

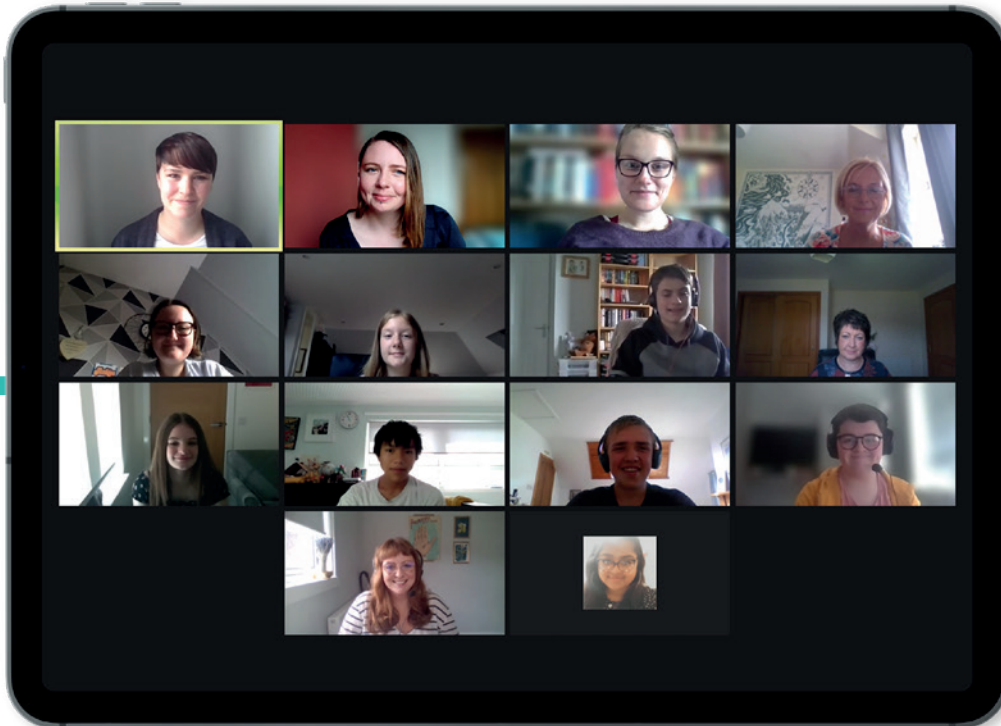
# EDUCATION SCOTLAND YOUNG PEOPLE'S STRATEGIC PANEL REPORT

AUGUST 2022



# INTRODUCTION

**Education Scotland (ES)** and **Young Scot (YS)** established a partnership in April 2021 with the purpose of creating the Young People's Strategic Panel, a co-design group composed of a variety of young volunteers aged between 13-17 from across Scotland.



The purpose of this Panel was to improve how youth voices are engaged within ES and support the embedding of the [United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child \(UNCRC\)](#) into the strategic work of ES. Over the 18-month project, The Panel has been exploring the work of ES and the UNCRC through their own lived experiences, collaborating with ES staff, identifying their priorities from issues they had identified and testing out their solutions before producing their recommendations for ES to take forward.

The Panel envisage a future for education that provides a level playing field for learners, with highly trained and skilled professionals supporting them through turbulent experiences, combatting stigma and empowering young people with their rights. The group see ES's involvement in this vision

as vital and strategic, providing the mechanisms, resources and awareness that educators need to support their students to the best of their ability. The Panel want their recommendations to inspire ES to be more involved in the day-to-day lives of children and young people, listening to their voices directly and making proactive changes to the education system on their behalf. The Panel wish for ES to be more transparent about the work they do, and how they do it and to communicate the ongoing cycle of necessary change needed to keep education relevant, engaging and informed.

# THE YSHIVE CO-DESIGN PROCESS

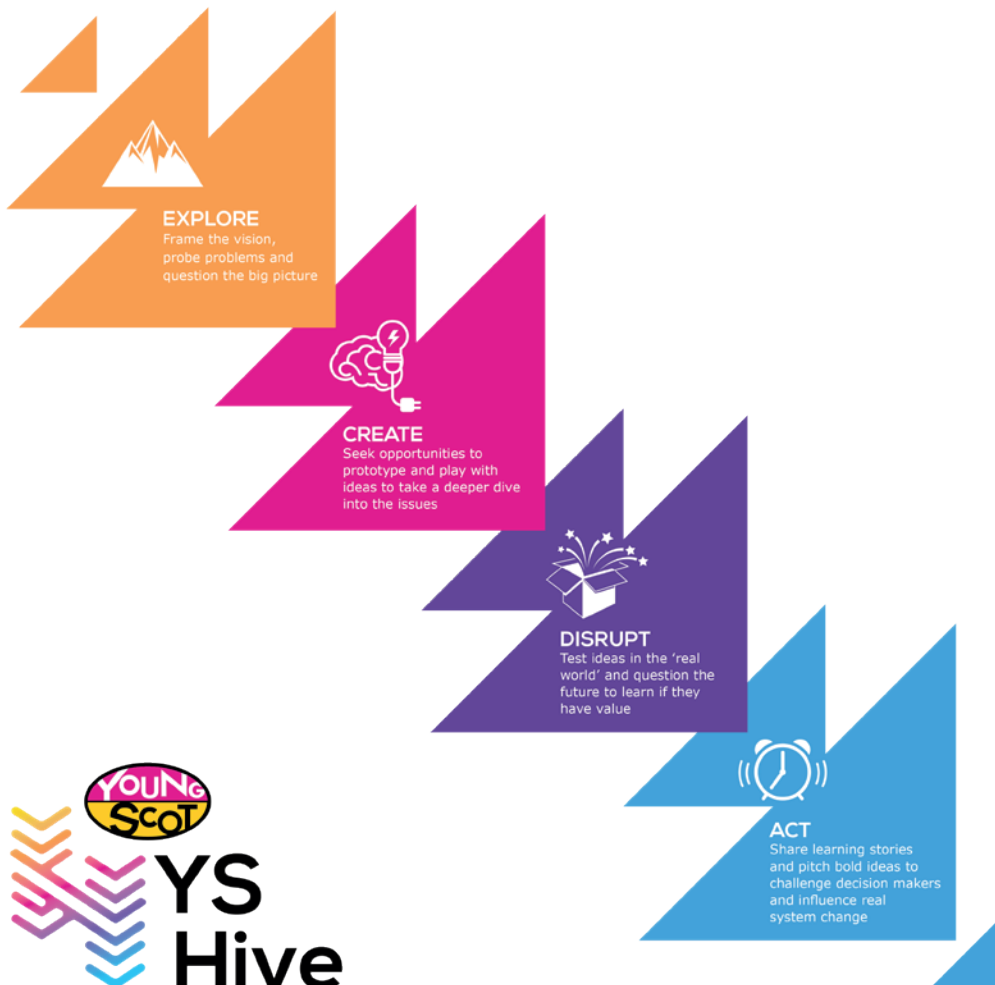
#YSHive co-design model throughout their project to learn about ES, discover the opportunities for development, generate ideas together and test these out before creating their final recommendations in this report.

The Young Scot #YSHive service empowers young people to be system changers and influencers by sharing power with organisations and tackling society's toughest challenges. Co-designed by young people, Young Scot supports organisations like ES to partner with young people to define, design and deliver of new policies and improvements to services.

The range of engaging and ethical design models create conditions, discover insights, and shape ideas for improvement to unlock culture and system change.

## Our skills, design models and tools support the #YSHive young volunteers to:

- **Explore** - Frame the vision, probe problems and question the big picture
- **Create** - Seek opportunities to prototype and play with ideas to take a deeper dive into the issues
- **Disrupt** - Test ideas in the real world and question the future to learn if they have value
- **Act** - Share learning stories and pitch bold ideas to challenge decision-makers and influence real system change



# MEET THE TEAM



## Aidan, 16, Inverclyde

I choose to join this panel as I believe that school has let me down in many aspects. Growing up as someone who struggled with mental health and neurodivergence it opened my eyes to some of the failures schools have made. And the stigma that mental health has and how hard it has been for me to get the correct accommodations so I joined The Panel as I believe if my voice can be heard it will make it easier for young people all over Scotland and they won't have to go through what I did.



## Alasdair, 14, Glasgow

I joined the Education Scotland panel to find out more about education in Scotland, as it personally affects my friends and I. I particularly enjoyed chatting with my mentor during the project, who was very interesting.

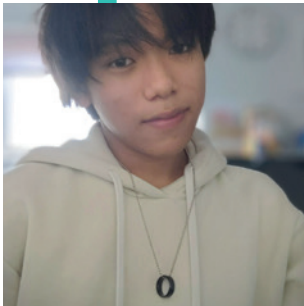
## Anna, 16, Glasgow

Having been to two schools in my academic journey, I saw the stark contrast in opportunities presented to me at each school. They were polar opposites. My old classmates had no academic involvement throughout the pandemic, whereas I was receiving online lessons, registration and assignments. This clear disparity was not just limited to the pandemic. I found it starkly unfair that it would have been so much harder to have a shot at my future if I had just stayed at my old school. My wish is that academics become a level playing field, and our future is determined by our drive and desire to succeed, not our postcodes or affluence. By being on this panel, I have been able to talk to other young people and receive a powerful insight into different people's experiences of education, and hold meaningful discussions with others as passionate about education as I am.

### **Finn, 17, Aberdeenshire**

I joined this group because I've seen Scottish education not succeed, and I thought that this group was a great opportunity to create positive change. I've gained new skills and new friendships out of this group. .

### **Mark, 16, East Ayrshire**



I chose to be on this panel because I feel the curriculum has failed me and my culture. With PSE classes always on puberty, sex and drugs... we never had the time to focus on other cultures and more importantly how to RESPECT other cultures. But what I got out of this project was a newly developed passion for change. From this project, I have gotten new perspectives of the education system young people are currently under and we have highlighted even more problems in the curriculum that we desperately need to change. I will be focusing on Training for Educators and Stigmatised Topics in this report.

### **Micaela, 17, North Ayrshire**

I wanted to be on The Panel because I am really passionate about improving education and I felt like nothing was being done at the school level. I also felt like I had a unique perspective as someone who goes to a catholic school and someone who is being diagnosed with learning difficulties later on. I am passionate about change and involving young people in decision making and this panel only developed that further. I really enjoyed getting to work with other young people from different backgrounds and feeling like my voice was being heard. I feel that we managed to give an insight into education today and how it can improve.



### **Pippa, 14, East Lothian**

I'm passionate about the opportunity that young people have to help shape our own education system. I've really enjoyed the chance to share ideas within our group and help to influence change – being able to have your voice heard, regardless of your background, is really important to me. I've been interested in promoting the rights of children throughout my time at school and have been involved in many projects with Young Scot that help support young people in Scotland in having the opportunity to share their opinions and ideas. The chance to shape the way that we learn both now and in the future is really important. Being part of this panel has helped me gain a better understanding of how other people think when we share our ideas. When we've talked about ideas as a group and with Education Scotland, understanding the reasons behind why decisions are made has been really interesting.

# PANEL ACTIVITY

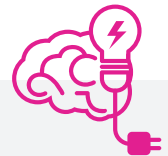
Recruitment for The Panel took place over the summer of 2021 with 12 panel members being selected by September 2021. The Panel represents a variety of ages between 13 to 17 from across nine different local authority areas in Scotland.

## Activity during the 'Explore' phase of the project included:



- The Panel conducted desk-based research to learn about what ES and the UNCRC are, what ES does, how ES works and researching ES policies.
- They attended four internal meetings with ES, meeting the Leadership Team to ask questions and learn more about the organisation.
- Panel meetings were held once a month on Zoom to share research with other one another, identify the issues and establish priority areas.
- The group identified key themes to develop further which would allow young people's voices to be at the heart of ES strategic development while embedding the UNCRC.
- Panel members took part in ongoing Mentor meetings for professional development and to explore their understanding of ES.

## Activity during the 'Create' phase included:



- The Panel focused on their key priority areas identified from the 'Explore' phase of the project.
- They played with ideas, possibilities and creative thinking to develop prototype solutions to problems they've identified.
- The Panel collaborated with ES Staff to propose their ideas, question decision making and share their initial prototyped ideas.
- A staff survey for ES was created by The Panel to learn more about the organisation and test out their initial ideas with staff.
- A youth questionnaire was created to test out their ideas with more young people.
- The Panel drafted co-designed, decision-making solutions in the form of recommendations for ES.

## Activity during the 'Disrupt' phase included:



- Using the results from testing, The Panel evaluated their ideas and refined their prototype solutions.
- They defined what was needed for the implementation of their co-designed, decision-making solutions to put the voices of young people at the heart of what ES does.
- The Panel created their final recommendations for change within ES and defined their ambitions for next steps.

## The Panel's Recommendations: In Summary

### Training for Educators

- Create and deliver training that tackles topics which are relevant to young people and continuously update this training based on young people's needs.
- Involve young people in the creation of courses.
- Use case studies from young people as storytelling examples and refresh these regularly to keep them relevant and topical.
- Implement a Teacher Ambassador role in schools and provide more in-person training opportunities to tackle online fatigue and time constraints.
- Signpost the professional learning portal more clearly on the website.

### Stigmatised Topics in Education

- Create training courses for educators on a range of stigmatised topics that young people want to learn about.
- Provide extra support and resources for educators on stigmatised topics.
- stigmatised topics and provide better training, resources and support to educators.
- Support religious schools to deliver education on stigmatised topics and provide better support to their pupils.
- Ensure educators understand the importance of stigmatised topics and teaching standards and behaviour around these topics is maintained.
- Utilise a new national survey to identify gaps in learners' awareness of stigmatised topics and address teaching standards from student satisfaction results.

### The UNCRC in Education

- Provide online training and resources for educators on how to integrate the UNCRC into their teaching and disciplinary methods.
- Support educators to empower children and young people with their rights.
- Integrate the UNCRC across the curriculum.
- Consequences for not respecting the UNCRC should be clear to all educators and if rights are infringed, Education Scotland should act on this immediately.

### Website and Social Media

- Improve the interface, design and content of the website to improve accessibility and transparency.
- Create a youth-friendly, youth-facing social media presence to inform and engage young people about the education system
- Create youth-friendly versions of strategic documents within ES relevant to children and young people.

### Inspections

- Inspectors should pick a diverse group of young people to provide guided feedback on their learning experiences
- Unexpected inspections should occur more frequently to capture a better picture of daily school life.
- Results from inspections and associated improvement measures should be communicated in youth-friendly ways.

### Youth Engagement, Feedback and Concerns

- Implement the role of Student Ambassadors in all schools to allow students to share their experiences in education with Education Scotland directly.
- Conduct a national survey once a year in schools to gather the experiences and opinions of young people across Scotland.

# MENTORING

For the duration of this project, a unique opportunity was provided for both panel members and ES staff to work together within a 1 to 1 mentoring relationship. ES staff were invited to volunteer for this role and provide professional support to individual panel members throughout their journey on the project.

Mentoring was an opportunity for everyone involved to learn more about one another and help support the young people to explore and understand ES better as well as provide them with any relevant opportunities for personal development and career or education advice.

In September 2021 mentors and mentees met one another in an online group call and then subsequently communicated through periodic zoom calls on a 1-to-1 basis, and via email with the option to use the platform Basecamp too.

**“MY MENTOR HAS REALLY HELPED ME OUT WITH ACADEMIA AND HAS ADVISED ME TO HAVE A CLEARER PATH FOR MY LIFE.”**  
**(YOUNG PEOPLE'S STRATEGIC PANEL MEMBER)**

**“I ENJOYED WORKING WITH THE MENTORS, THEY WERE KIND AND HAD AN EXPERT INSIGHT ON EDUCATION SCOTLAND AND WHAT WAS ACTUALLY GOING ON.”**  
**(YOUNG PEOPLE'S STRATEGIC PANEL MEMBER)**

From the experiences of panel members, ES mentors and YS staff the following suggestions have been made for how this opportunity could be improved in future if it were to be implemented long-term into ES's work:

- Dedicated staff resources would need to be provided to support communication and scheduling with staff and young people.
- Alternative communication methods that suit young people other than email should be provided to support engagement.
- More time at the beginning of engagement for building rapport and getting to know one another informally.
- Structured purpose and direction given to meetings.
- Regular meetings scheduled that suit individual calendars.
- Young people's availability at key times of the year should be considered when scheduling meeting e.g., the festive period, exam times and school holidays.
- Training in-house on mentoring

A panel member and their ES Mentor were invited to share their experiences of the mentoring opportunity during the project. Their feedback reflects what worked well for them individually and speaks to improvements that could be made if the mentoring opportunity was implemented into ES's work long-term.



### **Panellist: Micaela**

My mentor was really friendly and approachable. This helped me feel more open to talk about my experiences and I felt like my mentor actually cared about what we were talking about.

Together, we spoke about my experience in education and what her role is at Education Scotland. She also spoke about certain programmes that are being run throughout the country. This helped me come up with ideas for our recommendations.

My mentor also helped me improve my knowledge on the education system in Scotland and develop my communication skills. In the future, I think it would be helpful if mentees have more time with their mentor and that this time be more structured.

### **ES Staff: Jacqui Ward, Attainment Advisor, Forth Valley and West Lothian, Regional Directorate**

I volunteered to participate in the YSHive project for several reasons. One very selfish reason is that I missed speaking to young people! In previous roles I had lots of contact with children and young people and felt it made me better at my job so when this opportunity came up, I jumped at it. However, another more important reason is that I wholeheartedly believe that we should be listening to children and young people's views and actively co-creating and working alongside them to ensure what we are doing in education is effective and meets children's needs. Being a mentor was my opportunity to actively be part of this discussion.

I was fortunate enough to connect and mentor two young people. We met online through Zoom, using the times that Young Scot had organised for the cohort to meet up. Young Scot were great in helping make the initial connections and giving ideas on how to make sure the mentoring worked

for everyone. Rather than meet as a small group, both young people advised that they would prefer to meet individually with me. We would then arrange to meet whenever the young person had questions about pieces of work they were doing. It felt better to respond to questions through meetings rather than through email. Meetings tended to last about an hour and happened every 6-8 weeks over a 6-month period. We had some really good discussions on their experiences as well as those of their peers in education and they asked great 'why' questions around education.

It was a real privilege to meet with both young people. Our meetings were whilst I was working from home, so for me it was really valuable as it gave me an insight in their educational experiences across two different local authorities which I don't usually work with.

# STAFF SURVEY RESULTS

The Panel's purpose was to provide strategic recommendations to ES using the YSHive co-design process to learn about how ES currently work and how they felt this could be improved to embed the UNCRC and include youth engagement.

During the Create stage of this project, the Panel needed to better understand the organisation and the views of staff members to create informed solutions to the problems they had identified so far and check if there were any gaps. Therefore, the Panel decided to create a staff questionnaire in April 2022 to support their work.

The survey was also a chance for the Panel to illustrate their ideas so far and invite staff to give them useful feedback on these ideas that they could then take forward to Disrupt to evaluate and refine further.

The survey included **27** questions in total with both qualitative and quantitative questions covering the following themes:

- About You
- About Education Scotland Internally
- Engaging Young People
- The Current and Future Position of the UNCRC
- Education Scotland's Priorities and Influence
- The Panel's Current Priorities

**94** staff members took part in total, with every Directorate represented but with the majority of participants coming from the Regional Directorate.

Specific reference has been made in the recommendations of this report to questions and data from the survey that helped shape the Panel's ideas and solutions.

However, here are some of the key results from the survey overall:

## Engaging with Young People

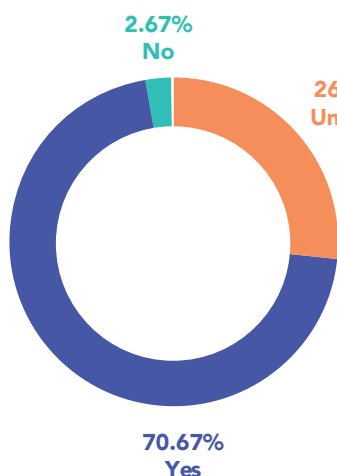
What has been done to include young people's voices both in decision-making and the daily workings within the organisation?

**66** responses were received for this question. It was common for respondents to be unsure what is currently done to include young people whilst others commonly stressed the need for stronger involvement of children and young people. Respondents also spoke of direct discussions and focus groups with young people and the incorporation of young people's voices and opinions in meetings and programmes.

### Themed Responses

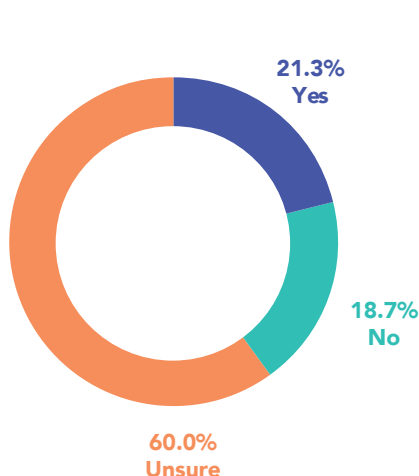
Not sure	18
There is still a need for stronger CYP involvement	16
Direct discussions and focus groups with young people	14
Incorporating the voices of young people directly into meetings and programmes	13
Very little is done	11
Consultations	5
Surveys/questionnaires	5





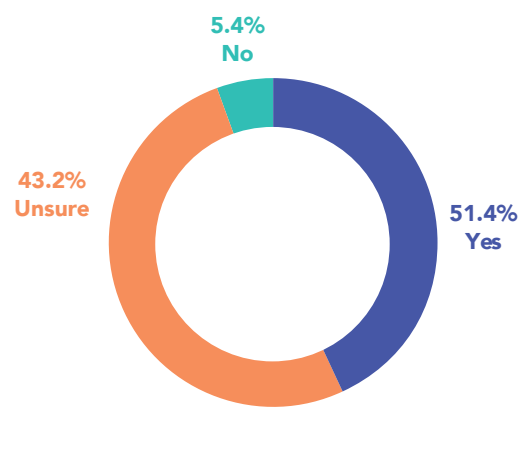
**Are there opportunities for young people and The Panel to be involved in the development of practices and policies in the future?**

Of the **75** responses received for this question, over 70% believed there were opportunities for young people and The Panel to be involved in such developments in the future.



**When previously engaging with young people, do you feel that their views have affected inside the organisation?**

Of the **75** responses to this question, the majority (60%) were unsure if young people's engagement had made any real impact inside of Education Scotland.



**When previously engaging with young people, do you feel that their views have affected outside the organisation?**

There was more certainty with the **74** respondents when considering young people's impact outside of the organisation. Just over half (51%) believed young people's views have had a noticeable impact.

**What are Education Scotland's current priorities and plans around the UNCRC and how will you continue to make sure this is tailored to the needs of young people in the future?**

Of the **57** responses to this question, the majority (**37**) mentioned the importance in integrating the UNCRC into all that is done at Education Scotland. UNCRC awareness and training sessions were also commonly mentioned.

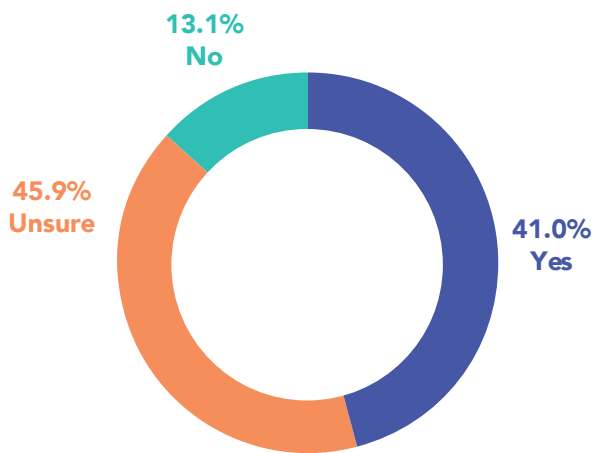
**Themed Responses**

Ensure it plays an integral role in all that is done	37
UNCRC Awareness sessions and training	18
To involve young people more in assessing the impact of Education Scotland	16
Ensuring the centrality of young people in our work	5
Not sure	3
More needs to be done around UNCRC at Education Scotland	2

## Education Scotland's Priorities and Influence

### What do you feel are Education Scotland's main policy priorities in education and as an organisation?

56 responses were received for this question. 23 responses discussed improving the Attainment gap as a key priority for Education Scotland, also commonly referring to the Scottish Attainment Challenge as a result. Further popular responses included improving and promoting an inclusive education environment (17 responses) and improving learning, teaching and assessment methods (15 responses).



### Feedback and Expressing Concerns:

Does Education Scotland have a role in giving young people a space to share their concerns around the issues that affect them on a daily basis?

61 responses were received for this question. 46% of responses felt unsure if Education Scotland had a role in giving young people such space.



### What does this currently look like?

This question was asked to those who selected 'yes' in the above question with 21 responses being received. The following responses were given.

#### Themed Responses

Engagement with young people	5
Inspections	4
Not sure	4
Limited engagement currently	3
Surveys and questionnaires	2
Engagement through practitioners and teachers	1
A need for more youth groups	1
Nothing	1
Supporting structures to enable young people to share concern	1

### If this could exist, what might this look like?

This question was asked to those who selected 'no' or 'unsure' in the above question with 7 responses being received. The following responses were given.

#### Themed Responses

Best done at a local level	2
Young people panels	2
Anonymous mailboxes	1
Separate Directorate at Education Scotland to focus on such provisions	1
This is not the role that Education Scotland plays	1

# YOUTH QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS

During the Disrupt process of this project, the young people tested out their ideas with young people to get feedback on their sustainability, explored if other young people were inspired by their ideas and invited other young people to input into the work on this project too.

The Panel used the online questionnaire platform Menti to create an interactive questionnaire that summarised their ideas and research and invited them to provide comments, suggestions and evaluations of their ideas. YSHive volunteers under the age of 18 were invited to complete the questionnaire and 14 young people took part in total.

The questionnaire included 12 questions in total, covering the following topics:

- The UNCRC in Education
- Expressing Concerns and Providing Feedback
- Stigmatised Topics in Education
- Training for Educators
- How Education Scotland Engages with Young

## The UNCRC in Education

### What have been your experiences with the UNCRC in school?

After participants were given an overview of what findings the Panel had made on this topic so far, the young people were asked about their experiences of the UNCRC. There were multiple responses to this question which have been summarised below:

- Lack of UNCRC education in schools especially post-primary
- Progresses have been made in UNCRC education but it's not consistent across schools
- Those who had experienced UNCRC education had had predominantly positive experiences of it
- Lack of implementation of the rights-based approach to education practices
- Empowering children and young people with their rights is currently lacking
- Importance of accessibility for students and their rights

## People

Reference to how the feedback from of this questionnaire affected the Panel's decision-making has been included in the description of the relevant recommendations.



### Feedback and Concerns:

Do you think Education Scotland should be involved in providing a space for pupils to share their feedback and experiences in school?

Respondents were invited the answer this question with the option of three answers – Yes, Maybe I'm not sure and No. 100% of the young people answered 'yes' to this question.

Young people were also asked to provide feedback on the Panel's prototype ideas for implementing a student ambassador role in schools and having a Youth Feedback panel within ES. The Panel has used the varied and numerous comments from the young participants to help shape these two ideas into recommendations in this report.



### Stigmatised Topics in Education:

Young people were asked about which potentially stigmatised topics were important to them and what they'd like to see discussed in schools. The Panel shared their priority topics so far which were sex education, LGBTQ+ awareness, periods and reproductive health, neurodiversity awareness and how religion and culture is discussed in faith schools.

**The participants clarified that the topics the Panel had identified were equally important to them too and also suggested the following additional topics:**

- Feminism
- Gender-based violence
- Pregnancy
- Making friends
- Social media and stigma
- Racism
- Visible differences and hidden disabilities

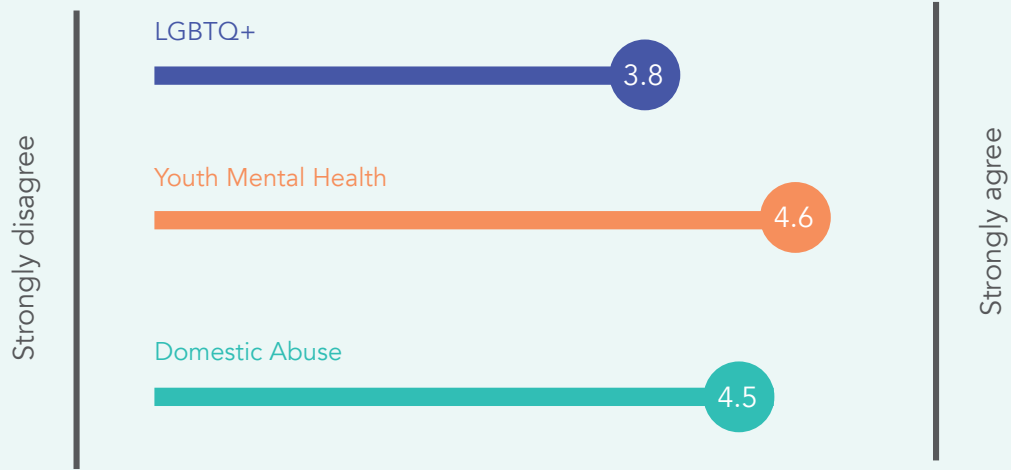
Comments from young people in this section also raised issues around "bigoted attitudes" in schools from both pupils and young people and they called for more to be done to manage this responsibility in education settings.

### Let us know how you feel about the following



## Training for Educators

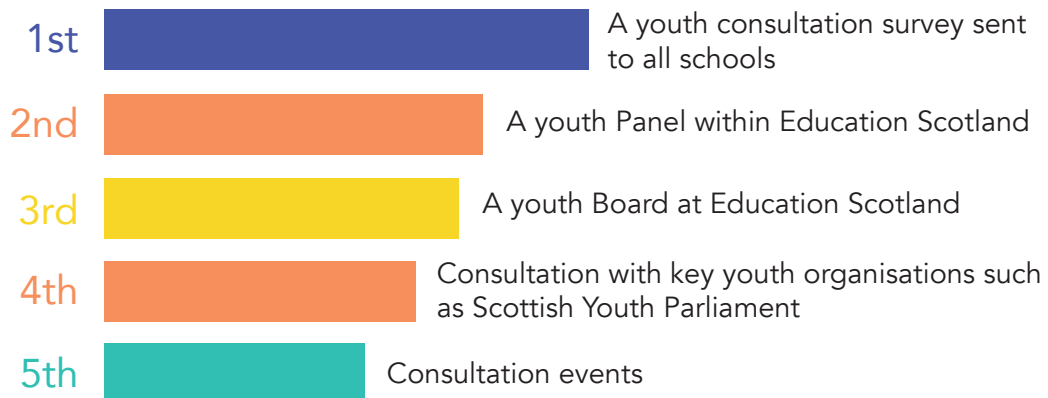
These are some topics we think educators need training on.  
Do you think these are important too? Please rate them below.



From your experiences, what topics do you think educators need more training on?  
Answers to this question were varied and covered the following:

- Call for more educators to be better trained overall on the topics important to young people
- LGBTQ+ awareness
- Racial equality and cultural awareness
- Wellbeing and work/life balance
- Bullying
- Need for education on these topics to be more engaging and creative

How would you rank our current ideas for youth engagement at Education Scotland?



The Panel has used feedback from the Menti questionnaire with young people as well as the feedback they have had from ES staff in both the survey and discussions in meetings to help shape the recommendations they hope to be taken forward throughout Education Scotland.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations outline the strategic changes the Panel want to see at ES and across the education system. Fundamentally, each of their recommendations speak to improving youth engagement, communication, transparency and youth accessibility.

During their work, the Panel often found themselves unsure on what ES did as an organisation and what their aims were despite the information they had gathered. They feel this shows that ES need to make their organisation more accessible to young people, from documents to social media, allowing them to understand the impact ES have on education and the power they have to change it.

The Panel also felt that ES needs to hear directly from young voices to understand what matters to them most and how their education can better support and educate them.

The Panel think the best way to improve accessibility and youth engagement is for ES to listen and include young people consistently across the organisation, allowing young voices to inform and shape the work

they do. They want the stories and experiences from young people to be told throughout the education system, ensuring all staff understand the perspectives of young people and the role they play in ensuring positive impact on learners. The Panel envisage a future ES that works collaboratively with young people at the heart of decision-making, being open to scrutiny and proactively implementing change.

The Panel understand that communication during times of change can be challenging but they hope their recommendations will support internal communication among ES staff too. Results from the staff survey and from some experiences of Panel members suggest internal communication could be more coherent and any direct youth engagement needs to be more widely shared consistently with all Directorates.





## Training for Educators

One of the Panel's key priority areas is for Education Scotland to provide improved training for educators that is engaging and accessible which tackles the issues that really matter to young people. This topic is a priority for this Panel because educators are at the heart of the curriculum. Without well-trained teachers, the system won't deliver enriching experiences for young people to go through. Educators are the foundation to the education system, so if a more efficient system of professional learning is provided, with more youth voices involved in the development of these trainings, The Panel would hope to see a huge improvement to the system.

From the staff survey and discussions with ES staff, the panel has learnt that training for educators is currently tailored to the needs of staff based on their feedback to ES. Since Covid-19, these sessions are predominantly online to allow easier access to professionals across Scotland and conducted both nationally and regionally. ES staff said that if they were aware of a training need to support schools, staff or young people, they would act on this to the best of their ability. However, the Panel feel that not enough feedback is being provided from young people to ES for them to be aware of the most important training needs or the benefit of students.

**Create and deliver training that tackles topics which are relevant to young people and continuously update this training based on young people's needs.**

This Panel believes that training should tackle topics that are relevant to young people and are continuously updated based on young people's needs. One example is the toll of Covid-19 on young people's mental health and how to support young people with this. Another example is how racism is discussed in schools. The Panel feel that the history of racism and the effects it has on young people should be included in the content of the training. They also want to see a more effective system of professional development based on ever-evolving topics such as those that are stigmatised. This has been addressed specifically in the target area Stigmatised Topics in Education.

**“SOMETIMES PEOPLE SAY THINGS THAT ARE UNINTENTIONALLY RACIST AND STEREOTYPICAL, THIS SHOULD BE DISCUSSED IN SCHOOL TO MAKE SCHOOL FEEL MORE LIKE A SAFE AND DIVERSE PLACE.”**

**- YOUTH QUESTIONNAIRE PARTICIPANT**

**“IT'S NOT THE SUBJECT, IT'S THE WAY THEY TEACH IT. THEY KNOW ALL THE FACTS, BUT THE LESSONS CAN SOMETIMES BE AWKWARD, UNCOMFORTABLE AND BORING. THEY NEED TO MAKE IT MORE ENGAGING AND EASIER TO LISTEN TO, TRY TO TAKE AWAY THE BAD CONNOTATIONS ASSOCIATED.”**

**- YOUTH QUESTIONNAIRE PARTICIPANT**



### **Involve young people in the creation of courses.**

Involving young people in the development of trainings is crucial to make a more inclusive environment for all students. The Panel would like to see young people's opinions, ideas and feedback consulted and utilised in the development, creation and evaluation of training for educators.

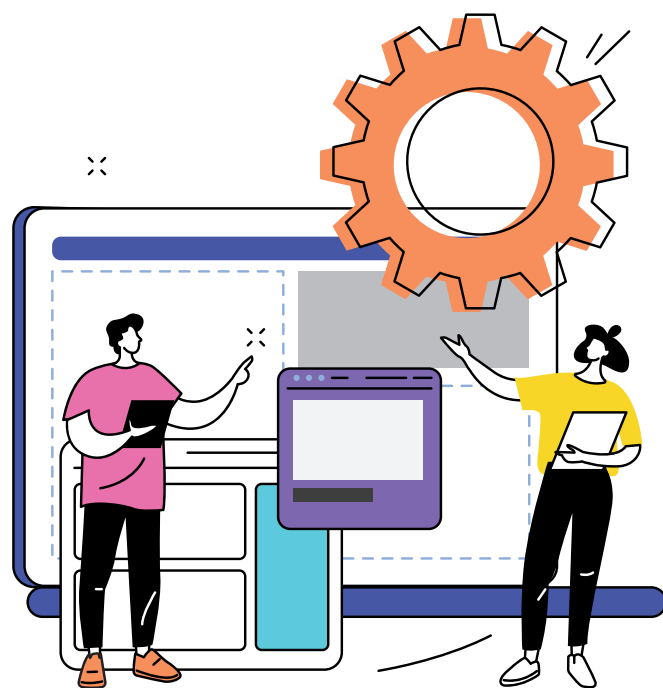
### **Use case studies from young people as storytelling examples and refresh these regularly to keep them relevant and topical.**

The Panel believe that teaching and educating about more sensitive topics is more effective with case studies from real young people. Telling the narratives of young people ensures a topic is authentic and topical but most importantly has the greatest impact on adults. The Panel want educators to understand the effect these topics have on students in a variety of ways and how this affects their education and the best way to do this is to provide experiences of real-life young people. Case studies should also be refreshed regularly to keep them relevant and topical.

### **Implement a Teacher Ambassador role in schools and provide more in-person training opportunities to tackle online fatigue and time constraints.**

The Panel think that training should be high quality, quickly and easily accessed and relevant to the ever-changing needs of young people. During discussions about their ideas with ES staff, the group discovered that Zoom fatigue and time constraints can be significant barriers for educators accessing training. Therefore, the Panel suggest the Teacher Ambassador role for schools to tackle these issues.

Feedback directly from teachers highlighted that they often feel that professional learning can be time-consuming and uninspiring. The Teacher Ambassador role would involve teachers representing either their department or school and undertaking training on behalf of their colleagues, then reporting back and upskilling them at a later date. Instead of professional learning being mandatory on In-Service Days to whole schools, greater flexibility can be given to each school on who undertakes training and how they want their Teacher Ambassador to upskill staff. This could help alleviate time constraints and allow more peer-to-peer training to occur. Dedicated training time could be implemented per Local Authority for Teacher Ambassadors to train together before reporting back to their school and/or department colleagues.



To ensure Ambassadors aren't overloaded, regular rotating which teachers represent their school or department at training sessions would distribute the responsibility.

The Panel also recommend training happens in-person as much as possible to avoid online meeting fatigue and to allow training to be more interactive and collaborative. Training should be inclusive and accessible in terms of content, delivery and location. To ensure easy access to materials and to support Ambassadors with upskilling their colleagues, training should be recorded where possible and uploaded online alongside any other supportive material or resources.

### **Signpost the professional learning portal more clearly on the website.**

The Panel want educators to be able to access training and support from ES quickly and easily to ensure young people have high quality support in their education. The Panel found that the ES website's navigation and design could be improved to make it more accessible (see Website and Social Media recommendations) and this includes signposting to training for educators. The group thinks the training portal should be either integrated into the main landing page for the website and clearly flagged, or clearly signposted on the landing page to make it easier to find.

## Stigmatised Topics in Education

From the Panel's experiences and those of their peers, we've identified that stigmatised topics are an important issue for young people in education and they want to address this. Education is all about preparing us for adult life and stigmatised topics play a fundamental role in this.

Young people feel that PSE lessons are not being used to their fullest potential, missing possibly meaningful conversations that could resonate with certain minority groups and provide greater awareness among others. The Panel feels that the delivery of these lessons are lack-lustre and diluted by the repeat of the same topics over and over again.

This could be tackled largely through the previous priority area: Training for Educators. This means more up-to-date training and workshops for teachers that is influenced by young people and their experiences. Stigmatised Topics are subjects that the Panel feel are rarely talked about in education, yet they deeply affect pupils. Education on these topics changes from school to school, but from Panel member's experiences and the feedback from young people, the Panel has identified key topics that are important to young people. Stigmatised topics affect the everyday life experiences of young people, and the Panel feel that all teachers need training on these sensitive subjects to best support their students and provide preventative structures.



With topics such as sexual harassment and rape, why should only a select few teachers be taught how to deal with such situations, be that direct training or peer to peer training, when the issue affects many students across every classroom? The Panel recognise that schools are often constrained by the aims of the curriculum and the scrutiny of parents, so they hope that by supporting educators to deliver teaching and support on stigmatised topics, ES can empower educators to confidently manage this in their schools.

The results from the staff survey show that ES currently provides resources, learning opportunities, consultations and inclusion teams to help target topics like these. Therefore, the Panel hope their recommendations can be easily implemented into the current system of support provided for educators at ES.

### A Panel member shared their experience with stigmatised topics in school:

**“STIGMATISED TOPICS ARE IMPORTANT TO ME BECAUSE OF THE MASS AMOUNT OF PEOPLE AFFECTED BY IT. WITH TOPICS SUCH AS LGBTQ+ AND NEURODIVERSITY, THESE CAN ONLY BE RECOGNISED AS UMBRELLA TERMS FOR COUNTLESS PEOPLE IN THE SCOTTISH SCHOOLS RIGHT NOW. THESE TOPICS MAY BE TAUGHT IN SCHOOL, BUT ARE TALKED ABOUT IN A STIGMATISED WAY, WHERE TEACHERS FEEL WARY AND UNCONFIDENT ON THE TOPICS. I FEEL THERE NEEDS TO BE BETTER TRAINING FOR EDUCATORS SO THAT THEY FEEL MORE CONFIDENT TALKING ABOUT THESE STIGMATISED TOPICS. WE RECOGNISE THAT THERE ARE GUIDANCE TEACHERS / TEACHERS SPECIALLY TRAINED FOR THESE TOPICS BUT NOT ALL STUDENTS WILL FEEL COMFORTABLE TALKING ABOUT THESE SUBJECTS WITH PARTICULAR TEACHERS.”**

**Create training courses for educators on a range of stigmatised topics that young people want to learn about.**

The Panel want as many educators as possible undertake training on stigmatised topics that directly affect the education and life experiences of young people. The group think that training should be accessible, up-to-date and engaging, aimed at raising awareness and upskilling educators on how to teach on these subjects and support their students. It is important to the Panel that stories from young people about their experiences with these topics are also utilised in the training to have the greatest impact on educators.

In the Menti questionnaire, all respondents felt the following topics were important to them:

- Sex education
- LGBTQ+ awareness
- Periods and reproductive health
- Neurodiversity awareness
- How religion and culture is discussed in faith schools

However, they also had the following suggestions of other stigmatised topics they would like to have discussed in schools:

- Feminism
- Racism
- Social media pressures
- Gender-based violence
- Gender stereotypes
- Pregnancy awareness
- Creating friendships
- Visible differences and hidden disabilities

The Panel believe all these topics need to be addressed and training courses created to specifically educate educators on these topics. Another topic that is particularly important to the group is improved training mental health and wellbeing support for young people that focuses on science and practical support networks not just personal experiences.



**A Panel member shared their experience with mental health support in school:**

**“I HAVE BEEN INVOLVED IN FUNDRAISING PROJECTS FOR MENTAL HEALTH IN MY LOCAL COMMUNITY, WHICH STEMMED FROM SEEING THE IMPACT MENTAL HEALTH HAS ON YOUNG PEOPLE AND THEIR ABILITY TO SURVIVE IN AN ACADEMIC ENVIRONMENT. YOUNG PEOPLE CAN STRUGGLE WITH THINGS SUCH AS THEIR PERSONAL LIFE, FRIENDSHIPS, GROWING UP OR COPING WITH THE STRESS OF HIGH SCHOOL, AND HAVING MENTAL HEALTH SYSTEMS IN PLACE AT SCHOOL IS CRUCIAL. IN MY SCHOOL, WE HAVE A COUNSELLOR, BUT SOME OF MY PEERS HAVE SAID THAT THEY DIDN'T FEEL SUPPORTED BY THE MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT PROVIDED. ESPECIALLY WITH THE HIGH WAITING LISTS FOR MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT IN THE NHS, HAVING INCREASED SUPPORT IN SCHOOLS IS KEY TO ENSURE IT IS NOT A BARRIER HOLDING PUPILS BACK. I BELIEVE HAVING MORE DIVERSE OUTLETS OF MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT BEING ACCESSIBLE IN SCHOOLS WOULD ALSO HELP PUPILS REACH OUT FOR SUPPORT WHEN THEY NEED IT, AS THE PROSPECT OF DISCUSSING ONE-ON-ONE CAN BE DAUNTING. IF WE COULD HAVE A STANDARDISED APPROACH TO MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT AND ENSURE A BASELINE LEVEL IS ACCESSIBLE IN ALL SCHOOLS, PUPILS COULD FEEL MORE SUPPORTED IN THEIR ACADEMIC LIVES.”**

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**Provide extra support and resources for educators on stigmatised topics.**

To best support educators, the Panel want ES to ensure there is greater support available aside from training courses, including direct communication between educators and ES staff as well as accessible resources. The Panel hope this will help teaching staff to feel confident identifying stigmatised topics in the classroom, providing teaching and awareness on them and empowering their students around these topics too. The Panel are passionate that even if there is a lack of staff resource in schools, this shouldn't result in a lack of quality teaching for young people and creative solutions should be developed to tackle this for those schools affected. The young people also want teachers to feel confident tackling hate crime and bullying surrounding these topics in schools and hope extra support from ES can help with this.

**Work with external organisations to use their expertise on stigmatised topics and provide better training, resources and support to educators.**

The Panel recognise that external expertise will be needed to support ES to deliver training, resources and support to educators. The Panel think this is great opportunity for ES to develop partnerships with other organisations which in turn can not only improve their training for educators but also their awareness of the biggest issues affecting young people's education. Some stigmatised topics are currently tackled by organisations like Scottish Violence Reduction Unit (SVRU) who run the Mentors in Violence Protection (MVP) in many schools in Scotland and the Panel want ES to continue to strengthen their working relationships with partners such as SVRU.

The young people think local youth workers and community support workers should be utilised to support ES with stigmatised topic education, training and resources too.

**A Panel member share their personal experience:**

**“FOR MANY YEARS, MY STRUGGLES AT SCHOOL WERE DISMISSED BECAUSE I WAS ‘TOO SMART TO HAVE A LEARNING DISABILITY’. NOW THAT I AM GETTING DIAGNOSED, TEACHERS ARE RELUCTANT TO GIVE ME ACCOMMODATIONS BECAUSE THEY BELIEVE I DIDN'T NEED THEM PREVIOUSLY. THIS HAS SHOWN ME THAT MORE AWARENESS NEEDS TO BE DONE AROUND NEURODIVERSITY, ESPECIALLY IN WOMEN.”**





**Support religious schools to deliver education on these topics and provide better support to their pupils.**

The Panel were concerned about the disparity in teaching on stigmatised topics in religious schools and secular schools. From their personal experiences, these topics are either rarely taught or given light-touch approaches in the classroom. The Panel want every student to receive non-judgemental and supportive education on these topics. The young people want educators to prepare students for life and provide support for issues affecting their daily life, so consistent education on stigmatised topics is vital.

**A Panel member shared their personal experience:**

**MY EXPERIENCE IN A CATHOLIC SCHOOL HAS REALLY INFLUENCED HOW I FEEL ABOUT CERTAIN TOPICS BECAUSE MY EDUCATION HAS BEEN CENTRED AROUND A NARROW CHRISTIAN VIEWPOINT. I HAVE NOTICED THAT MY SCHOOL DOES THINGS VERY DIFFERENT TO NON-DENOMINATIONAL SCHOOLS. FOR EXAMPLE, I HAVE NEVER HAD A PROPER SEX EDUCATION LESSON, THERE IS NO SUPPORT FOR THE LGBTQ+ COMMUNITY, AND I HAVE NEVER LEARNT ABOUT OTHER RELIGIONS OR CULTURES. I FEEL THAT THIS SHOULDN'T BE ALLOWED AND THAT CHILDREN ATTENDING CATHOLIC SCHOOLS SHOULD RECEIVE THE SAME LEVEL OF EDUCATION AS THEIR PEERS.**

**Ensure educators understand the importance of stigmatised topics and teaching standards and behaviour around these topics is maintained.**

The Panel are concerned about personal opinions influencing teaching approaches to stigmatised topics, having been witness to incidences of discriminatory behaviour or views relating to the topics. These incidences deeply impact young people in numerous ways and can often make school feel like an unsafe space for them to express themselves or discuss issues they face. The Panel want ES to ensure educators know how to discuss these topics with students and that they are transparent with educators on what disciplinary action will be taken for any discriminatory behaviour in schools.

**“SCHOOLS HAVE A RESPONSIBILITY TO STOP PREJUDICED ATTITUDES ON THEIR WATCH BY ACTUALLY DOING SOMETHING ABOUT IT.”**  
**- YOUTH QUESTIONNAIRE PARTICIPANT**

A Panel member shared their experience with stigma in school:

**“MY EXPERIENCES STARTED AT A YOUNG AGE IN PRIMARY AND PROGRESSED ALL THE WAY INTO SECONDARY EDUCATION. THROUGHOUT MY SCHOOL CAREER I HAVE HAD TO DEAL WITH BULLYING DUE TO TEACHERS’ IGNORANCE TOWARDS DISABILITIES AND NEURODIVERGENCE AND DUE TO THIS IGNORANCE, I WAS THE VICTIM OF PHYSICAL VIOLENCE WHICH HAD A MAJOR IMPACT ON MY MENTAL HEALTH AND WHO I AM TODAY. I BELIEVE THAT ALL SCHOOL STAFF NEED TO BE TRAINED TO RECOGNISE EARLY WARNING SIGNS TO HELP STOP THIS BULLYING DUE TO NEURODIVERGENCE AND MAKE SURE IT DOESN’T LEAD TO PHYSICAL VIOLENCE AGAIN. I AM NOT THE ONLY PERSON I KNOW WHO HAS EXPERIENCED ISSUES WITH STIGMATISED TOPICS WITHIN MY SCHOOL. DUE TO MY SCHOOL BEING A CATHOLIC SCHOOL IT MEANS TEACHERS CAN BE VERY IGNORANT TOWARDS THE LGBTQ+ COMMUNITY AND I KNOW THIS HAPPENS AS I’VE SEEN IT HAPPEN TO SOMEONE I KNOW. A PUPIL OF MY SCHOOL CAME OUT AS GAY AND RECEIVED NO SUPPORT WHATSOEVER IN FACT MY SCHOOL ACTUALLY SENT THEM TO A SCHOOL COUNCILLOR AND THEN WHEN PEOPLE FOUND OUT AND CONFRONTED IT, THEY CLAIMED IT WAS DUE TO OTHER ISSUES, BUT THE PUPIL SAID THEY ONLY THING THEY SPOKE ABOUT WAS HOMOSEXUALITY. THIS IS WHY I BELIEVE STIGMATISED TOPICS NEED TO A PRIORITY IN SCHOOL AS SOMETIMES TOO LITTLE IS DONE TOO LATE.”**



**Utilise the results from a new national survey to identify gaps in learner's awareness of stigmatised topics and address teaching standards from student satisfaction results.**

Ensuring topics are relevant and up to date is important to the Panel and they want young people to be able to shape the content of teaching on stigmatised topics. Therefore, the Panel think the recommendations of a national survey would be the ideal platform to receive this feedback from children and young people. This recommendation can be found in Youth Engagement, Feedback and Concerns which suggests ES conduct a new national survey to gather a picture of local and national experiences and opinions of young people in education.

Knowledge gaps and national trends could easily be identified from the survey results, allowing ES to target their support to educators locally or nationally and provide the relevant resources or training as appropriate



## The UNCRC in Education

The Panel think it's vital for both young people and their educators to be well informed on the UNCRC and they believe ES have a key role to play in this. They especially want young people to know what their rights are, how to access them, what to do when they're not respected and for educators to fully support how children and young people access their rights.

### From their research on this project and through their personal experiences The Panel has discovered:

- Many young people don't know how to be empowered by their rights.
- Young people can struggle to stand up for themselves when their rights are being infringed.
- Inclusive, accessible language needs to be used when they're being informed about their rights.
- Additional support needs for pupils aren't always respected.
- In Gold UNCRC schools, pupils typically feel more empowered by their rights.
- Sharing stories and experiences with the UNCRC in education settings could help young people learn about their rights.

In the Menti questionnaire, the young people were asked to reflect on what the Panel had discovered in their work so far and share their experiences with the UNCRC in education. Overall, responses were varied, with many responses saying they still didn't know enough about the UNCRC and others saying that more needs to be done in schools to teach young people about the UNCRC and help them feel empowered by their rights. Some respondents felt they had some UNCRC knowledge, often beginning in primary school but felt that in secondary school, accessing and understanding the implications of their rights needed improvement.

One young person felt there is currently a lack of rights-based approaches in individual school policies which they feel should be co-produced with pupils.

### The young people were then asked how they would like to learn about their rights in education to help give The Panel ideas on how UNCRC education can be improved by ES. Responses included the following suggestions:

- UNCRC workshops in schools and dedicated lessons on rights.
- Utilising creative teaching methods involving PowerPoint, posters, research tasks and using tools such as Kahoot or Blooket.
- Make learning about rights relevant, real and fun to young people.
- Ensure any additional rights teaching doesn't impact negatively on exam preparation time for students.

Overall, the biggest challenge with the UNCRC in education is the lack of knowledge and awareness most young people have about their rights. The Panel want their education and their educators to ensure they know about their rights, how to access them and what their educators are doing to support them.

From the results of the staff survey, ES staff told the Panel that online training and resources are available to support educators on the UNCRC alongside professional learning sessions online. Some staff also mentioned resources were tailored to both adults and young people and others noted the use of their inclusion, wellbeing and equalities teams on this topic too. While the Panel think these internal infrastructures of support are the ideal springboard for their recommendations, greater attention needs to be given to how much impact these mechanisms are having on pupils day-to-day.

**“I THINK LEARNING ABOUT THE UNCRC IS REALLY BENEFICIAL AS IT WILL EMPOWER YOUNG PEOPLE AND ENCOURAGE THEM TO SPEAK UP WHEN RIGHTS AREN'T BEING RESPECTED.”**  
**- YOUTH QUESTIONNAIRE PARTICIPANT**

**Provide online training and resources for educators on how to integrate the UNCRC into their teaching and disciplinary methods.**

The Panel want educators to feel confident talking to young people not only about their rights, but about integrating them in practical ways into how they teach, what they teach and how they use discipline in the classroom. The group feel it is essential for educators to support young people to access their rights, and uphold them so that young people can exercise their rights to their full potential. For example, the Panel feel digital is very important to employing the UNCRC; they want young people to know they can access the toilets when they need to; and have their pronouns respected, just to name a few.

The Panel want educations to have access to engaging training, helpful resources and practical examples of how to integrate the UNCRC to their work and show young people how to uphold their rights. The group also want these resources and training to pay special attention to young people with additional support needs and how they can be empowered.

**“PROGRESS HAS BEEN MADE, PARTICULARLY THROUGH RIGHTS RESPECTING SCHOOLS AWARD (RRSA) PROGRAMS. HOWEVER, A LACK OF IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH TO CO-PRODUCTION WITH REGARDS TO SCHOOLS’ POLICY AT THE INDIVIDUAL SCHOOL LEVEL UNDERMINE THIS.”**

**- YOUTH QUESTIONNAIRE PARTICIPANT**

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**Support educators to empower children and young people with their rights.**

Aside from training and resources which are often virtual mechanisms, the Panel want ES to provide additional support mechanisms for educators on the UNCRC. This is because the Panel want educators to provide greater holistic support around the UNCRC to students, allowing them to feel empowered throughout their education. The Panel believe effective ways of doing this for educators include: more support face to face in education settings, and by widening the presence and information provided by the Rights Respecting Schools Association.

They also feel there is a need for a greater focus on how to support young people with accessibility concerns such as those who are neurodivergent, have additional support needs or disabilities. The Panel are passionate that children and young people know how to stand up for their rights, but they can't do this without the knowledge, support and compassion of their educators who in turn need the same level of support from ES.

A member of the Panel met with pupil support in their school to explore how they approach additional support needs (ASN) teaching. Reflecting on this discussion, The Panel feel that ASN needs to be specifically considered by ES when supporting rights-based education in either training, resources or support for educators. This will allow ASN pupils to be better empowered by their rights. From the Panel member's research, they discovered that ASN pupils need creative teaching methods that focus on a variety of qualifications and topics that suit pupils individually, a public celebration of achievements, support during transitions and clear policies on anti-discrimination and inclusion championed by head teachers.

**“I THINK SCHOOLS OUGHT TO DO MORE TO MAKE SURE OUR RIGHTS AS STUDENTS ARE BEING RESPECTED.”**

**- YOUTH QUESTIONNAIRE PARTICIPANT**

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**Integrate the UNCRC across the curriculum.**

The Panel has found that one of the greatest barriers to integrating the UNCRC in education is young people's lack of awareness of the UNCRC. Therefore, one way to ensure they learn about the UNCRC is to integrate it throughout the curriculum. The young people feel it's important that their rights education is not restricted to just PSE or Modern Studies lessons and that it is incorporated into their learning across the curriculum. Utilising examples and storytelling within teaching on the UNCRC will also help young people to understand their rights and know how to practically uphold them in different scenarios. The Panel are also concerned that any additional UNCRC lessons or teaching could take time away from the essential focus on exams for some year groups; so, if rights are integrated into existing lessons and subjects, additional learning won't need to occur.

**“I AM PERSONALLY A PART OF MY SCHOOL'S RIGHTS RESPECTING SCHOOLS GROUP AND A MEMBER OF THE UNICEF UK YAB. I HAVE ALSO FOUND IN MY SCHOOL IT RATHER DIFFICULT WITH THE CURRENT CURRICULUM TO EMPOWER YOUNG PEOPLE IN MY SCHOOL/MAKE THEM AWARE OF THEIR RIGHTS.”**  
**- YOUTH QUESTIONNAIRE PARTICIPANT**

The consequences for not respecting the UNCRC should be clear to all educators and if rights are infringed, Education Scotland should act on this immediately.

The UNCRC is soon to be incorporated into Scots law, so the Panel think it's important for ES to inform educators on the current consequences for not respecting the UNCRC in education settings and for ES to act on any infringements immediately. The Panel think this will prepare schools for the implications of the UNCRC but more importantly, will allow young people to see that their rights are being taken seriously.

A Panel member shared their experience with the UNCRC in school:

**“AT PRIMARY, I HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO BE A PART OF LEADING THE SCHOOL'S JOURNEY TO ACHIEVING THE GOLD AWARD WITHIN THE UNCRC, BEING THE JOINT HEAD OF OUR RIGHTS RESPECTING GROUP. FROM THIS, I DEVELOPED A STRONG PASSION AND INTEREST IN CHILDREN'S RIGHTS. EVEN WITH THE GROWTH OF THIS IN SCHOOLS, SINCE MOVING INTO HIGH SCHOOL, I'VE FOUND THAT IT'S VERY RARELY MENTIONED OR REFERRED TO WITHIN OUR TEACHING AND LEARNING AND THE LEVEL OF AWARENESS OF THE UNCRC AMONGST MY PEERS IS WORRYINGLY LOW. THE WAYS IN WHICH YOUNG PEOPLE CAN ENGAGE WITH THE WORLD AROUND THEM IS HUGELY ENHANCED AND EMPOWERED BY A BETTER UNDERSTANDING THE UNCRC AND I BELIEVE THAT IT NEEDS TO BE A KEY PRIORITY FOR PSE LESSONS WITHIN HIGH SCHOOLS. “**





## Website and Social Media

The Panel first explored the ES website to research the organisation’s purpose, strategic aims, what they do and how they do it. However, the young people struggled to find the information they needed easily and often found that the content as well as the design of the website was not youth friendly. The young people felt that often it wasn’t clearly defined what ES do and how they do it, which they felt should be clearly explained on the website.

The Panel recognise that the target audience for the website is not children and young people, however they do think the interface should be more accessible to all. The Panel want ES to utilise social media platforms to inform young people about ES, the education system and all changes that are taking places nationally that affect young people’s experience of education locally. The Panel believe improving the website and social media will increase ES’s accessibility and transparency to learners, educators and parents.

**A Panel member shared their experience researching ES during the project:**

**“EVERYONE WAS VERY OPEN TO LISTENING TO US AND HELPING US, BUT IT WAS DIFFICULT TO FIND INFORMATION ON ES OUTSIDE OF MEETINGS.”**

### **Improve the interface, design and content of the website to improve accessibility and transparency.**

While the Panel recognise that the website needs to engage educators and organisations first, they believe the site still needs to be engaging to young people and parents too. They think an improved website could help give more clarity on who ES are and what they represent, improve accessibility overall and signpost educators to training and resources more easily.

The Panel think the interface and design of the site needs improvement to make the content more engaging and accessible and suggest making the homepage much easier to navigate on both desktop and mobile. The Panel also want to see clearer signposting to important documents or information that are relevant to young people or their parents.

### **Create a youth-friendly, youth-facing social media presence to inform and engage young people about the education system.**

The Panel think it's important for ES to be more transparent with young people about their education, how it works, how it's changing and how they can shape its future. The group want ES to be better known among young people and more accessible to them too. A crucial way to do this is to ensure ES have a strong social media presence as this is where many children and young people engage with organisations and find information.

This would include a clear and accessible social media presence on TikTok, Instagram and Twitter that provides children and young people with relevant information relating to their education. The Panel believe this will support transparency, accessibility and engagement however, they also noted that it's important for content to be tailored to suit each social media channel. For example, TikTok would involve more playful and engaging video content whereas Instagram would need information to be condensed and visually engaging.

#### **Social media content could include the following:**

- Information on who ES are, what they do and how they do it
- Information on how the Scottish education system works
- What options are available to learners within the curriculum
- Updates about changes or developments within ES or the education system as a whole
- Opportunities available for youth engagement within ES
- Results from national surveys or engagement
- Updates on how ES is using young people's feedback to implement change
- Case studies of positive changes happening in local authorities
- Explanations on how the inspections works
- Advice on exams such as prep or options after results
- Signposting to community learning opportunities
- Sharing youth-friendly documents such as the latest strategic plan

### **Create youth-friendly versions of strategic documents within ES relevant to children and young people.**

During their desk-based research, the Panel identified that many of the strategic documents ES produce which are directly relevant to the education of children and young people are not youth-friendly. The Panel think it's important for young people to be able to read and understand any information that directly relates to them, their experiences of education and the education system they are involved in. Therefore, they want ES to make any relevant documents child and youth friendly going forward. The Panel also believe this will help parents access this information, support their children to understand how their education works, and any changes that might occur.

The Panel would like to see these documents shared on social media to inform young people and signposted on the ES website to inform parents. The results from the national survey could also help guide what documents need to be produced in youth-friendly formats depending on what young people's priorities are.



## Inspections

From the personal experiences of Panel members, they highlighted that most schools prepare significantly for inspections and identify specific pupils to speak with inspectors which can provide an unrepresentative picture of the school. The Panel understand the stress inspections put on teaching staff, however, they are passionate that inspections reflect the true picture of the school and teaching standards.

### **Inspectors should pick a diverse group of young people to provide guided feedback on their learning experiences.**

To ensure that inspections gather fair and representative information that reflects a broad variety of students' experiences, the Panel want inspectors to pick which young people they would like to hear from, rather than schools selecting students.

The Panel think the feedback given to inspectors should be guided so students understand what they're contributing to, why it's important and how to give inspectors the feedback they're looking for. The Panel also suggested conducting pupil interviews with a diverse range of students and an anonymous questionnaire at the end of specific class. The group feel it is important that students aren't offered incentives to be involved in inspections as young people will give more honest and impartial feedback when their time isn't incentivised.

### **Unexpected inspections should occur more frequently to capture a better picture of daily school life.**

The Panel think it's important for inspectors to be able to see the daily working of schools and educators and they believe this can only be achieved with unexpected visits from ES. From their personal experiences, schools prepare significantly for upcoming inspections which can give a misleading view of what school life and education standards look like on a day-to-day basis.

### **Results from inspections and associated improvement measures should be communicated in youth-friendly ways.**

The young people felt that often results from inspections weren't communicated well enough, or even at all, in their individual schools. They want young people to understand the status of their schools, what ES are doing to improve it and why. The Panel think ES should work with schools to ensure this is communicated consistently and in youth-friendly ways.



## Youth Engagement, Feedback and Concerns

A key aim of this project is address how Education Scotland works with young people, incorporating youth voices into the work of the organisation. The Panel are keen that a diverse group of youth voices from across Scotland are involved in decision-making and feedback to Education Scotland in the future. They think it is essential that ES listens to young people's experiences of their education and understand why this is important to their work as an organisation. The Panel feel that young voices need to be involved at any important decisions or policy changes that affect their day-to-day experiences of the education system. The group want ES to act on the feedback they receive from young people and implement change accordingly so that more young people can receive a better education.

The Panel feel that it is important for young people to have a way to provide feedback to ES so they can express their concerns about their education and their educators as well as champion great teachers and lessons too, demonstrating a national picture through the experiences of individuals. They want young people to be able to share their experiences and have their voices heard to improve their learning environment for the better.

The Panel feel that ES need more direct contact with young people and their experiences to understand the impact of issues within schools on both an individual and a national level. While the Panel are aware that most of ES's engagement with young people happens within the Scrutiny directorate, they feel there is lots of potential for greater engagement throughout ES. The Panel are concerned about young people's negative experiences at school not being taken seriously or not feeling confident enough to report their experiences. Often, The Panel feel young people are not listened to by their educators or local authority when they raise issues about their education and that ES cannot see the overall picture without the direct feedback from young people. The Panel think feedback to ES needs to be structured, guided, supported and in some cases anonymous too.

This will allow young people to understand the purpose and impact their feedback will have, feel safer expressing their views as well as making this data easier to collate and then act on from within ES.

When asked about this topic in the staff survey, 46% of responses felt unsure if ES had a role in giving young people a space to express their concerns and feedback. However, the Panel feel strongly that ES has a fundamental role to play in gathering and receiving the feedback and concerns of young people. They believe this will help ES understand the complex education experiences faced by young people in Scotland and implement appropriate measures and improvements for educators as a result. The Menti questionnaire results also showed that 100% of young respondents felt the same way.

Results from the staff survey show that 70% of staff believe there are opportunities for young people and The Panel to be involved in developing practices and policies within ES. However, 60% of respondents were unsure if the views of young people currently engaged in ES work had affected the organization internally and many responses expressed the need for greater incorporation of young voices into ES work. The survey also showed that most staff are unsure about what has previously been done to include young voices in decision-making, but it was highlighted that focus groups, consultations, surveys, inclusion ambassadors and participatory pedagogies had been implemented.

This suggests that while there is clearly an appetite for greater youth engagement within ES, work needs to be done on how young people's views are gathered, communicated and integrated across the organisation.

When asked in the survey, 51% of respondents believed that when young people views are consulted, they have a noticeable impact outside the organisation. This shows there is also more room to grow youth engagement and impact outside ES with the work they do.



**Implement the role of Student Ambassadors in all schools to allow students to share their experiences in education with Education Scotland directly.**

One solution the Panel developed is a Student Ambassadors scheme in every school. This role would allow individual young people to provide feedback to ES on their experiences in education, flag issues and champion positive education experiences throughout the year. The Panel believe that young people will provide greater, more honest feedback when this is done through their peers anonymously. Ambassadors would take feedback they have directly gathered from their peers across the school and give this to Education Scotland. Pupils would be invited to share any school experiences that are impacting their education so that Education Scotland could hear what is happening and put measures in place to improve.

In the Menti questionnaire, the young participants were asked for their feedback on the Panel's idea of implementing Student Ambassadors in schools. Almost all participants felt this was a good idea and suggested the following considerations for the role:

- Ensure ES and Local Authorities are committed to the role and supporting the young people involved.
- Provide thorough resources for schools to support staff and Ambassadors for the role.
- Give the opportunity to different ages not just senior pupils or captains.
- Provide an anonymous method of feedback, such as suggestion boxes or anonymous notes.



**“I THINK IT’S A GREAT IDEA, JUST LIKE A PUPIL COUNCIL REP FOR EACH YEAR CAN EXPRESS CONCERNS AND SUCH LIKE OF THEIR YEAR GROUP PEERS, THIS AMBASSADOR CAN EXPRESS THE IDEAS AND FEELINGS OF THOSE IN THEIR YEAR. IT SOUNDS GREAT, EXCITED TO SEE IT HAPPEN!”**

**- YOUTH QUESTIONNAIRE PARTICIPANT**

The Panel want this role to be an opportunity for young people to develop their skills too and think it is vital that training and support is provided in schools for this role to safeguard Ambassadors from the feedback they may receive as well as empower them to be good listeners and facilitators. They also think guidance should be provided on how to best to feedback their data to ES that is representative, accessible and productive for ES.

The Panel wish for Ambassadors to be identifiable and approachable while also providing a space or mechanism for anonymous feedback from their peers. To ensure recruitment is fair, the Panel think ES inspectors should pick Ambassadors from their applications instead of schools to prevent any bias in the recruitment process and that both younger and older students are given the opportunity to be an Ambassador.

Ideally, the Panel would like this role to be standardised for every school to ensure the role, its responsibilities and the format that feedback is gathered through is consistent. However, they want the role to be representative of their school's community and size. Therefore, the number of Ambassadors per school will vary and the Panel want a diverse range of ages, ethnicity, sexuality and SIMD localities to be represented.

Feedback and learning from similar schemes implemented in Local Authorities or schools can be applied to the initial pilot Ambassador scheme.

**Conduct a national survey once a year in schools to gather the experiences and opinions of young people across Scotland.**

The Panel want ES to have both a national and local picture of young people's experiences in education in Scotland and provide a consistent, trusted two-way dialogue between ES and learners.

Both the Panel and the young people in the Menti questionnaire felt that one of the easiest ways to do this was to conduct a yearly student survey. This survey will be anonymous, accessible to all students and results will be given to ES directly rather than via schools first. Schools and LA's will be linked to responses to allow data to be gathered on both a local and national level so that ES can target where improvements need to be made for the following year.

The Panel think that ES should be more well-known to young people and think this would be an opportunity to inform them on what ES do and the impact they can have on the education system. The Panel suggest mandatory time in lessons for the survey to be completed with a short input on ES and the importance of the survey.

The national survey should act as the initial consultation with young people that then feeds into the work of both the Student Ambassador role and the Youth Feedback Panel. The Youth Feedback Panel would utilise their personal education experiences as students to help inform and advise on ES's decision-making processes (see next recommendation for more details). The Panel suggest that focus groups could take place after survey results had been analysed, allowing more detail feedback to be given on specific topics or in specific localities, depending what target areas had been identified from the results.

The Panel think it is important for the design of the survey to be carefully considered to include open questions, allowing young people to respond with greater honesty and accuracy. Once the survey results have been received and ES have made decisions on how to act on the results, the Panel want ES to utilize social media to communicate both the results and their solutions. This will help young people see the impact their feedback has, how improvements will be made and increase transparency overall.



**Introduce a rolling Youth Feedback Panel.**

The Panel would like to see ES implement a Youth Feedback Panel that uses their personal experience of education to inform and advise on internal decision-making in the organisation. While the national survey and Student Ambassador role is aimed at improving youth engagement with ES, the feedback Panel is a chance for a smaller group of young people to be directly engaged in the decision-making processes internally at ES and have a direct impact on system change.

The Panel are passionate that youth engagement in ES is about sustainable power-sharing not simply engagement and the youth Panel would play a pivotal role in this.

**“APPOINT ACTUAL LEARNERS (PLURAL) TO THE ES BOARD AND BRING THEM IN REGULARLY (READ: MORE TIMES THAN THEY’RE NOT) TO MANAGEMENT MEETINGS. IF YOU’RE GOING TO ENGAGE, DO IT VIA CO-PRODUCTION.”  
- YOUTH QUESTIONNAIRE PARTICIPANT**

**To make this Panel fair and representative, the Panel think it could be created by random allocation - similar to Jury service - so that the Panel has a diverse range of voices that is representative of Scotland’s young people. The following outlines the key features of the Youth Feedback Panel:**

- Young people would be picked once a year by random, representative selection with the option to opt-out of the opportunity.
- Diversity, equality and inclusion considerations would be used to create a fair and representative Panel.
- As many Local Authorities would be represented as possible.
- The Panel would be invited at set times in the year to feed into the strategic work and decision-making at ES.
- The Panel would be asked for their opinions on policies, and what their greatest concerns are and introduce student input in the decision-making process.
- The Panel would champion their individual experiences and those of their peers as well as the feedback received in the survey and via Student Ambassadors.



## NEXT STEPS

The Panel are passionate that their recommendations are implemented into the work of ES going forward and that the legacy of their work on the project improves the experiences of young people in education.

They hope to see their recommendations turned into tangible changes to test out their solutions in reality before rolling them out nationally. The Panel hope to see pilot schemes implemented for the Student Ambassadors role, Youth Feedback Panel and the national survey.

They hope that ES can learn from these prototypes, develop them directly with young people and then integrate them into the national, strategic work of ES.

The Panel aspires for a more inclusive organisation by incorporating young people into decision-making, creating a supportive, reactive and engaging education system that ensures all children and young people in Scotland know what their rights are, feel empowered by them and trust they are upheld by their educators.





## Young Scot

Caledonian Exchange  
19A Canning Street  
Edinburgh  
EH3 8EG

[youngscot.net/news](http://youngscot.net/news)



@YoungScot

[info@youngscot](mailto:info@youngscot)



YoungScot

