also thought to be missing from local provision in all areas. Young people thought those younger than them and adults were well catered for, but there was less available which was suitable for their age group. For example, one young person acknowledged that while there were dance classes provided in their local area which were within their age range, these local dance groups focussed on the development of younger age groups. Therefore, they had to look further afield to find a dance class that would continue to develop their skills at their age and level.

> "I feel like there's a lot more for younger ages. I know it's difficult to get something for our older ages because everyone's a bit more just like, social media, PlayStation, Xbox, so it's harder to find something that our age would enjoy and that could fit everyone. I feel like for younger people, there is a lot of opportunities." (13-15 year old female, mixed ethnicity, rural area)

Access to a wider range of activities locally

Missing activities were sometimes discussed in terms of the diversity of activities in their local area. While some sports like football were catered for locally, less prominent sports and non-sporting activities were not. This required some young people to travel outside their local area to access them which could be prohibitive for them. While not clearly defined by young people, for a service to be local it needed to be within the area they live so they would not be dependent on travel, either by public transport or lifts from parents or carers.

> "In terms of netball, there's definitely good teams and stuff, and I know football and more sports or whatever you'd call them, but I feel like there's a lack of alternative sports as well. I know a lot of girls my age want to get fit, but they don't want to play a sport, so fitness classes would be

something good to introduce, but there's just not much of that anywhere that's affordable." (16-19 year old female, White British, coastal area)

Activities to prevent anti-social / criminal behaviour

Young people identified gangs as being an issue in their area and thought that activities to deter people from criminal activity and services to support people to get out of gangs were missing from local provision. This was particularly among people living in rural areas.

"Gangs as well is quite a big thing in the whole of [local area]*, really. It's quite a prominent thing that people can be quite scared of. So I think, yes, just having some sort of group there to support people who are in gangs, and try and get them out of gangs and find them a hobby, if that makes sense. So get them interested in things, like a sport, or an art, drama, etc., I think that would be quite an important thing, and that would definitely reduce crime, which would eventually make people more confident and want to participate a bit more." (16-19 year old male, Indian, rural area)

Accessible services and spaces

Young people aged 16 and above, including young people with learning disabilities, would like to see more inclusive activities available in their local area. For young people with learning disabilities, this included both activities aimed specifically at young people with learning disabilities and also community activities being accessible for them to participate in.

Young people thought activities and groups should be inclusive, so that anyone could attend and feel welcome regardless of income, previous experience of an activity or ethnicity. Across all areas and age groups, young people thought activities that were cheap or free to access were missing from local provision. Cheaper or free access to activities would enable all young people to access them, and access them more frequently. One young person gave an example of a local leisure centre previously having £10 monthly membership for young people to use all their facilities. While young people felt there were green spaces available locally that were free to access, the equipment in these spaces were sometimes of poor quality (e.g. ripped basketball hoops) which discouraged young people from using them.

"Even though you can play sports, I also find that sometimes you'll go out to a park or something, and even so, the equipment isn't great. If you want to play cricket, there's nowhere to really do it, or if you want to go and play football, there's no goals. It's limiting, even when you do get to go to a park." (16-19 year old male, White British, coastal area)

4 The barriers young people face in accessing activities, services and spaces

Young people were asked whether there was anything that might prevent them or other young people from accessing spaces, activities and services. A range of potential barriers were identified by young people, which broadly related to either practical or personal and social barriers. Young people also discussed ways to make activities, services and spaces more accessible to young people, many of which addressed the barriers that had been identified.

4.1 Practical barriers

Young people of all ages and from all areas identified a number of practical barriers which could prevent young people from accessing spaces, activities and services. These are summarised in Table 4 and discussed in more detail below.

Table 4: Practical barriers and solutions

Practical barriers	Suggested solutions
• Cost e.g. entry, equipment, travel	• Free / cheaper access to spaces and activities (e.g. memberships) for all young people (and carers) • Government funding for young people aged 20 and under to access activities • Free / cheaper public transport for all young people
• Getting there e.g. distance, difficult to get to, access to transport	• Local provision of activities and services • Free / cheaper public transport for all young people • Support and funding for independent travel
• Safety	• More young person specific spaces and activities • Safer travelling routes e.g. cycle lanes
• Lack of information and awareness of spaces, activities and services	• Targeting advertising of what's available locally to specific ages groups via social media, schools, colleges schools, local council websites and offering taster sessions
• Availability of spaces, activities and services locally	• More spaces and activities aimed at specific age groups locally
• Not having enough free time	• None mentioned
• Spaces being hard to access	• None mentioned
• COVID-19 restrictions	• None mentioned
• Requiring a carer to access activities	• Greater funding and availability of carers to accompany young people with additional needs
• Spaces and activities not being accessible to meet young people's additional support needs	• Spaces and activities being made accessible for all young people to access

4.1.1   Cost

The cost of attending and/or travelling to attend an activity could prevent young people from accessing activities and services. Young people acknowledged that they often relied on parents to pay for activities if they didn't have jobs and recognised that not all families could afford to pay for their children to access activities. These costs could be even greater for activities that required young people to purchase particular equipment or a club strip or involved travel for competitions, matches or tournaments.

> "Some things that might stop people from going to these clubs, especially in less fortunate areas, if the club asks for money or something, or you need to pay for it…Sometimes it can be that a family, they don't have enough money to pay for the place that you want to go, like, it's a fun place, but it's just financially you can't go to it." (13-15 year old male, mixed ethnicity, urban area)

Young people thought providing cheaper or free access to activities and spaces would not only make them more accessible, but could encourage young people to attend more frequently. Young people described using some spaces such a leisure centres or AstroTurf infrequently because of the cost and said if it was cheaper they would use it more. One young person said their local leisure centre used to offer an affordable membership for young people which allowed them to access all facilities as often as they liked. Another young person suggested that the government could provide funding to enable all young people under the age of 20 to access an activity.

> "It would be really good if there was some kind of government funding that gave everyone under the age of 18 or maybe even 20, a chance to do an activity…I think it would just really encourage people to do stuff rather than just hang around, because I find with [local area] as well, there's a lot of people our age that literally just hang around, and sometimes that can be a bit intimidating as well." (16-19 year old female, White British, coastal area)

4.1.2   Distance and transport

Young people of all ages and areas thought that there were not enough spaces, activities and services for young people provided locally. While there were those who travelled to participate in activities of their choice, young people felt that distance could prevent some young people from accessing spaces, activities and services. This was a particular issue for young people:

- Who could not afford public transport (in addition to the activity)
- Who lived in areas where public transport did not take them to where they needed to go or when they needed to be there
- Without parents with access to a car or time to give them lifts to and from activities.

> "As you get older and you don't have your mum or your dad or anyone to taxi you around, then sometimes it's…Yes, it's not as appealing if you're having to travel 40 minutes on a bus." (20-24 year old male, White British, urban area)

Young people from all areas gave examples of when one or more of these issues had prevented them, or someone they knew, from accessing activities. One young person described how they were so determined to do an activity that they had waited until they were older and earning their own money to pay for the public transport required to participate in their activity of choice. However, not all young people may be so determined.

> "I think it also narrows the kind of things that you want to do. So for instance, if there's something that you like that's a lot further away, you are less likely to do it because obviously we don't have full-time jobs, but we pay full prices. Then you're like, well, I haven't got the money to go all the way there, so I'm just not going to do it." (16-19 year old male, White British, coastal area)

Young people thought providing more activities and services locally (where public transport wasn't required) would be one way to address these barriers. Making public transport free or cheaper for all young people (not just those under the age of 16) was another suggested way to address these barriers. Young

people over the age of 16 thought it wasn't fair that young people who were still studying had to pay the same for transport as adults working fulltime.

> "The only thing I find with buses is that we have to pay for adult tickets, and the problem with that is that we don't have jobs, well, I don't personally, and it costs so much without a job, and then all the time my mum will pay for that as well. So we're spending the same amount as someone with a full-time job or whatever to get somewhere." (16-19 year old female, White British, coastal area)

Finally, young people with learning disabilities said providing independent travel support would help them access activities and services more easily.

4.1.3 Safety

Feeling unsafe was another barrier identified by young people from all areas and across all age groups. Young people reported experiencing this both when travelling to, and spending time at, a space, activity or service. Young people identified places in the area they live which did not feel safe, either because people congregated in areas where they would need to pass through (e.g. underpasses) or because an area was known for crime and/or gangs.

> "Personally, even when I was going to the library, like the library in town, it just gave me dodgy vibes. There was people that were drunk in there, like bad vibes, and also, if you're a young girl, yes, and you're going to the library in town, do you know what I mean? Some people try and talk to you." (16-19 year old female, Black Caribbean, rural area)

Suggestions to address issues of safety included introducing more young person specific spaces and activities. Young people thought this would offer an alternative to hanging around the streets or being in spaces that they felt uncomfortable. In regard to helping young people access activities and services, one young person thought cycle lanes could go some way to enable young people to pass through unsafe areas quickly.

> "If I'm leaving my house to go for a run and then there's a load of people that - I don't want it to sound horrible - that are just there, maybe doing things I don't agree with, then that makes me think, oh, maybe I don't want to go for a run and stuff. So if there were actually activities that we could do that were in a controlled environment, it would make it a lot easier and stuff." (16-19 year old female, White British, coastal area)

4.1.4 Knowing what is available

Young people aged 16 and over said not knowing what is available for young people their age could be preventing young people from accessing spaces, activities and services. This age group felt that there were not enough spaces, activities and services suitable or targeted to their age group provided locally. However, they acknowledged that it was possible that there were suitable things available that they did not know about. Young people of all ages said they found out about what was available in a number of ways including: through word-of-mouth (from family, friends, neighbours, parents friends, faith groups), via school, social media or community notice boards. However, based on the discussions there appeared to be less ways of finding out what was available in their local area for young people aged 16 compared with those aged 13-15.

> "I think that's part of the problem. Sometimes they do have stuff, but when they advertise it, they either advertise it poorly, or don't advertise it enough. So you'll hear about something and it'll just be like a passing-by thing, or you don't have a way to look into it, so you can't find it, or whatever. For instance, I've not heard that there's paddle-boarding in [coastal area], but obviously you'd think it'd be obvious, but you wouldn't know because you haven't heard it, you haven't seen it advertised anywhere, so to me, it doesn't exist." (16-19 year old male, White British, coastal area)

To solve this issue, young people came up with a range of suggestions, including:

- Targeting advertisement of spaces, activities and services at specific age groups

- Using social media (e.g. Instagram) to promote spaces, activities and services suitable for young people

- Advertising opportunities via schools and colleges to ensure that all young people in education knew what was available

- Community groups offering taster sessions in schools to promote their group and engage young people.

4.1.5   Other practical barriers

A number of other additional practical barriers were identified by young people. There were young people who said **not having enough free time** could prevent them from accessing activities and services. This was mentioned by young people aged 13-15 and 16-19 who described trying to balance studying, work and spending time with family and friends, which meant they don't always feel they have the time to fit in other things.

> "Sometimes people have just got a lot on their plate already and they're like, maybe they're studying or they've got other clubs and stuff and they don't have time to do it all." (13-15 year old male, Asian British, coastal area)

Others felt that recent changes to community facilities had made them **harder to access** which was putting young people off from using them. Young people described that local tennis and basketball courts previously open for anyone to turn up and use, had recently changed to a booking system. This extra layer of administration made using them less appealing.

> "I know that near me there's tennis courts and basketball courts that used to be open as well, but now they lock them up and you have to book them, and I know it's fine, you can just go online and book them, but it is a pain and it does discourage people using those things. There's also not that many. I feel like there could be more." (16-19 year old female, White British, coastal area)

Finally, young people thought the COVID-19 pandemic and associated lockdowns had prevented them from accessing spaces, activities and services. While some groups had continued to meet virtually through the COVID-19 pandemic and various lockdowns, others had not. Young people did not suggest any solutions to these barriers.

4.1.6   Additional practical barriers experienced by young people with learning disabilities

In addition to cost, transport, distance, safety and knowing what's available, young people with learning disabilities identified a number of practical barriers they have faced in accessing spaces, activities and services. Young people shared that they often **require a carer to accompany them** to access spaces, activities and services but a carer is not always available or the additional cost of a carer attending can be prohibitive. While not mentioned in other focus groups, this could also be a barrier for other young people who require the support of a carer. Greater funding to pay for additional support could help address this barrier.

Furthermore, a barrier identified by young people with a learning disability, was the protectiveness of their parents towards them. Some young people with learning disabilities said their parents were very protective and would not let them do things that they felt other young people do such as go to friends' houses to socialise. In this sense it is possible that parents compounded barriers to participation for their children because of the expectation of discrimination or lack of inclusivity that some young people described above. While family was identified as a potential barrier to accessing activities by all young people, for young without a learning disability this was in the context of cost and not protection of their children.

Finally, young people with learning disabilities said that **a lack of suitable equipment** prevented them from accessing certain activities, for example, a young person said they couldn't participate in a cycling activity because adapted bikes were not available. Spaces, activities and services not being accessible to people with physical disabilities or other support needs wasn't discussed in the other focus groups but young people did say that activities and spaces should be inclusive and welcoming to all young people.

4.2   Personal or social barriers

In addition to practical barriers, young people identified a number of personal or social barriers which could prevent young people from accessing activities, service and spaces. These are summarised in Table 5 and discussed in more detail below.

Table 5: Personal and social barriers and solutions

Personal and social barriers	Suggested solutions
• Fear of inexperience • Fear of how you will be treated by others	• Spaces / activities for specific age • More information about activities • Taster sessions
• Anxiety of going alone • Fear of not fitting in	• Having someone to go with
• Social desirability	• Engaging people in activities at a young age • Engaging young people via schools
• Lack of diversity	• Service and activities being welcoming and inclusive • Involving people from ethnic minority backgrounds involved in running groups • Diversity and discrimination awareness training
• Interest / motivation (grown out of some activities)	• None mentioned

4.2.1   Anxiety of how you will be treated by others

Anxiety and insecurities about other people who use the space or participate in an activity, could act as a barrier for some young people accessing activities. Young people said they had previously decided not to take part in an activity because the other people there were older than them which they found to be intimidating. Others felt intimidated attending because they were worried they would not be as good as everyone else and were concerned how others would react. Offering age specific activities, providing more information about an activity (and the experience levels they cater for) and offering taster sessions were all suggested as ways to tackle these barriers.

> "I was planning on joining a volleyball club before COVID, but I heard that there were going to be people who were older than me, like 18-year-olds doing it. I don't know, it kind of stopped me from joining. I don't mind younger people, but knowing older people are going to be watching you, it's kind of nerve-wracking." (13-15 year old female, British Filipino, coastal area)

4.2.2   Fear of not fitting in

Across age groups and areas, young people said the fear of not fitting in, or being accepted by other people taking part in an activity or group, could prevent young people from accessing activities they are interested in. For many, a sense of intimidation came from not knowing other people participating in groups or activities or what to expect from them. For example, whether they would be friendly or their attitudes towards them, or people like them. Young people aged 13-15 said that if they did not have someone they knew, liked and trusted to go with they were unlikely to try new activities and groups.

> "The majority of the people who go to a club are either from the same school or they know each other outside of school or just in general. I think it's quite intimidating as well to start a new club and you're not really involved that much." (13-15 year old female, Asian British, coastal area)

Young people thought the way to address this barrier was to have someone to go with to. However, young people acknowledged that some people experience social anxiety which may stop them from taking part in activities they enjoy and young people weren't sure how to address this.

> "I think a big thing that can stop people is a lot of people have anxiety and social anxiety, like mental health issues and like lack of confidence and stuff. I think that brings them back a lot of, like meeting new people and feeling really conscious around new people. I think that's a big stop when doing clubs and interacting with other people as well." (13-15 year old female, Asian British, coastal area)

4.2.3   Social desirability

How an activity, group or space was viewed by their peers could stop young people from engaging with it. Young people said they would do what their friends did, so if something was not perceived to be good, they wouldn't go.

> "Yes, because there's a thing of although your mates can get you into it, if someone comes in and one person or two people go, 'Oh, this is terrible, this', a lot of people will just jump on the bandwagon because you don't want to feel alienated, like they have a different opinion towards the activity. So they'll just jump on and no one will do it, or everyone will do it, and most of the time no one will do it." (20-24 year old male, White British, urban area)

Young people aged 20-24 thought that engaging young people through schools, so everyone is engaged, or trying to engage people when they are younger before they start being influenced by their peers, may go some way to address this barrier.

> "I think if they're coming into secondary schools, they should target Year 7 and 8 because you're still at that age where you'll get involved." (20-24 year old female, mixed ethnicity, urban area)

> "People drop off when they get to 15, 16, 17 because you just find things more interesting. So I personally think if you can do more to retain those ages and keep them in those teenager years, you'll have more involvement." (16-19 year old male, Black British, urban area)

4.2.4   Lack of diversity

Young people living in rural and coastal areas thought the lack of ethnic diversity amongst people attending specific spaces, activities or services could act as a barrier to black and minority ethnic groups from attending or using them for fear of not being accepted. Young people described experiences of racism in their local area, including in school from a teacher. Young people found it more difficult to suggest ways to address this barrier and make spaces, activities and services more accessible to all young people. Young people thought the people running activities or services needed to make sure that they were welcoming and inclusive. One young person suggested that having people from ethnic minority backgrounds involved in running groups could help address this barrier. More widely, young people thought more needed to be done to tackle racism and educate people on different cultures, some of which could happen in schools.

> "There are a lot of people at my school and the area that are of different ethnicities or race, but you do get the odd few people, like a few of my friends who might not think they want to go somewhere just in case, because they don't feel as accepted in a way." (13-15 year old male, Asian British, coastal area)

A lack of diversity amongst participants could also act as a barrier for other young people. Young people with learning disabilities said they had been put off doing certain activities because other people stared at them or treated them differently to others.

5 Impact of accessing activities and services

To gain an understanding of what impact different activities have on young people, focus group participants were asked to reflect on what they get out of participating in the activities they are currently or previously involved in. Young people of all ages reported a range of benefits they gained from participating in activities and clubs. These included:

- Social connections – meeting new people and socialising with friends
- Physical health benefits
- Mental health benefits
- Increased confidence
- Improved social skills
- Enhanced life skills
- Educational and career benefits
- Something to look forward to

The benefits young people gained from taking part in activities and groups were the same across a number of activities (Table 6). What young people got out of participating in activities and groups did not vary by age group or area.

Table 6: Benefits young people gaining from activities they do in their spare time

	Sports	Martial Arts	Dance, drama, music	Youth clubs	Cadets, Guides, Scouts	Volunteering	DoE, NCS
Time with friends	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓
Make new friends	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Mental health	✓	✓	✓				
Physical health	✓	✓					
Learn new skills	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓
CV development	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓
Confidence	✓		✓		✓		
Social skills	✓					✓	✓
Life skills					✓		✓

5.1 Social contact

The sociable element of an activity or group was something young people of all ages and from all areas said they got out of participating in activities and groups. There was a social benefit to all types of activities and groups young people mentioned.

- A wide range of activities and groups enabled young people to spend time with and socialise with existing friends. Some young people noted that they don't go to school with some of their friends and taking part in activities and groups with them was how they spent time with them.
- Participating in activities and groups also enabled young people to meet new people and make new friends.
- For young people who were shy, meeting new people and participating in group also helped them develop their social skills.

5.2   Physically and mentally healthy

While sports and physical activity helped young people feel fit and healthy, they also helped boost young people's mental health and wellbeing. Positive benefits to young people's mental health was also something young people of all ages said they got out of participating in creative activities like music and drama, or attending support groups or spending time with friends. Young people said these activities helped lift their mood, reduced stress and helped them unwind.

> "I like football. Even though you could say it's physically good, so it keeps you healthy, but also, if you've been in school all day or college or whatever, but when you go out and play football, it's a release. You can chill out, play football for a bit, and then sit down for a bit and that kind of stuff. So it's not just about the football. It's about being able to relax as well." (16-19 year old male, White British, coastal area)

5.3   Personal development

A number of activities also benefited young people by enabling them to learn new skills, develop life skills and increase their confidence.

- Learn new skills: sports, uniformed groups (Scouts, Guides and Cadets), citizen initiatives such as Duke of Edinburgh and NCS and solo activities such as learning an instrument or language.

- Develop life skills (e.g. independence, presentation and coaching skills): uniformed groups (Scouts, Guides and Cadets), citizen initiatives such as Duke of Edinburgh and NCS.

- Increase confidence: sports, uniformed groups (Scouts, Guides and Cadets), citizen initiatives such as Duke of Edinburgh and NCS and creative activities like dance.

5.4   Educational and career development

Finally, young people said that the activities they took part in benefited them because it could be put on their CV or gives them UCAS points. Duke of Edinburgh, volunteering, activities done as part of uniformed groups, and development opportunities as part of sports clubs and dancing were all identified as being beneficial to boost their CV.

> "I did the bronze Duke of Edinburgh in Year 10, and it was a school thing, so I did it with the people in my school. It's supposed to be very good on your CVs and stuff like that and it gives you a great advantage." (13-15 year old female, Asian British, coastal area)

Older participants said the experience they had gained from participating in these kinds of activities had helped them choose future careers or obtain employment. Young people thought these sort of benefits should be advertised more to encourage more young people to take up these opportunities.

> "I'm training to become a primary school teacher in university now. And like, back in the day, because I was one of the older people there and more experienced, I got to teach…because I was in air cadets, it was how a plane flies and stuff like that, like the science behind it all. From an early enough age I was teaching them…Now, because I enjoyed it, that's set me on my way to becoming a primary school teacher." (20-24 year old male, White British, urban area)

6   Empowered to make changes to their local area?

6.1   Previous involvement in decision making

Not all young people had previously been involved in decisions about activities and services in their local areas. Young people from rural and coastal areas (both males and females) said they had been included in consultation activities. The ways in which young people had previously been involved included:

- Local council members visiting their Scout group to consult on what improvements could be made to the local area

- Being a member of a youth council

- Involved in surveys and consultation groups in or linked to school

- Via the Nextdoor App

    "There's this app that you get in different areas and it's called the Nextdoor app. On there, it's kind of like as a community and as your area they make decisions, or people communicate on there and they find out different things. There also is kind of support on there as well for teenagers and stuff like that…It was open for everyone to really go on there and communicate." (13-15 year old female, Asian British, coastal area)

They recalled being involved in decision-making both as a one-off experience or as ongoing consultation activities both via school and through community based groups.

Young people who had previously been consulted about their local area, enjoyed sharing their opinions but said they felt disappointed when the opportunities ended because of lack of funding or because nothing changed as a result of their input. Young people said it made them feel like their opinion didn't matter. Despite this disappointment, young people were still keen to be involved in any future decision making or consultation.

    "My school does a lot of surveys and petitions, but I never really know what the government does to actually achieve those goals. We never really see the results…[makes me feel] kind of like it just doesn't matter, just irrelevant. What's the point in doing it if the government doesn't actually take it into account?" (13-15 year old female, British Filipino, coastal area)

    "My school had a poster, like, 'You can talk about issues in your area,' and I was like, 'Oh, this sounds good,' but then it got closed down because there was no money from the government. You know when the council had no money? Everything got shut down. So did we." (16-19 year old female, rural area)

There were young people who said that being involved in the focus group was the first time they had been asked their opinion about things that affected them but they hoped that there would be more opportunities available in the future.

    "I feel like this has been the only time that I've ever been asked about a change or any other activities that we want. I feel like it would be better if young people were involved more, because then you would be able to know what sort of thing to make." (13-15 year old female, mixed ethnicity, rural area)

6.2   Future involvement in decision making

Across all focus groups and therefore age groups and area types, participants thought it was important that young people were involved in decision making that affected them, whatever the topic. Respondents thought youth involvement would help ensure that the decisions made met the needs of young people and they thought young people would be more invested in it.

    "If you're trying to appeal to any age group, it could be over 60s, it could be people my age, it could be younger people; if you're trying to do something that appeals to them then you should speak to

them and understand the stuff that they want rather than just go out and do it. So thinking in any sense, yes, the people you're trying to appeal to should have a say in the decision-making, I think." (16-19 year old male, Black British, urban area)

6.2.1   How young people would like to be involved

Young people were asked how they would like to be involved in decision making.

- **Short, one-off engagement:** There were young people who were hesitant in getting involved in activities that would take up lots of time because of competing time pressures (education, work, family and friends). They therefore said they would prefer to engage in short, one-off engagement rather than ongoing activities.

- **Written format:** Young people from all areas and ages groups, but particularly those aged 16-19, said they felt uncomfortable speaking to people face-to-face so would only get involved if they could engage in a written, rather than verbal, format. Young people thought that the method used to engage people in decision making should be tailored depending on the age group being targeted.

  "I think quite a lot of people would rather have something that they don't have to, for instance, talk or whatever. So maybe like a form they can fill out, or something you can do that doesn't take as much time, so something that people can do in their spare time that doesn't take too long, that still gets the data and their point across." (16-19 year old male, White British, coastal area)

- **Online and social media:** The most common way young people in the focus groups said they would like to get involved online, particularly via social media (mentioned in all focus groups), as it was a medium that they felt all young people were familiar with. Respondents reported taking part in Instagram polls and online surveys, and thought these approaches would appeal to a wide range of young people as a quick and easy way to respond that did not require them to speak to someone directly.

  "Probably a form or on social media is the best thing, because our generation now, a lot of people have a phone and a lot of people have access to one, so I feel like online would be the best way, personally." (13-15 year old female, White British, urban area)

- **Providing young people with a variety of ways to engage in decision making** was deemed important for ensuring engagement opportunities were inclusive and accessible to a wide range of young people by allowing them to choose to engage in a way they felt comfortable. There were young people of all ages (but particularly those aged 13-15) who would also be interested in taking part in one-off small discussion groups similar to the focus group, or in longer term engagement such as youth councils. Young people with learning disabilities would prefer to be consulted face-to-face in a space they feel comfortable, though a survey which they could complete with support was another option suggested.

  "I also think that the age that you're aiming the club at depends on how you're going to try and advertise it. For instance, if it was between, like we are today, 13- to 15-year-olds, online or social media is great because most people our age have a phone. If it was for younger kids, let's say, if it was for six- to ten-year-olds, maybe it's worth putting it on the mum groups on Facebook, or putting posters in - I don't know - churches or something, just so that parents can see it, or WhatsApp it to all the parents, because it depends who you're aiming the club at." (13-14 year old male, mixed ethnicity, urban area)

- **Engage via schools:** Young people from different areas and age groups thought that school would be a good place to advertise opportunities or conduct activities to involve young people in decision making because it would allow everyone to get involved and it would not cut into young people's free time. A yearly survey of Year 7+ was suggested. Those aged 16-19 thought that engaging younger young people was important because they felt that this us when they are trying out new activities and finding their interests. However, 16-19 year olds also said they didn't think there were enough activities available for their age group.

"I think most likely the best way to do it is through school, because then everyone has their say and everyone's involved, whereas I think when you do it online and stuff like that, not everyone sees that or not everyone has access to online and internet and social media." (13-15 year old female, Asian British, coastal area)

- **Voting:** Finally, there were young people in the 16-19 age group who thought that the voting age should be lowered to 16 to enable young people to be involved in choosing who are in positions of power to make changes.

7 Conclusions

The first part of this Youth Evidence Review[6] in May 2020 consisted on a rapid evidence assessment. The evidence of issues and concerns among young people was grouped in five areas (discussed below in section 7.1 to 7.5). In these conclusions, we revisit these themes and explore where there are similarities or differences between the forms of evidence.

7.1 Experiencing positive wellbeing

The rapid evidence assessment found that most young reported being happy and satisfied with their lives. Over the last decade, however, one in five young people remained unhappy or dissatisfied, with the quality of friendships, the relationship between poverty and poor wellbeing being, and bullying on social media being especially highlighted. Some of these themes were also reflected in the focus group , while others were less so. Notably, young people (especially older teens) discussed the lack of spaces that were welcoming to them, and where the possibility of getting involved in formal or informal activities existed alongside having a place to just sit and talk with friends. This suggests that there are difficulties for young people finding friendly and affordable spaces where they can build and develop their friendships. This was especially the case at times of the year when they could not meet in spaces such as parks.

The relationship between poverty and wellbeing was seen in the cost participants described getting to and from and taking part in activities or attending services. These problems were exacerbated where there was a lack of diversity of available activities within reasonable walking distance from young people's homes; where there was a lack of free, subsidised or frequent public transport; and where young people with learning difficulties need a carer to attend with them. Young people in these circumstances were disadvantaged in terms of the positive benefits of being involved in sports, clubs and other activities for their wellbeing.

Bullying (particularly on social media) was not as prominent in the accounts of the focus groups participants as in the evidence review, though it was mentioned as an issue facing young people. Young people did not discuss bullying per se in any detail in the groups, instead, there was an emphasis on anxieties about how they would be treated by others when attending activities or services outside school. They also worried about whether they would be good enough to take part in activities, and whether activities would be inclusive of people like them. Age group specific activities, going with someone they liked or trusted, activities for different levels of ability, taster sessions, and ensuring activity or service leaders make their activities inclusive are possible solutions. In these ways, everyone will feel included and comfortable in participating and be more likely to have a sense of positive wellbeing as a result.

7.2 Safe and treated fairly and equally

Previous evidence has demonstrated a decline in the number of young people being cautioned or sentenced for a crime in England and Wales, although crime policing continued to affect young people from Black and minority ethnic communities disproportionately. At the same time, some groups still felt unsafe because of their race, religion, sexual orientation or gender identity. Despite the decline in crime figures, young people from the focus groups still felt unsafe in some places were older youths or adults congregated (e.g. underpasses) or in areas known for gang activity, including rural areas. They felt more activities were needed to divert some young people from gangs and crime. Significantly, young people from Black and minority ethnic groups said that, despite the experience of continuing racism, they were reluctant to report incidents to the police and other authorities because they didn't think their complaint would be taken seriously, or that it would achieve anything.

Once again, the cost of activities outside of school, and travel to and from them were barriers that disadvantaged some young people. Others, including people with learning disabilities were active in challenging discrimination, and wanted people to be better educated about how to include them in

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[6] Molly Mayer and Lydia Marshall (2020) Youth Evidence Review: Rapid Evidence Assessment Findings, London: Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport. INSERT LINK TO PUBLISHED REA

activities, without treating them differently. They wanted to be able to feel welcome, treated fairly and safe when travelling to and activity, and when they participated.

7.3   Mentally and physically healthy

Official statistics show that more than one in seven young people in England have a diagnosable mental health disorder serious enough to impact on their daily lives. This was reflected in the deep dive research in that young people across the groups thought that there is not enough support for their mental wellbeing and mental health. This was one of the biggest gaps between concerns among young people and the activities and services young said were available to them. To some extent this may reflect a lack of knowledge about services available or how to access them outside school. However, the young people said some people didn't have anyone to turn to when in crisis and that more self-help and one-to-one support was needed.

Obesity and inactivity were concerns identified in the evidence review. The evidence suggested than less than one in five young people achieve at least one hour of moderate exercise per day. There is therefore a need to explain the contradiction between high reporting of sporting activity, and other activities such dance and drama, and statistical evidence that points in the opposite direction. One explanation may be that activity has become more irregular, with a need to look more closely at the practical, personal and social barriers to participation in sports and other activities documented in this report.

7.4   Learning and prepared for work

One-third of young people are worried about finding work in the future according the to the previous evidence review. They also think they do not get enough opportunities to develop work-related skills and that too much time is spent on preparation for exams and academic routes to university.

These views were also reflected in the focus groups. It was a recurring theme across the groups that there was an absence of career planning and future life skills support outside of schools. Participation in uniformed groups such as the Cadets, and citizenship and voluntary initiatives (such as the Duke of Edinburgh award and the National Citizen Service), were regarded as important for developing skills and confidence, and for cementing ideas among young people about their future careers pathways. This suggests wider participation in these initiatives, and better promotion of them (and what young people can gain from participating in them) through schools and other youth services, may be beneficial. Young people also sometimes found it difficult to balance studying, working and time with family and friends. Spaces to study away from home or school are also wanted, with libraries sometimes closing too early or not feeling welcoming to young people. Skills in financial planning, budgeting and paying bills were also wanted.

7.5   Active members of society

Only around half of young people aged 18 to 24 voted in the 2019 election, with young people often feeling that that issues of importance to them such as poverty, climate change, mental health and voting age are not being taken seriously enough.

Young people in the focus groups thought that it is important for people like themselves to be involved in decision-making about policies and services that affect them. However, young people who had been involved in consultations were sometimes disappointed where they said clear messages or implications had not been acted upon. They felt that schools or colleges were the best place to advertise opportunities to be involved in consultations or research so that everyone would be aware of them. One-off engagements online, or written submissions during school time were preferred so as not to cut further into their free time. As in other research with young people, there was a call for the voting age to be reduced to 16 so they can choose who they want to see in positions of power.