



Committee for Education - Impact of lockdown and restart on the emotional well-being and mental health of children and young people

Education Service - Focus Groups

An invitation to participate in a focus group was issued to all schools via the C2K Noticeboard (C2K is the IT network provider for schools in NI.) An email invitation was also sent to the Education Service teacher contact list and to schools which had recently participated in the Assembly's general education programme.

The Education Service sought to include schools from all education sectors (primary, secondary, maintained and controlled, voluntary grammar, special, integrated and Irish medium). This was achieved. It also sought to include schools from as many constituencies as possible. Schools from every constituency were invited to take part, but given the particular circumstances of this academic year, not all those invited were able to do so. In the end, schools which participated represented 14 of the 18 constituencies. A total of 21 focus group sessions were delivered to groups from 19 schools and one youth organisation. (See table attached for list of participating schools.) Participants ranged in age from Primary 4 pupils (8 years old) Post 16.

In relation to the participating primary school from the Irish medium sector, it was agreed with the school that a questionnaire method, rather than focus group would be the best approach. Questions were asked in both Irish and English and pupils could write their answers in either Irish or English.

Pupils from two special schools participated – Clifton School, Bangor and Tor Bank School, Belfast.

The Education Service was approached a youth group, Newtownabbey Arts and Cultural Network (NACN), which requested a focus group and wanted the Committee to see music videos created by young people, reflecting their experiences of lockdown. Members of this group attended different schools and came from a number of constituencies. This is a small, creative, music based youth group, made up of young people from different schools and areas including Ballyclare, Monkstown, Millisle, Carrickfergus, Bangor, Ballysillan and Rathcoole. The songs produced were a pandemic themed cover of 'Do they know it's Christmas? (2020) and two further lockdown inspired videos featuring Brooke Thompson and Carly Richardson from the group. Lyrics and links to the songs are provided at the end of this document.

The focus group session with Banbridge High School was with one of the pupils involved in a 'Connecting Minds' mindfulness project across 2 years, in conjunction with St Patrick's College and Newbridge Integrated College. The project links these school with other schools internationally. Sarah McMahon (finishing Year 13), relayed the findings of their work on

the impact of Covid 19 and lockdown on young people, representing the views of 16 pupils from Banbridge High School, 30 +, mostly Year 8, pupils from St Patrick's College and 8 pupils from Years 9 and 9 at Newbridge Integrated College.

Focus group sessions lasted approximately 30 minutes and participants answered 8 questions:

Questions and Responses

1. What did you find was the **best activity to help you cope** during lockdown? (to support your emotional wellbeing and mental health = happiness and feeling confident that you can do what you have to do)

In all groups, pupils mentioned spending more time with family and communicating with friends (and family) online - 'video chatting became the new normal'. Playing with siblings was also high on the list and so were pets, with quite a few participants getting new pets during the lockdown.

Exercise and being outdoors, where possible, were also very important. There was widespread appreciation among all groups of being able to go outside, especially in the good weather of the first lockdown. The young people surveyed enjoyed walking, cycling, and practising football and other sports, including golf – on their own, with siblings or parents, or directed by sports clubs. One Year 13 group talked about the strengthening and conditioning programme provided by their sports club. One secondary school streamed a weekly, online yoga class through Google Meet, and Joe Wicks' online PE classes also got a mention.

Online gaming was popular among boys in particular and especially at primary school level. While one called it a 'stress reliever', he also expressed a concern that he might be addicted, spending up to 8 hours a day on this activity. Watching video clips ('of favourite 'YouTubers'') on mobile devices was also a popular thing to do.

Watching TV and movies (streaming services) was popular – and watching football on TV from January 2021.

Those who had pets enjoyed spending more time with them – including cats, dogs, horses, hamsters, a budgie and a parakeet.

Some who lived in the country loved helping to look after horses and helping out more on the farm (eg, lambing).

Doing *art activities* (drawing and painting) was also mentioned by many primary school children, and reading and listening to music helped were important for all age groups. Some participants learned *new skills* during lockdown, such cooking and baking, drawing, learning the guitar and learning a new language. Eating was a popular

activity for a few (with chocolate and takeaways getting a mention). One primary school pupil enjoyed helping his grandfather in the garden, which was a new activity for him. Learning a new language was also on the list.

Online lessons were mentioned by several young people. These kept them in touch with their teachers and class mates and helped them keep up with work. They also provided entertainment.)

Many young people mentioned the importance of their mobile *devices* in helping them cope with lockdown, 'so you didn't feel alone' and could keep up with schoolwork. Face-to-face contact was especially important through video calls and live lessons. Listening to music was also important for many pupils from KS2 upwards and so was streaming movies and other entertainment.

While routine and creating a new routine was important for many pupils, a small number appreciated the lack of routine and the greater freedom to do school work at one's own pace and time of choosing. Many admitted to sleeping late in the morning, as a coping mechanism. 'My schedule was freed up because I wasn't at school for 6-7 hours a day'.

The NACN youth group members found the organised video calls on the normal day and at the normal time of meeting were reassuring. Members enjoyed producing a few songs about their experience of lockdown. They also sang in public, on a street in the local community to entertain older people living on their own. One group's local GAA club also organised for their members to do shopping for those who were vulnerable or isolating. Sports teams also kept in touch via video meetings.

Pupils in one school felt that their weekly recorded assembly was important in helping to keep community spirit going. Pupils and teachers could send in news using photos and videos. The majority of children got involved.

A few more comments on what helped young people cope with lockdown:

'It was most likely my parent, she kept me going'

'Having my mum to talk to, art and stories'

'I could read all day.'

'I did some art, played, chilled, watched my phone and went out with my brother'

'Singing, music and art'

'Going outside with my dog, calling my best friend, playing with my little sister and playing football'

'Sleeping and studying'

'Hot tub and monopoly'

'I took breaks after every lesson, so I wouldn't get stressed.'

2. What did you miss the most during lockdown?

Top of the list of what was missed, was 'face-to face social interaction' with family and friends - or, as one pupil put it, 'people who I love'. Grandparents were greatly missed especially by primary school children and cousins were also frequently mentioned. Across all age groups, friends were universally missed. Primary pupils particularly missed playing with friends outside and going to the park with them. Older pupils missed 'proper socialising with friends' on 'nights out' – Missing girlfriends also got a mention.

Everyone wanted life to return to normal, to 'just do normal, everyday things'.

In a case study carried out within the Banbridge area Connecting Minds project involving Banbridge High School, St Patrick's College, Banbridge and Newbridge Integrated College, 22% of students said that they had experienced 'states of sadness' during lockdown because of lack of social interaction – conversation and laughter with others.

There was a feeling among older pupils that they missed out on the milestones and celebrations or 'rites of passage' they were really looking forward to, such as 18th birthday parties or learning to drive. A couple of Year 13 pupils said that they missed their girlfriend. Primary pupils also missed birthdays, milestone events, such as Confirmation or First Communion, school trips and leavers' celebrations. Eating out on special occasions was also on the list.

Sport was missed by those of all ages, especially football/Gaelic, but rugby, hurling, basketball, hockey, tennis and golf also got a mention. Older pupils spoke of missing competitive sport and its social aspect.

Going places was something that pupils of all ages missed – on holiday; to Ballycastle, Newcastle, Scotland; to the Balmoral Show, horseshows, farmers' markets, the cinema, swimming pool, indoor play areas, on day trips and to friends' houses.

Many primary pupils missed school and their teachers, although a few were happy not to be at school. Pupils of all ages missed going to clubs, eg, sports clubs, youth clubs, and the Boys Brigade and Girls Brigade (although many clubs kept in touch with members virtually and organised activities for them to do at home).

While some appreciated online shopping and deliveries, 'going into town' shopping was missed by many (across all ages) and meeting friends for a coffee (older pupils). A teacher said 'While there is talk of the death of physical retail sector, a lot of young people have missed it.' The Banbridge group concluded that might be really be such a thing as 'retail therapy'.

Some mentioned that they missed the separation of home and school life and one primary school pupil missed 'the wonderful dinners in school.'

3. What were you most grateful/thankful for during lockdown? (Were there any benefits to lockdown?)

Unsurprisingly, the majority of participants said they were most thankful for **family and friends** ('more time with my dad, support from mum, support from my sister, and for having more free time to spend with them. There were several pupils who were thankful for siblings to play with. Some added that they were grateful *that no-one in their family got Covid-19*. When one pupil's parents both got the virus, the family was very grateful for the kindness of others – '... people dropped off ice-cream and stuff'. There were a number of references to being thankful for the *NHS and key workers* both in healthcare and other areas, such as retail.

Primary pupils loved *having parents working from home* and looking after them, helping them with their school work and playing or doing activities with them, including cycles, walks, baking, cooking and playing games. Many were also grateful to have siblings to play with and support them. A few were also living with a grandparent. One pupil enjoyed 'being in a bubble with my nanny' and another 'having chats with my money.

Many were grateful for extra *relaxation time* during the day that resulted from being off school, especially during the first lockdown when there were no exams in the first lockdown (It was a different case in the more recent lockdown, when secondary exam classes felt under pressure during the second lockdown. Many stayed up later at night and slept later in the morning. They enjoyed playing outside and with their pets, extra time talking to friends, learning new skills (cooking and baking) and helping out at home, or on the farm. One boy 'lambled most of the ewes myself.' Some primary pupils also got new toys and some enjoyed reading.

They also had more time on their *devices* – which many were grateful for, especially phones, tablets and games consoles. This was how they kept up with schoolwork, and watched TV, movies and online videos. Some young people want better Wifi/technology (and one pupil was proud to say that his Granda now has Tiktok!)

Quite a few were thankful for the period of *good weather* in the first lockdown and getting outside to enjoy it. With remote learning, it was possible to enjoy the weather by doing school work in the evening.

In the written questionnaire a few pupils said that they weren't grateful for anything – that '*nothing good happened during lockdown*'. One was thankful for 'staying out of trouble'

Many were grateful to the **school and their teacher/s** for 'keeping in contact and explaining the work we had to do in a way which we understood'. Pupils enjoyed fun school activities too, eg, set challenges, a digital detox day, forest day, art day and live online meetings because 'it was great to see everyone'. One group had a 'new

found appreciation for education and school life' and for 'the little things we took for granted before'.

A few pupils were grateful for being able to go to school as children of key workers. A few others were thankful *not* to be at school, to have less work to do and to do it at a more leisurely pace.

Quite a number of pupils said they were grateful for a house, a garden, living on a farm, own room or space at home, and 'the *basics in life*, such as food, water and money.' There was also appreciation of online shopping and deliveries and streaming services. A couple of Year 13 boys expressed appreciation for their girlfriends.

Members of the NACN youth group were grateful for walks on Cavehill, keeping in other group members through virtual meetings.

Here are a few more comments:

'My family, my dog, my phone'

My sister's teasing! Playing with siblings/laughter, eg playing pranks/hugs from family members

'That I didn't lose anyone as a result of Covid or people not having access to normal hospital services/'that we came through unscathed'.

4. What was the most difficult thing about lockdown?

There was some overlap in the response to this question and 'What did you miss the most?

Not being able to see extended family, especially grandparents *and friends* topped the list. In the written responses, pupils wrote 'I was lonely'; 'I felt really lonely and had bad days'; and 'I am an only child and I had no-one to talk to.'

Some pupils worried about Covid-19, that family members might get sick, especially those who worked in healthcare. A few pupils revealed that they had lost loved ones during lockdown, although not to Covid-19. Others mentioned difficulties such as 'coping with the time when mum had Covid-19' and 'not being able to see Dad, Mum and Step Mum when they had Covid-19. A few worried about getting Covid-19 themselves.

Staying inside was very difficult for many, especially for primary school children and during the first lockdown when you could only leave the house once a day. Pupils said 'I wasn't able to see grandparents, cousins and friends' and 'I couldn't go anywhere' and 'I couldn't play with friends.' Older students found the lack of face-to-face contact with friends and girlfriends difficult and not being able to play football.

Not being able to go to restaurants was difficult for many and younger pupils missed going to indoor play places, or the park, or the shop with friends. Some found 'being alone' and 'being lonely' difficult, and 'being trapped in the house for such long periods and missing friends, grandparents and other family members. Not going on holiday was greatly missed as was travelling to see friends and family. One pupil's mum was diagnosed with cancer, another lost her grandmother, and another lost both grandparents, but not from Covid-19.'

Schoolwork was difficult for many. One primary pupil said that she worried about getting all the homework done and keeping everyone safe, and that the experience was all 'a bit overwhelming'. It was hard to get motivated to do things, although family helped and teenage sister made a point of checking in with her often. Even returning to school was 'a bit scary' and required an adjustment period.

For many P7s, the hardest thing was doing so many practice transfer tests together with the uncertainty around whether tests would go ahead. A pupil said 'We worked hard over Christmas and then it didn't happen'. Some felt it was an important opportunity which was taken away from them. Would have like to have done even an online test. Others were relieved not to be doing it. Then there was the long wait to find out what school you were going to and the worries that come with starting a new school. P7s missed end of year and leaver celebrations, such as 'Leavers' mass' and school trips. They weren't able to take on the leadership roles usually carried out by P7 pupils.

Pupils of all ages worried about work piling up and not getting it all done, about not understanding work, with no teacher available to help. One group of pupils had no live classes at all during lockdown periods, just Google classroom. The change of routine was also difficult for many pupils. 'It was hard to create a new routine or even get motivated to have one at all'. One said 'I was a bit stressed out at times with work'. Sleep patterns were also disturbed due to staying up late and lying in late. Noise of younger siblings and other distractions were a problem for some.

Toward the end of the last lockdown, examination classes were under pressure to cover topics, do assessments and prepare for further assessments back at school. For Year 13 students, having worked extremely hard for a number of weeks and completed assessments for Centre Determined Grades, they then found out that the grades will not count towards their final A-Level score. One group of Year 13s said that lockdown was 'generally a bad experience': the news was upsetting, eg the number of deaths, there was the uncertainty around exams, which caused a lot of anxiety, due to pupils been first told 'no exams', then there would be 'mini assessments', which felt like exams and which schools treated them like exams, not knowing how grades would work. This year group feels that they were put under a lot of pressure to study and revise in a short space of time – and, despite the fact that it was hard to stay focused and motivated in the circumstances, they did it only

to learn that exams would not count towards their final A-Level grade. They were disappointed that 'people were struggling with school work and schools didn't seem to understand that'.

In the Banbridge area mindfulness project case study of approximately 50 pupils, 19% experienced anxiety during lockdown. One student told of her worry about both parents who worked in healthcare.

Missed the company of teachers and classmates.

Many primary school pupils really missed school and the company of teachers and classmate. This was shown by comments such as 'I want to go to school', 'I missed my friends', and 'I love being back at school'

Within one group of older students, participants felt supported by subject teachers, but thought that the Head of Year was in touch with them too often and that schools should take care to get the balance right between checking in to see how pupils are doing and checking up on them.

Several schools put measures in place to support pupils, including a weekly assembly to share news, a weekly online yoga class and one school organised a couple of sessions with Action Mental Health. Banbridge schools got involved in an international mindfulness programme.

A few older pupils said that while initiatives such as this are appreciated by students, most of them just want to 'get on with it', and that 'mental health issues do not affect everyone'

There were a smaller number of pupils who found home learning easy enough, had sufficient help at home and who viewed it as a good opportunity to get experience of working independently. While most were not that keen on the packs of work sent home in the first lockdown, the introduction of Google Classroom meant that they could talk to the teacher. Some also liked the fact that you didn't have to work all day, could do your work in your own time and get up when you wanted.

Return to school was difficult for some pupils, who found it hard trying to readjust to their former routine. However, primary pupils were mostly delighted to be back to see their teachers, friends and classmates. One teacher remarked that school was a little 'boring' because of restrictions on activities, classes having to stay in bubbles, no visitors or day trips out.

Other aspects of lockdown which were said to be difficult were:

- Covid messaging being unclear and the timing of decisions;
- Not been able to play or watch football, or do other sports (GAA clubs remaining closed);

- the boredom of being 'stuck at home', doing the same thing every day, going to the same places for walks, with weekends feeling no different – 'a soul crushing lack of activity!';
- spending too much time playing video games and conflict/arguments over gaming consoles;
- difficult relationships between siblings
- no youth clubs open or BB or G; as a creative group, NACN members felt that their creativity was hampered
- not going on holiday
- no shopping
- No beauty salons or hairdressers open
- Not being able to sell bulls at the market
- trying not to waste food and supplies

5. What did you most look forward to after lockdown ended?

The majority of focus group participants looked forward to

- seeing family and friends again, face-to-face
- freedom to go to different places and on holiday, including to see family in Scotland or down south
- getting back to doing sports, especially football and Gaelic, and other extracurricular activities, including music and drama groups
- watching football, especially fans of premiership teams
- Returning to normality, in and out of school, including an end to restrictions (wearing masks, sanitisation and one way systems and feeling less need and responsibility to protect others.
- Seeing my carer again, who is also my friend

Primary pupils wanted to go play and socialise with their friends, to go to the park and other fun places, such as the swimming pool, cinema and activity centres. Going out to eat in restaurants, celebrating birthdays and other occasions, including First Communion and Confirmation. Other things to do on the wishlist were going to friends' houses (for a sleepover), getting hair and nails done, going to parades and bonfires. Some were also looking forward to trick or treating at Halloween and a proper Christmas.

Many were looking forward to going back to school to see their teachers and classmates.

Older pupils looked forward to hanging out with friends, nights out, formals, the 'buzz of normal life in town' including live music. They look forward to having a proper Sixth Form experience (eg use of a recreation area/café), learning to drive

6. What one thing could the school or government do to help you cope with school life now?

While a small number of participants said nothing in response to this question, the vast majority made suggestions about what schools and the government could do to help.

A small number of pupils thought that the government should continue to ensure that the rules are followed in relation to hand washing/sanitising, social distancing and wearing masks - - 'try to keep us safe no matter what'. However, one pupil thought there should 'less talking about Covid' and many wanted school – and life generally - to go back to normal, with an to restrictions.

Primary pupils were keen to suggest changes to school life, including longer breaks and lunches for socialising with friends; less homework and fewer tests; more fun activities such as art; more PE and outdoor activities, including after-school sports, with schools offering a greater variety of sports, especially for girls. One school has operated a shorter school day since return after lockdown and pupils would love that to continue next year.

A few also suggested abolishing school uniform.

Some thought that more school work and revision classes are the answer to concerns about being behind with studies.

A few pupils want government to continue to provide Covid-19 support, including helping people more with costs such as heating. Another pupil called for more funding for schools, to buy better books, arts resources and equipment, eg computers for video calls. A teacher asked for all children and young people to be provided with a free laptops/tablet, and free broadband/Wi-Fi. Another teacher wants more to be done to extend free school meal provision and a third would like larger classrooms to allow space for social distancing and active learning. A pupil from Clifton School, Bangor would like more funding for their school to buy outdoor play equipment, including zip lines and a mud kitchen and increased support for people who need assistance paying rent and other bills.

Young people want play parks to open, sleepovers to be allowed, more safe cycling paths away from traffic, more skate parks and dog parks (safe places to let them off the lead).

In the case of any future online schooling – schools should have more live/face-to-face contact, with subject teachers touching base with students more often to check how they are doing.

Extra time in next year's exams was suggested by one Year 13 class who believe that their year group has been most affected by lockdown due to the cancellation of GCSEs and AS exams and because so much will depend on A2 exams.

Young people from the NACN youth group felt that there wasn't enough support for young people during lockdown and that government should do more to help young people struggling to maintain good mental health. They also want more funding for groups like themselves (their current premises are too small and have no heating, toilets or running water).

Sarah McMahon from the Banbridge area mindfulness programme believes the government should provide funding for similar mindfulness projects in all schools.

Older pupils would like government to trust teachers to deliver grades in times such as these and make decisions more quickly, 'putting children's views and best interests at the centre of decision-making'. (Teacher - Pupils have picked up on the stress teachers have been under with CDG assessments and marking. Pupils feel that they have had exam stress for weeks on end – which they feel has been worse than doing actual exams.)

In one school, pupils want permission to use stress reliever toys.

7. Have you any **worries about the future**, because of lockdown?

Pupils were worried that they might get Covid-19 and die, or lose family members to the virus, especially grandparents; that 'we might be stuck in this (crisis) for ever'; or that other pandemics will happen and cause further lockdowns;

Being behind in their studies was another worry because so much important learning was missed during lockdown. Pupils are concerned about the possible impact of this on their future academic success (in examinations and applications to university).

Many P7 pupils were worried that they might not get into the school of their choice, make friends or be able to cope with the Year 8 workload, or that they might some of Year 8 due to a further lockdown. Getting lost in the new school was also on the list, as the usual open nights and induction programmes did not take place. Others were concerned because they did not get to sit the transfer test. One teacher expressed concern about the mental health repercussions of all the uncertainty over transfer tests and applications to secondary school – saying that it was 'very stressful' for the children.

Year 13 pupils are concerned that their considerable efforts this year to allow schools to determine grade will not count towards their overall A-Level grade. They feel misled because they didn't find this out until after the work was done.

Some have concerns that all the work and proper teaching they missed due to lockdown will affect future examination results, that they might not do their best because they may not be as resilient as they were before the pandemic. Not everyone is happy with the proposed specifications for A2 and they think that there should have been closer consultation with teachers and pupils before making decisions about next year's exams. These pupils believe that their school has done the best it can by offering after-school catch-up classes going forward, but there is a

feeling that government could have done more to help those who were isolating when schools were open. They wonder if they (Year 13s) will be disadvantaged when it comes to university/college applications. 'A lot of AS topics weren't covered, so are we properly prepared for university?' 'What will be the ripple effect down the line?'

Exams next year because so much has been missed, afraid of being classed as the 'Covid Year', not having the right skills and qualifications because of Covid. Since the return to school, have felt under huge pressure to catch up on school work. There hasn't been anything to do since then outside school and school work. No break from schoolwork at the weekends. Some are back playing sport, but not all sports are 'open'. Missed out on the fun of important teenage years.

A few pupils expressed worries about the potential risks of the Covid-19 vaccine – eg, will fertility be affected? Is it safe for pregnant women? ('My mum is pregnant and a midwife') Is it some sort of tracking device? Some think the vaccine needs to be compulsory for certain activities such as travel.

A few pupils expressed a lack of optimism around the direction of government in Northern Ireland, including the possibility of a united Ireland

Some pupils worried that Covid will return again due to easing of restrictions and that there might be future lockdowns. 'Will we get a summer – be free?' They are also concerned about the mental health of the elderly and vulnerable who have had to isolate for so long and of bereaved families who didn't get to see loved ones before they died or have a proper funeral?

Our youth group participants are worried about funding for their group. Their current building has no heating or hot water. They have located a new building but need funding to renovate it.

The school community of St Eugene's in Strabane is worried about the school being in the Department's Area Plan and the uncertain future that brings.

One P7 teacher expressed her concern about her pupil and the heartbreak that would be caused if they didn't get into the school they wanted.

P7 pupils were worried about the possibility of other viruses and that Covid-19 won't end. 'Will we get a proper Year 8 experience, being able to move around different classrooms and not have to wear masks and socially distance?' One pupil hopes everyone will get the Covid-19 vaccine.

Several pupils were concerned about not being able to go on holiday in the near future. One mentioned weight as a concern and another, climate change.

'It has been a generally unhappy time.'

8. What are your hopes for the future now that lockdown is easing?

All participants want to see an end to Covid-19 and most are ready for a return to normality (without masks, sanitisation or other restrictions). A minority still feel the

need to be protected by some restrictions. All want to visit extended family and go on holiday to various places, including, Ballycastle, Portrush, down South, London, Scotland, Florida/America and Spain.

All hope to enjoy socialising with friends, eating out in restaurants, going to parties and other fun places and spending more time outside doing activities, including the Duke of Edinburgh award for one student. A high percentage are looking forward to competitive sport – ‘getting back out on the pitch’. Primary pupils hope we will have more play parks, skate parks and cycle paths in the future. They also want more school trips.

P7 pupils were hoping to go to school of choice and to do well there. Many hope to go to university and get a good job. Some are hoping to have careers as a professional footballer, beautician/make-up artist, photographer and detective. A few comments from primary pupils were: ‘I hope to feel like myself again, ‘I hope to have good times and a good life.’

Banbridge High’s involvement in mindfulness project hope that government and all schools will introduce similar programmes to help their pupils, as they feel it has

Year 13 are hoping to go to be able to visit universities and attend open days and to have a formal. Older pupils also hope for certainty of policy on exams – to give them time to get organised. ‘We want to do the exams’. They would also like to know soon what Plan B is, if another lockdown should occur. On a lighter note, they look forward to spending more time with friends, boyfriends and girlfriends.

Our singers and musicians from NACN/Coole Studios are looking forward to singing again in public, doing fundraisers (we did some singing for the elderly during lockdown – on a street where they mostly live on their own) and getting their Wizard of Oz theatre production back on track.

Here are the links to the music videos from NACN:

<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=218669576392703> (Do they know it's Christmas?)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MgdMx_YNQiO

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V4KkzMtubZY> (Let it be)

NACN (Coole Studios)

Lyrics by Brooke Thompson, Background track - 'Let it Be' (John Lennon)

When I feel myself down and
lonely, my mother always says to me, we will fight this virus, let it be.

And when I'm at my lowest, she is always there supporting me, saying we will fight this
virus, let it be.

Let it be, let it be, let it be, let it be, we will fight this virus, let it be.

When all the other people fighting this virus agree, we all need freedom, let it be.

For though we are apart there is still a way to be as one, we will fight this virus, let it be. Let
it be, let it be, let it be, let it be, we will fight this virus let it be.

When all the other people fighting this virus agree, we all need freedom, let it be.

For though we are apart there is still a way to be as one, we will fight this virus, let it be. Let
it be, let it be, let it be, let it be, we will fight this virus, let it be

Missing certain people

Word by Carly Richmond

Tune

Just wanna give them all a hug
I've got so much to say
Haven't seen them in so long
Now I'm stuck inside
Need to get outside
And see my friends again
Yes I miss them
Look at me you know I do

I'm bored of being in my house
And fighting with my family
All it take is you
To stay inside
And wash your hands
Shalalallalalaa
Bored inside
Just wanna get outside
And see my friends again
Shalalalalalalala
Ain't it sad
It's a shame that I
Can't see my friends again
Get me out of here
There's nothing here to do
Apart from lye in bed all day
This better be over by May
Now I'm stuck inside
Wanna go outside
And see my friends again

We were also contacted by a representative of the YouthPact project (National Youth Council of Ireland and Co-operation Ireland) which looked at young people's experiences of the pandemic.

Called the '2020 in 4' initiative (4 words, 4 lines, 4 verses, 4 images or 4 sounds), its 5 takeaway findings are:

1. Young people are significantly impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic (loss of connection, isolation, disrupted relationships, education, opportunity).
2. Youth work helped mitigate that impact (by holding connection, "being there", maintaining relationships and hope).
3. Young people demonstrated resilience and drew on their own sense of self-efficacy to sustain themselves through the pandemic.
4. The experience, whilst sharing similar characteristics with that of their peers, was different for individual young people.
5. There is need for tailored responses and significant investment in youth work as we prepare again to emerge from the public health restrictions.