WELLBEING IN LOCKDOWN

A youth-led research study into sixth form students wellbeing during the COVID-19 lockdowns.

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Executive Summary

Context

This research hones in on the second lockdown to control Covid-19 in the UK which occurred in the middle of a school year on the 6th January 2021. This research focused on the experiences of sixth form students in one school in North Cumbria. During the online learning students had to do, some of the students' human rights may have been challenged, for example, their right to education and goal of education (Articles 28 and 29). The key legislative framework for this research is the Children's Act (2004) which set out the key principles for all organisations supporting young people. This states that all organisations should support young people to succeed and achieve economic stability for themselves and future children.

Method

Our research objective was to understand the experiences of sixth form students learning at home during the Covid-19 pandemic using a mixed method online survey in Microsoft Forms. An online survey was necessary due to the control measures. We used quantitative and qualitative questions to understand the scale and nature of the impact on young people's mental health during lock down. We aimed to recruit 16 – 18 year olds doing A-levels at William Howard School and had a good response rate, with 77 sixth formers completing the survey in the school. Descriptive statistics were used to analyse the quantitative data and thematic analysis used to analyse the qualitative data.

Findings

Our chosen data collection tool helped us gain a lot of responses including quantitative and qualitative data. The three themes we explored were motivation, stress and workload and the key findings are as follows:

- The respondents in the survey were often unmotivated, possibly due to the lack of an effective working environment and distractions at home.
- Routines mostly did not work to support learning at home.
- The majority of learning routines were well prepared and structured but some had inconsistent or varied routines.
- Stress was experienced by half the respondents due to home schooling. Previous responses suggest an unstructured day and distractions may be key factors.
- There were many reasons identified for feeling stress during lockdown and school seems to have been one of many factors.

- Workload was experienced in different ways and there was no consistent answer to this question. This highlights that some young people will have managed whilst others will have struggled during home learning.
- 44% of the young people dreaded the workload during home learning suggesting it was too much or too pressured for many students.
- The level of support from teachers was inconsistent and many students felt they had too much work.
- Many young people did not ask for the support they may have needed or felt they could not ask for support when they needed it.
- The majority of young people felt it was easy to ask for help, however 29% were less confident and may have gone unsupported.
- The majority of students found teacher responses to requests for help supportive, but this was not a unanimous response and some found teacher responses unhelpful.
- Participants felt an effect of the lockdown on their preparedness for exams. There was a wide range of feelings about preparedness indicating there may be some inequality for students facing exams this year.
- The students who felt unprepared did so because they had struggled with online learning and felt they had not revised enough. This indicates the direct impact of home learning on exam preparation.
- Many students put a large effort into their work indicating they were keen to learn whatever. However, the majority put in either some or small effort perhaps suggesting a negative impact of home learning on effort.
- The reason students identified for putting in less effort was that they felt unmotivated, reinforcing the importance of the answers to question one.
- The majority of students took part in activities to help them de-stress suggesting a good level of self-awareness and maturity to help themselves in stressful times.
- A wide range of different ways to de-stress were shared, indicating the importance of individual choice.
- The majority of respondents found their de-stressing activities they partook in helpful when dealing with stress, aiding the efficiency of their learning.

Conclusion and recommendations

The Covid-19 pandemic created unprecedented challenges across society. Schools were not exempt and the decision to close schools and commence home learning was extremely challenging for them to manage. Schools put in huge efforts to translate dynamic classroom learning experiences into an online format, often learning new technology alongside students to make this happen. Sixth form might be considered a key stage of transition for young people. They are becoming young adults, making career choices for the future and

working to achieve the grades needed to realise these ambitions. The lockdown may therefore have affected them more profoundly than other year groups in schools.

Despite the great efforts by schools many of the sixth form students who participated in this research experienced a lack of motivation, excessive stress and a dread of workload. Rather than blaming schools for what was not done, we hope these findings and recommendations could offer ideas as to how to manage any future pandemics and home learning. There may also be some factors that would be beneficial to students even in school based learning situations.

Introduction

We are a group of young researchers in William Howard Sixth Form and we are studying the effects of lockdown on learning. This project involves Luke, Matty, Erin and Indra and we have been working on the project from January to June 2021. We all decid4ed to take the opportunity to study the topic of lockdown learning as we were intrigued by the topic and felt like it related to us. Knowing this, we wanted to see how other young people around us related to it.

Key terms

These are the key terms we use throughout this research.

Wellbeing: the state of being comfortable, healthy or happy

Lockdown: Not being able to go outside and do any educational or leisure activities/going outside. Dates range from 4th of January to the 8th March.

Home-learning: Doing learning whilst at home and not being able to attend school.

Remote Learning: Completing lessons online on apps like Microsoft teams. It involves learning outside of the classroom where the teacher isn't located with the students.

Motivation: being ready and excited to carry out work with your maximum effort. Involves physically wanting to do the work and striving towards a set goal.

Workload: The amount of work you have and hours taken to complete.

Stress: Feeling of being under pressure due to work and feeling anxious due to different troubles with academic learning.

Context

The global pandemic in the UK caused two lockdowns, the first of which started on the 16th March 2020, which disrupted schools. The second lockdown occurred during the middle of the academic year, on the 6th January 2021 this caused school to close meaning students had to learn on line. Most students felt under pressure and didn't enjoy learning away from school.

16th March 2020		September 2020		6th Jan 2020		8th March 2021
First national lockdown		Lockdown starts to be eased		National lockdown of schools everywhere		Schools reopened

Figure 1 Timeline for Lockdown

International Policy Context

The United National Convention on the Human Rights of a Child (1989) defined what a child or young person was entitled to. The following articles indicate that a range of human rights might have been challenged by the Covid-19 pandemic, particularly with regard to learning. The relevant articles are:

Article 28: Right to education

Article 29: Goals of education

The right to education and the goals of education are directly relevant to learning and wellbeing during lockdown. These may have been broken as children home learning often lacked motivation leading to them being deprived of their education. For example, children that require a lot of help may not be able to receive it when they are not in the classroom environment. Educational provision also varied in quality and quantity across the UK meaning children had different experiences of education. Article 29 states that education must develop every child's personality, talents and abilities to the full. This may not have been fully met as some schools may not have put the effort into the online learning to help young people develop these three things.

National Policy and Legislation Context

They key legislative framework for this research is The Children's Act (2004) which set out key principles that all organisations supporting children and young people should follow to:

• Allow children to be healthy

• Help children to be happy and enjoy life

• Allowing children to remain safe in their environments

• Help children to succeed

• Help achieve economic stability for the future of children

• Help make a positive contribution to children's lives

One of the main areas that the act focuses on is the wellbeing of children. The main part of the Act that most people will know about is the maltreatment of a child and the need to make their findings of maltreatment known to the relevant authorities.

A key question from this context, is to what extent did learning at home uphold the principles enshrined in this 2004 legislation?

In the education sector Ofsted is an organisation who quality assure teaching in schools. In 2021 they conducted research with school teachers and leaders to understand how remote learning should be delivered. They observed that:

- Students in higher education are far better at self-regulating their learning.
- Novice learners are likely to struggle without prior knowledge of their learning.

- Children and university students from higher socio-economic backgrounds have had a greater loss of learning than higher socio-economic families (Ofsted, 2021).

This suggests our research might find different experiences to the lockdown depending on the socio-economic background of the students. It may be that schools had a greater responsibility to support these students through the lockdown.

Ofsted concluded that "The message from the evidence is not that we should not be doing remote education. It is an imperfect but necessary substitute in mitigating against learning loss where classroom teaching is not possible" (Ofsted, 2021).

Even though Ofsted suggest the curriculum, teaching and learning and assessments can carry on as normal, there is counter evidence to suggest that learning remotely is harder than expected. We feel that the Covid-19 pandemic has been unprecedented, and therefore, the students are not sure how to act or how to carry on 'as normal'.

Non-statutory Responses and Guidance

Whilst the education of children and young people is the responsibility of the Department for Education and Ofsted, many organisations believed the support offered to children was poor. As a result, charitable organisations stepped forward to provide lap tops for children. This initiative was set up by the BBC to provide less affluent members of society with technology that can help provide laptops etc. so school work can be completed. "Ten months after the first national lockdown, with schools across England once again closed due to the pandemic, it is clear that many students still don't have access to a computer, laptop or data" (Lake, 2021).

A number of other charities created resources to support young people, parents of young people and schools. These included Young Minds, Mind, the Anna Freud Centre and the YMCA.

Academic Research

A range of four academic papers were reviewed to inform this research. It was notable that none of these was specific to young people in sixth form study in the UK, suggesting this research might be a unique contribution to knowledge.

The only UK paper reviewed was written by the Institute for Fiscal Studies (2021). This study was carried out on primary and secondary pupils so not directly relevant to our sample, however, the study found that parents struggled and more affluent families had more resources to reduce the impact of lockdown learning.

Engzell, Frey and Verhagen (2021) used performance data from schools across the Netherlands to understand the impact of home learning on academic progress. The lockdown in the Netherlands was only eight weeks long by was found to create a learning loss equivalent to one fifth of a year.

Another study from Norway found a different response to learning in lockdown. This study found; "There was more creative learning, better progress, more useful feedback and greater student independence. School leaders reported that they wanted to implement

changes based on the experience of remote learning enforced by the lockdown" (Bubb and Jones, 2021:209).

The final paper reviewed was written about home learning in China and studies the view of 6 – 16 year olds, parents and teachers. This found an increase in emotional and behavioural issues at home (Zhao et al., 2021) which suggest increased stress in children at home as a result of home schooling.

The most relevant study identified was conducted by the Behavioural Insights Team with the Sixth Form Colleges Association (2021). Thy documented that the reduction of student services in 75% of sixth form colleges prior to the pandemic was poor preparation for what was to follow. They also highlight that adolescents are more prone that any other age to mental health issues. These two factors created a great deal of stress for sixth form students in particular during the lockdowns and home learning situations. They recommend sixth form students have access to therapists / counsellors, mindfulness, physical activity and free use of mental health apps on return to college.

The findings of these studies are not entirely generalizable to our study of A-level students as the age of the students in this study and their level of study may mean they experience something different to primary and GCSE students. These papers are also of limited relevance given that they are from other countries and other governments and educational systems may have decided to deal differently with learning through the pandemic than England.

Research Project Overview

This project was funded by the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR), North East and North Cumbria Applied Research Collaboration (NENC ARC). Staff from the University of Cumbria and Northumbria University supported this group of young researchers to plan, conduct, analyse, write up and disseminate their own research project. They were entirely youth-led.

The project commenced in December 2020 when we heard about the opportunity to do our own research. When we started work in January 2021 we were in a lockdown and had to take part virtually via MSTeams. We were able to meet in person from the 18th March 2021 until the 2nd July 2021 when the project came to an end.

Methodology

Research Aims and Objectives

Our research aim was to help produce guidance for teachers, families and young people to support mental health in any future pandemic or lockdown.

The objective of our research is to use questionnaires to gain both quantitative and qualitative data to help us gain knowledge and understanding of young people's mental health during lockdown.

Research Questions

Our research questions include:

- What impact do the factors of stress, motivation, workload--and any other issues important to students--have on how sixth form students at William Howard School learn in lockdown?
- How were routines and workload managed?
- What did young people do to support their own mental health and how successful were those strategies?

Research Method

The learning in lockdown research used a mixed method approach, mixing qualitative and quantitative data from surveys. Mixed methods are helpful in providing sense of the range, scale and nature of issues experienced whilst learning online.

Initially we had planned to use follow up interviews to add more depth to the research, but this proved too time consuming and too difficult in terms of managing anonymity for participants as we were students in the same school.

Data Collection Tools

We used an online mixed method survey to get as many responses as possible. We decided to use an online survey in Microsoft Forms as it was a quick and easy tool to use. Online surveys were also the only really viable way for us to collect data given we were conducting the research during a pandemic.

A copy of the research questions is available in Appendix 1.

Participants, Sampling and Recruitment

We aimed to recruit 16 to 18 year olds doing A-levels at William Howard School with experience of three lockdowns and home learning. Aside from these criteria the participants could have any

ethnicity, any gender, any sexuality, any religion, any socio-economic status. Approximately 800 young people could fill in the survey but we hoped for around 30 responses. Our low expectations were due to the pressure there is on students at the moment. Our research used a convenience sample with as many students who want to take part enabled to do so. The invitation to participate in the research was sent out via email to all students in the sixth form by the head of year. This gave the survey status as a staff endorsed activity.

Ethical Considerations

There were a wide range of ethical issues to consider.

Informed consent – we provided all necessary information about the project in the introduction to the survey and embedded consent questions into the survey design.

Anonymity – the survey was entirely anonymous and we made sure young people understood we would not know who they were and so could not reveal who they were.

Withdrawal – we set up an email address specifically for this research project so young people could get in touch to withdraw their data from the research, or to ask further questions. No one used this option.

Protection from harm – the online survey method ensured there were no physical risks to participating in the survey (e.g. from COVID-19 infection). The survey questions were reviewed to ensure they were sensitive, and debriefing information was provided at the end of the survey so young people knew where to go if they did need additional support.

Safeguarding – we were aware that we would need to signpost any safeguarding issues to the head of year, but none arose in the research.

Data was saved in a password protected file on an encrypted computer ensuring data security.

Data Analysis

We used a mixed methods approach for the data analysis, using descriptive statistics for the quantitative data and thematic analysis for the qualitative data.

Findings

A total of 77 sixth form students responded to the survey.

Q1: Motivation during the March 2021 Lockdown

This multiple choice question asked respondents to select from five option in a Likert scale. The responses are shown in the pie chart below.
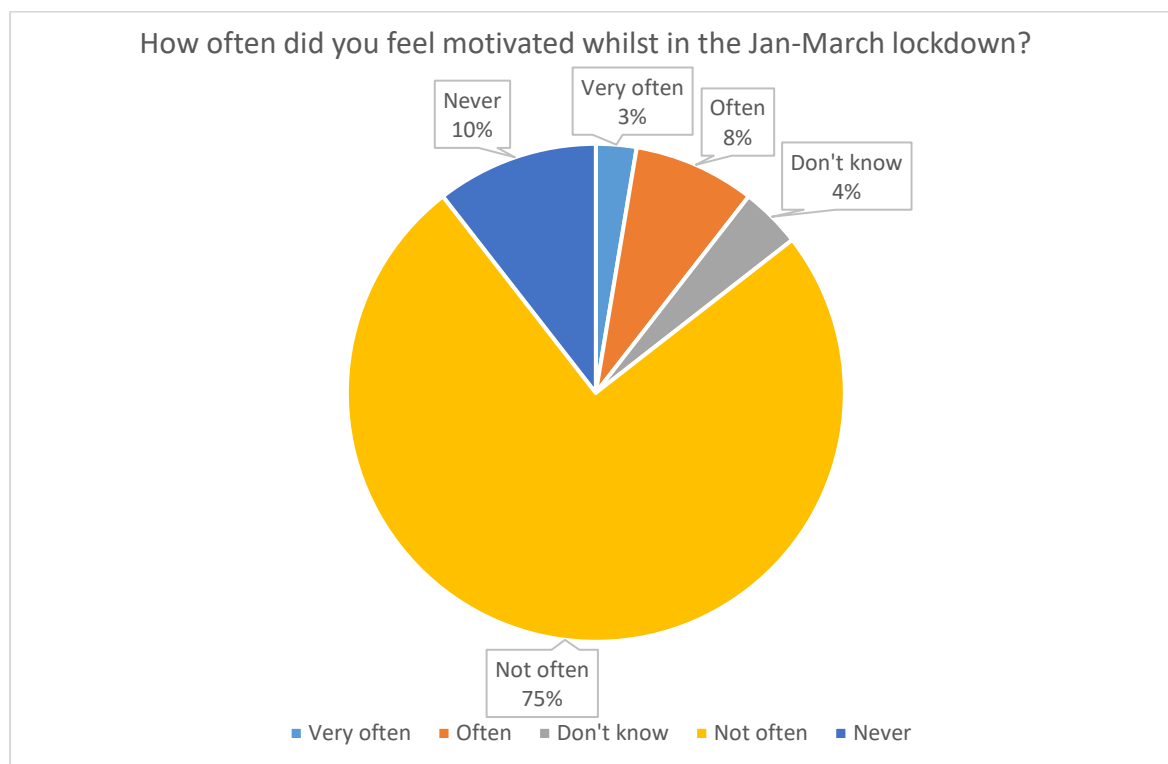

Figure 2 Levels of Motivation

10% of respondents (n=8) said they never felt motivated and a further 75% of respondents (n=57) who said they felt motivated 'not very often'. This suggests that very few people were motivated. In total 8% (n=6) felt motivated often and 3% (n=2) felt motivated very often indicating low numbers of sixth form students feeling motivated. When in school a range of factors maintain motivation. These range from in class motivators such as stimulating learning with friends, through to rewards such as charity and non-uniform days. These were all lost in the lockdown.

The results above potentially prove that these low levels of motivation could be due to the lack of an effective working environment and distractions at home like we suggested. Or, on the other hand, perhaps other factors that are accounting for this lack of motivation that aren't to do with education; like personal health, sleep levels, peer pressure to maintain socials during the lockdown, pressure to get fit and many, many more possible variables.

If the circumstances are to ever occur again (another pandemic or the need to work from home) then perhaps this survey may help to provide a way to increase or maintain our motivation levels in the future. For example, ongoing or extra support that is optional…NOT forced or scheduled in advance (as our data in following questions shows that these situations can be making motivation

worse), optional routine (either very scheduled or fitting to our day), motivators from the school itself (prom and leavers at the end of year 11/13), rewards/ incentive to work towards like charities morning and non-uniform days, more check in from the school to help and guide the link between work and mental health…not JUST "how stressed we are", help in the long-term instead of short term relief from stress factors…as they won't help our education struggles in the long run. And many more.

Q2: Learning Routines

This multiple choice question offered three answer options – yes, no and sometimes. A total of 76 sixth formers answers the question as illustrated in the pie chart below.
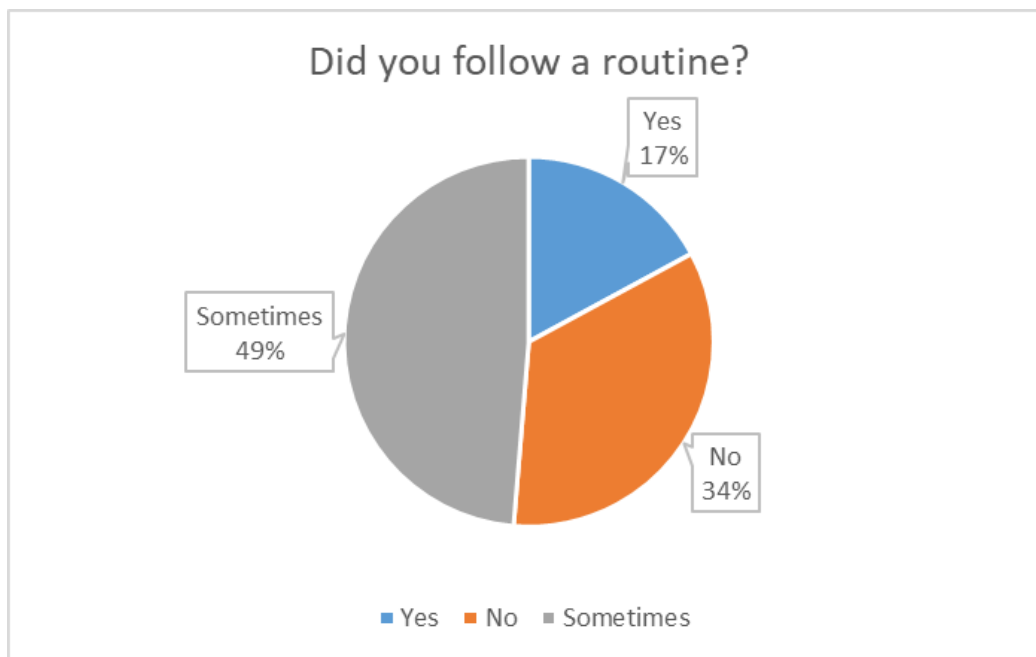
Figure 3 Routines Followed

The majority of sixth form students (49%, n=37) sometimes followed a routine, but 34% (n=26) did not follow any routine at all and only 17% (n=13) did have a learning routine.

These results show that routines mostly didn't work, and again no work environment/scheduled day so easily distracted. People lost structure in their life with everyday being the exact same with no variation. Therefore, from the pandemic and previous standards it has been generally accepted that having a routine is positive for our learning and without it, there are a multitude of variables that suffer from a knock on effect; motivation, stress levels, health, sleep levels and so on.

The idea/thought of "learning at home" hasn't been the only factor that has affected our education, distractions like technology, siblings at home, pets, parents, Wi-Fi connection for work, food, TV, social media, lack of discipline and so many more have had a negative or positive effect.

We would recommend that if this situation arises again, schools do more to promote routine based learning and provide additional support for students who struggle to maintain them.

Q3 Learning Routines Reported

The respondents who indicated they did have a learning routine provided details of their learning routines in an open ended response box.
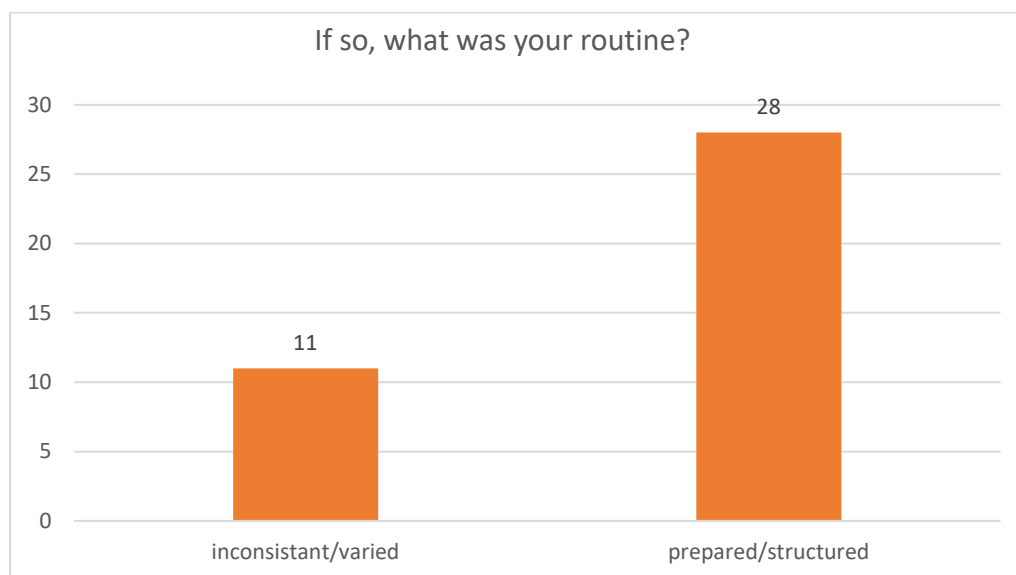

Figure 4 Types of Routines

The thematic analysis of this qualitative data showed that the majority of learning routes (n=28) were well prepared and structured, whilst a smaller number of sixth form students (n=11) reported inconsistent or varied learning routines.

Examples of positive routines are:

"Wake up, morning workout, tidy room a bit and sort out bedding, take a shower and have a cup of coffee or tea"

"7am Wake up, Shower, breakfast etc., done by 7.30. School work start 8.45am finish school work 2.45pm. Gym until 3.30pm. work on projects etc., until 5pm - rest of afternoon to relax"

The difficulties of sustaining these routines are illustrated in the following quotes:

"Get up around 8, have a quick shower, get dressed and eat breakfast sometimes eat breakfast during online lesson if I was running late, do all my lessons, have a break for a couple hours use this as free time to do whatever and then finish off any work left to do that evening. I tried to stick to this and I did at first but it got harder and harder to do so as time went on"

"I tried to keep a routine of getting up and eating breakfast before my lessons. But I'd often wake up late due to trying to finish work and then miss lessons or not be active during the lessons."

For many people the change to online learning disrupted their usually positive routes:

"Usually I would wake up about 10 minutes before a lesson and rush to get breakfast. Usually I am an organised person who would leave an hour to get ready at least, however I was really unmotivated especially in the mornings. I would do my online lessons and have

lunch, then continue with the lessons until they finished. Afterwards I would go for a walk to stretch and get fresh air- I did this nearly every day as I hated the feeling of being stuck in my room. I would then have dinner and chill for the rest of the night."

And for some it was just too much:

"I usually cried every day"

"Rubbish and inconsistent".

To improve inconsistent and varied routines in future pandemics schools could send out daily plans to students which would help them adhere to a prepared routine. This could help increase motivation of these young people, in turn allowing for reduced workload and stress. A planned routine would also benefit teachers as it would ensure most, if not all, work was completed.

For any future such lockdowns, students could prepare themselves for when they transition to online learning by creating routines and timetables to help structure their day in a more efficient way.

Q4 Feelings of Stress

The survey asked respondents how stressed they felt as a result of home schooling. They were given four options on a Likert scale ranging from never to very often.
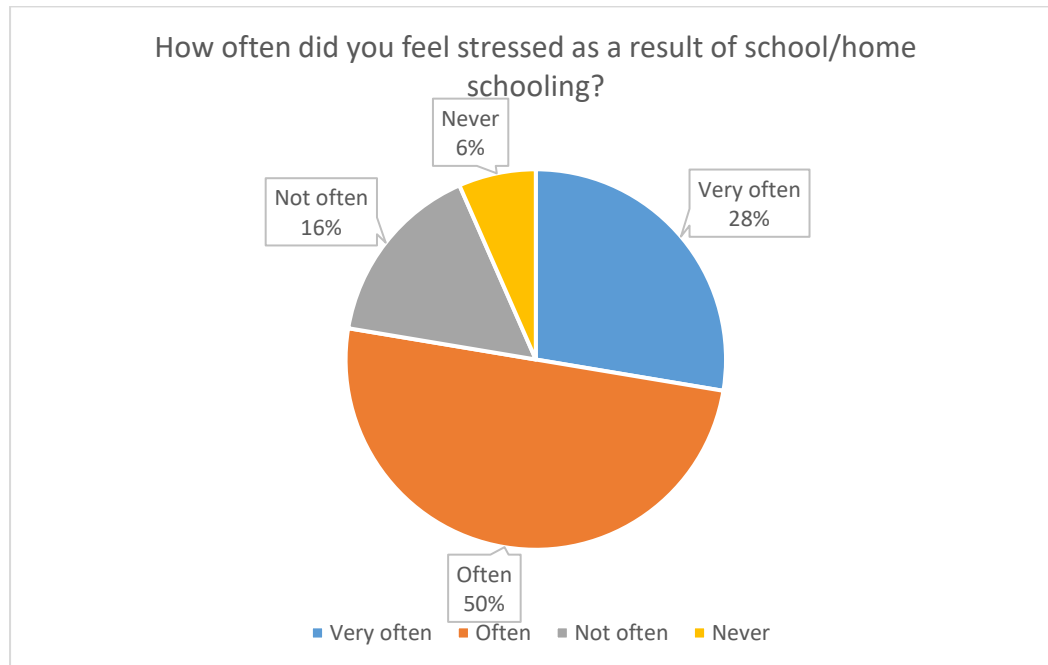

Figure 5 Feelings of Stress

50% felt stressed due to home schooling. This could be put down to a multitude of factors but previous responses suggest the unstructured day, lack of teacher support and having little time to de-stress (due to being in a lockdown) play an important role.

Lack of teacher support can create stress when completing work, as you don't understand. Also unstructured days with many distractions and a lack of routines can generate stress as work piles up.

Schools could provide sessions and talks for students who feel stressed. Schools should also be encouraged to prepare for any future lockdown so they can provide support good enough to help students while remote learning.

Q5: Wider Reasons for Stress

The survey respondents were asked a question relating to the previous question about feeling stressed as a result of home-schooling. They were given four options on a Likert scale including yes, no, both or maybe.
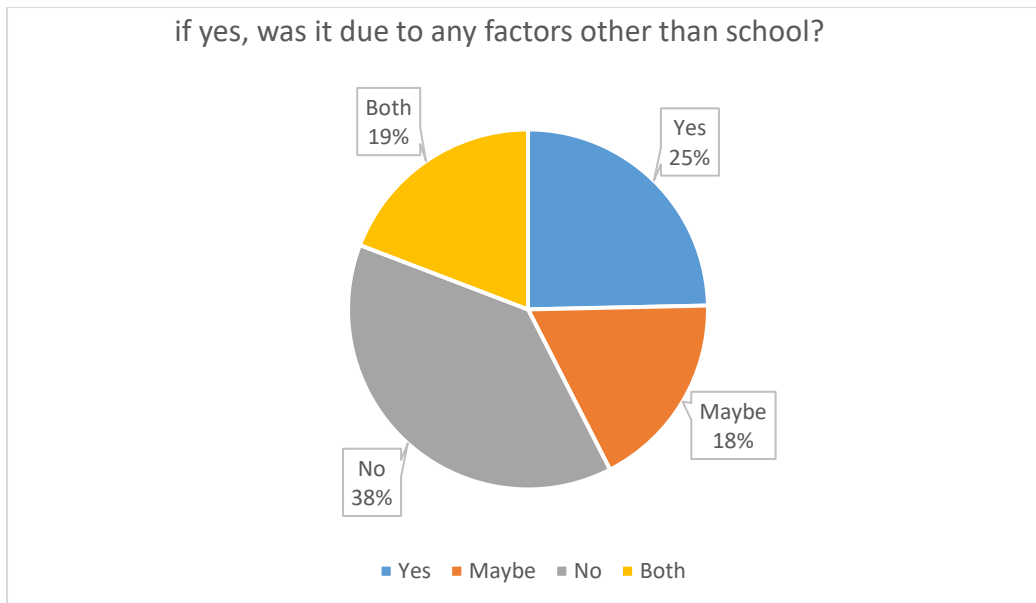

Figure 6 Reasons for Stress

38% said yes, which again shows there were many reasons for feelings of stress during the lockdown period but school could've been an added pressure to this as there is a lack of support and added pressure.

External factors like mental wellbeing and home life, such as being a teenage carer or looking after younger siblings takes away from time dedicated to school which can lead to incomplete work and a backlog of work.

Schools could arrange meetings for students to speak about how they feel regarding stress and mental wellbeing. As some students prefer to keep their feelings to themselves, there should be an easy way for them to open up. For example, students could be given the chance to sign up to anonymous questionnaires ran by the school to help them feel more comfortable about opening up.

Q6 Workload

The respondents were asked by the survey how far they agree with a statement given; "the workload was manageable" by responding on a Likert scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree.
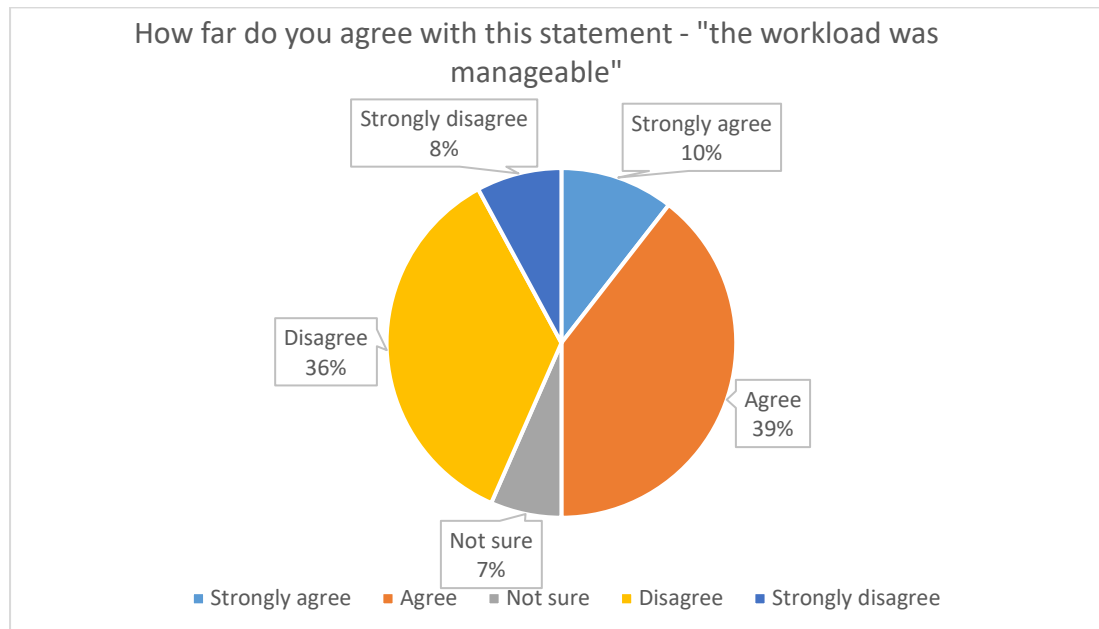

Figure 7 Manageability of Workload

The results to this question were mixed with 36% disagreeing and 39% agreeing. This could be due to either too much work to catch up on or the opposite; too few resources being given.

Some lessons only a single worksheet was given whereas in other it was double the expected in a lesson. This variability in experience might account for the wide range of responses gained here.

Lessons should be kept the same or as close to the same as normal classroom lessons, with the same amount of work given to complete, as many people felt that extra work was being set as they were at home. If this is not possible, students should be able to have weekly check-in meetings with staff members to discuss the workload and mutually agree on how to work through the problem.

Q7 Sense of Dread at Workload

The survey respondents were asked a question with 3 options of response, regarding the workload of the day and if they "dreaded it".
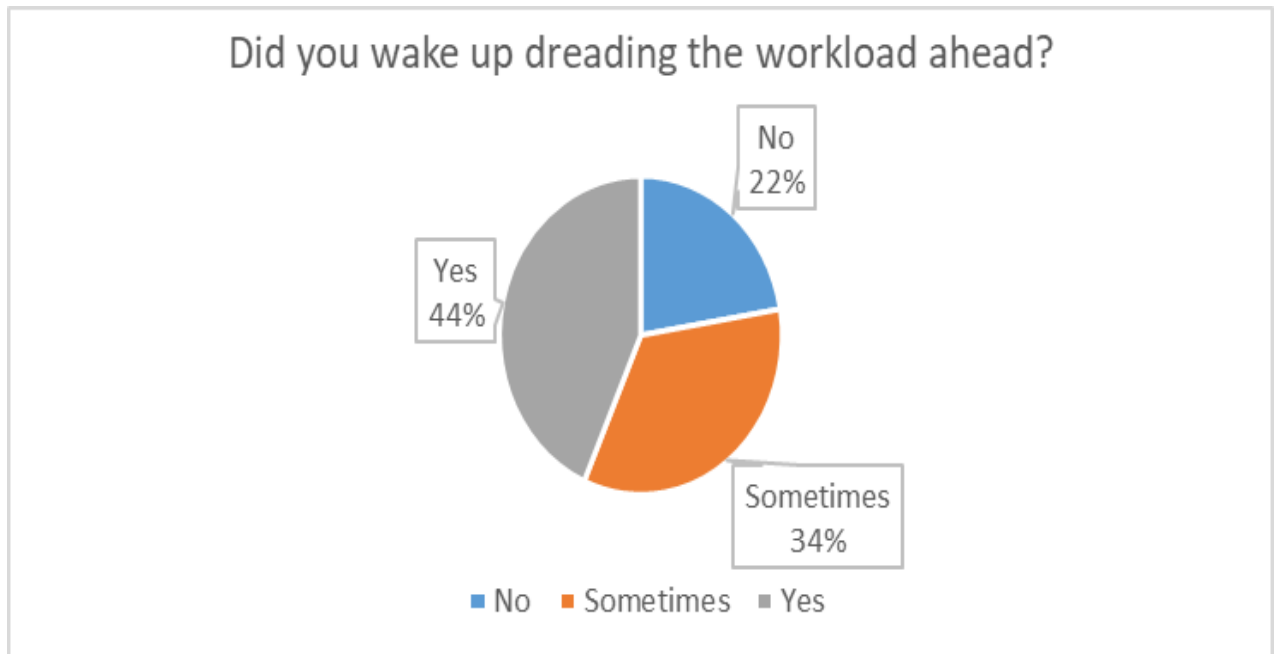
Figure 8 Feelings of Dread at Workload

A total of 44% of people responded that they did dread the workload ahead of them. This suggests that workload during lockdown was too much and there was pressure to have everything completed/correct, another possible factor is that there was too little support. This lack of support may have increased students stress as they did not understand what was required of them.

Uncertainty about exams may also have increased stress. This suggests that giving students extra revision classes over lockdown on MSTeams would have been beneficial, enabling students to feel more secure in what they were learning and in what exams would entail.

If home learning happens again in future lockdowns we recommend that schools provide clear guidance to staff and students on expected workload, that teachers check in with how students are experiencing their workload, and that exam preparation is factored into this workload.

Q8 Reasons for Dread at Workload

Respondents were asked an open-ended qualitative question regarding responses to the previous question. We collected all the data and produced the coding units as followed; too much work, no motivation, teacher- student relationship issues and no concentration. These were frequency counted as follows below.
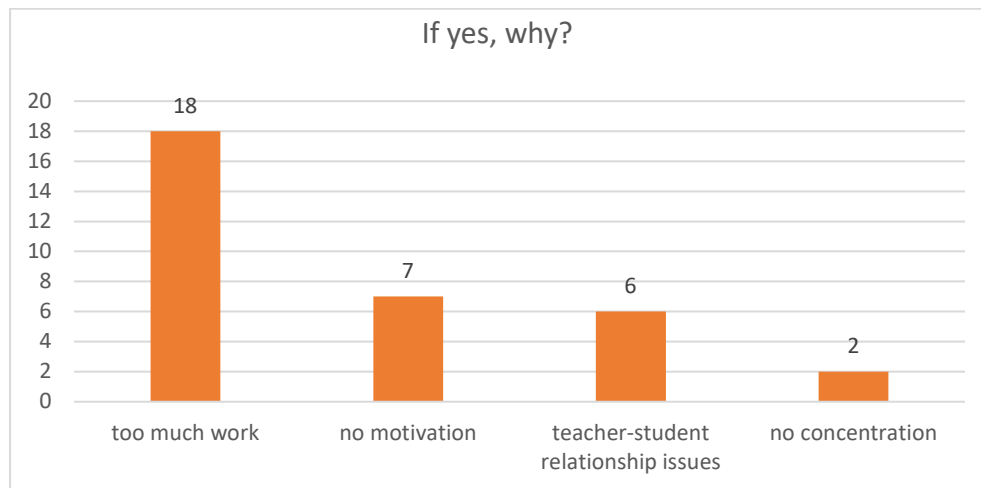

Figure 9 Reasons for Feeling Dread

The level of work from teachers was inconsistent and many students found they had too much work. This was sometimes due to the teachers not fully understanding the time it would take to complete a task, and one lesson's worth of activities took students many more hours to complete. Sometimes double the usual work was set as teachers wanted to 'catch up' on missed lessons. The negative impact of this is illustrated in the quote below:

"Because I was being assigned way too many essays and pieces of work per week. This led to me hurrying to catch up and burning out!"

"Because there was a lot of it to do, I knew that I could be asked questions on the work during the lessons and sometimes I hadn't finished it because of all the other work and I got quite stressed"

Some students found the nature of the work monotonous and this undermined their motivation:

"It was repetitive and there never felt like an end to it was just one task after another and with no motivation to do the task it felt like a giant mountain to climb every day to avoid being sent an email by a teacher about not completing work.".

Students also reported that they lacked motivation and concentration which led to them doing work more slowly than required and feeling overwhelmed.

"I find it extremely difficult to concentrate at home, at the time I didn't have a desk or anything so I either worked outside or on my bed which didn't help my concentration. Because of this, what may have been a manageable but still stress-inducing workload whilst

at school became much more work as a 1 hour task could now take me upwards of 4 hours. I was always behind and fighting to catch up and get recent work done too."

"I was very unmotivated during the lockdown so even if I had a tiny piece of homework it would feel huge. I am usually really good with homework and do it the day I get it, however I procrastinated doing homework until late the night before it was due, or right before the lesson in the morning. Even though the workload wasn't huge, it was definitely my mindset that made it a much bigger thing."

Six students also reported that teacher-student relationship issues meant they dreaded work:

"Sometimes if you missed a lesson it could be difficult to email teachers as some were unsupportive about missing lessons."

For many the workload and dread at doing the work at home led to issues with their mental wellbeing:

"Too much work was given during lockdown teams made me depressed ".

Teachers could be told or informed by the student about how the student's situation at home affects learning, they could also implement a weekly timetable of hours expected and work set to make handling catch-up and a backlog of work easier.

Q9 Ability to Ask for Help

The survey asked respondents how they felt when it came to asking for help if the workload was unmanageable and if they felt they could. Responses entailed three options including simply; yes, no and maybe.
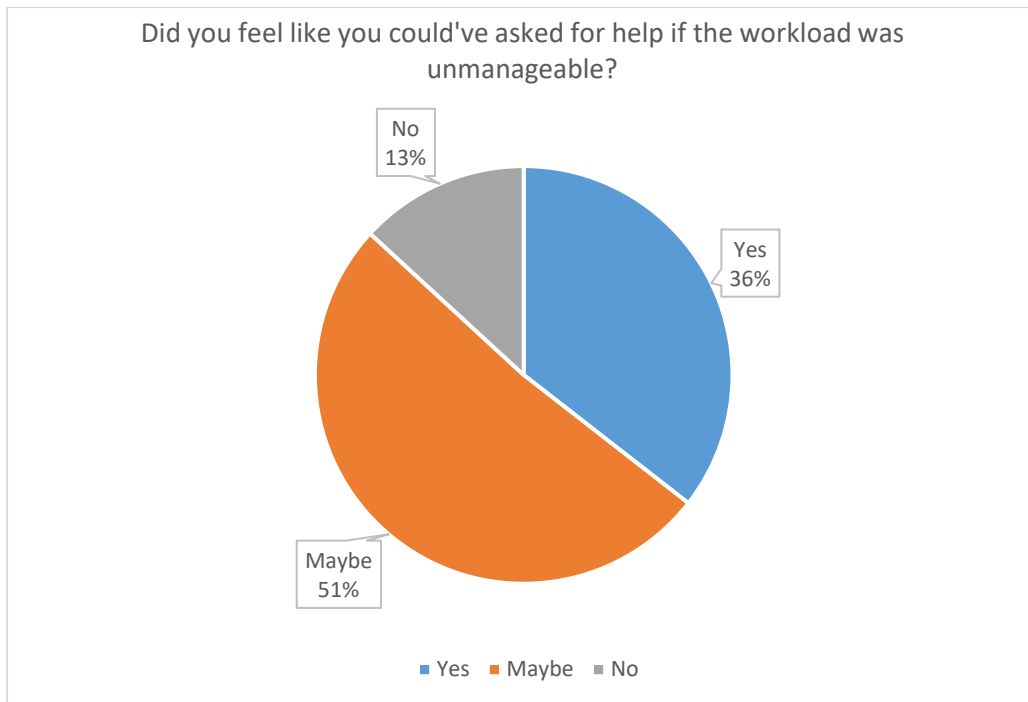

Figure 10 Ability to Ask for Help

Only 36% of people thought they could ask for help, indicating many young people did not ask for the support they may have needed or felt like they couldn't even if they needed to. However, 51% said they would "maybe" ask for help if the workload was manageable, but that's still not a definite yes.

Help should be widely available and shouldn't be a daunting task, to combat this teacher could be more lenient in the way they handle requests for extra time on essays and projects and make an inclusive environment where there is lots of question and answering in lessons to reduce the anxiety that asking for help in online lessons creates.

Q10 How easy it was to ask for help

This question relates to Q9, about how respondents felt about asking for help, the following asks about specifically how easy it was with three choices of response; yes, no and maybe.
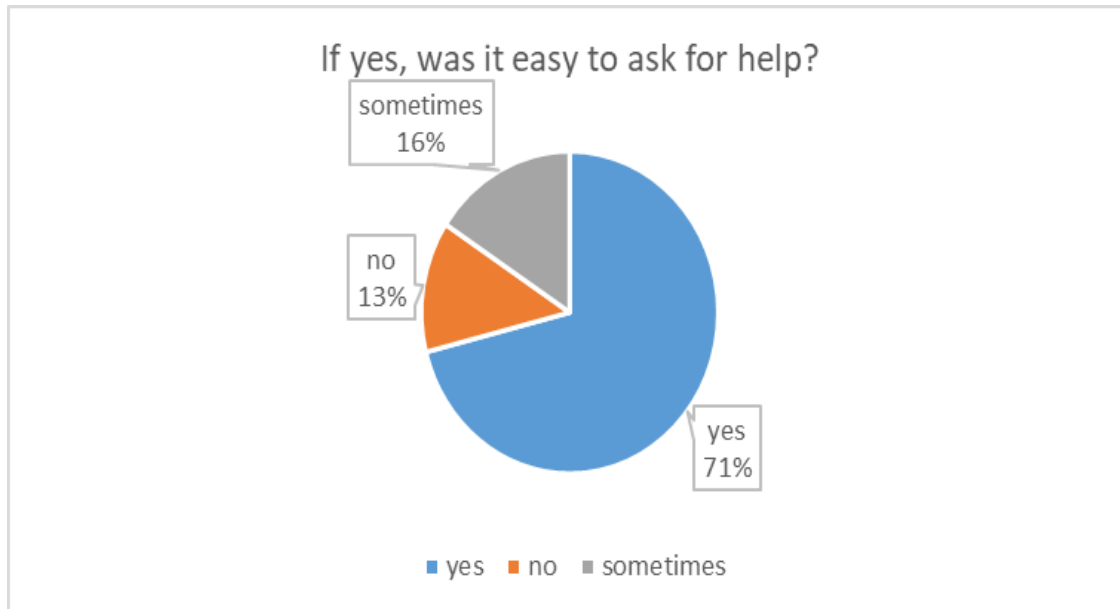
Figure 11 Ease of Asking for Help

71% felt it is easy to ask for help which is a positive aspect of the support needed for students in school, however, this highlights the 29% that either felt it wasn't easy to ask for help or didn't provide a strong yes, as 100% of the respondents should be feeling positive and confident about asking for help.

Schools could explore a variety of ways for students to ask for help, on different media platforms, and through different networks of support (e.g. teachers, specialist staff, peer mentors).

Q11 Helpful Teacher Responses

This question again related to the topic of teacher-student guidance, specifically asking an open ended question as to whether responses were helpful. The answers were coded into four units including; yes, no, some of the time and most of the time.
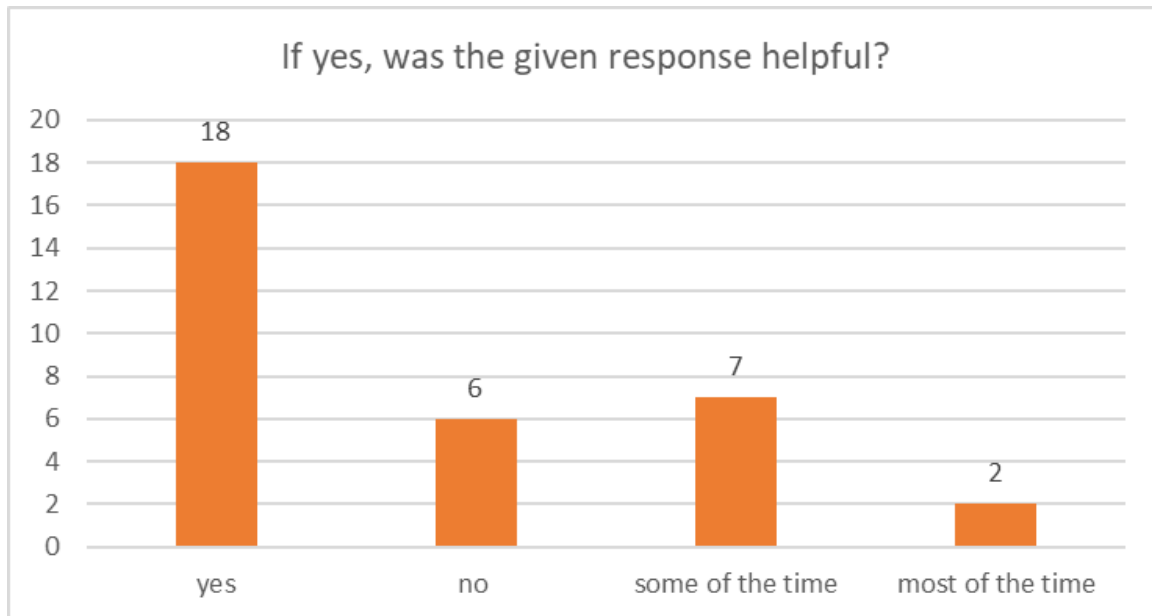

Figure 12 Helpfulness of Teacher Responses

The majority of the respondents received helpful feedback from teachers, however, 15 respondents didn't give a strong yes.

"Sometimes teachers would do extra one to one or one to a couple of students online, but other times it would be an email which didn't really help explain much"

This leaves the students with uncertainty as they feel asking for help won't be beneficial therefore reluctant to ask in future. The responses from teachers must be consistent throughout the school and all students should receive consistent and useful help when asking.

"My experience with [staff] in the past has been somewhat negative as it often didn't feel like they were on my side even when opening up about my mental health struggles early on"

"Sometimes teachers would do extra one to one or one to a couple of students online, but other times it would be an email which didn't really help explain much"

"My experience with [staff] in the past has been somewhat negative as it often didn't feel like they were on my side even when opening up about my mental health struggles early on"

"Sometimes, a lot of the time my problems couldn't be solved but teachers would try to be understanding"

"I did email several times for clarification with respect to exams, but teachers themselves didn't seem to know what was going on as higher up the school they were not being told anything either, so they could not really help"

If circumstances were to repeat themselves, support from teachers should remain consistent but also an optional aspect of a student's learning, so that students can feel independent with an optional support network.

Q12 Preparedness for Exams

The survey respondents were asked how prepared they felt in regards to school exams having spent 3 months in lockdown, selecting from six options in a Likert scale; very unprepared, somewhat unprepared, not sure, somewhat prepared, very prepared and neither. Results are shown in the pie chart below.
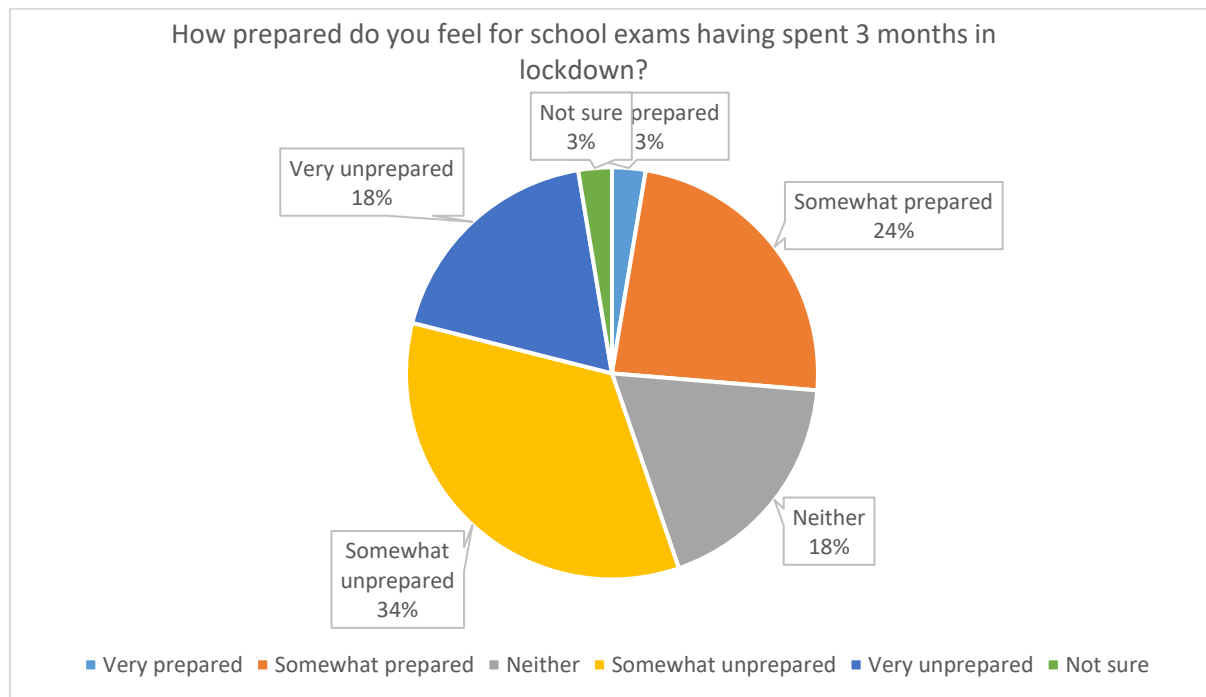

How prepared do you feel for school exams having spent 3 months in lockdown?

- Not sure 3%
- prepared 3%
- Very unprepared 18%
- Somewhat prepared 24%
- Neither 18%
- Somewhat unprepared 34%

■ Very prepared ■ Somewhat prepared ■ Neither ■ Somewhat unprepared ■ Very unprepared ■ Not sure

Figure 13 Preparedness for Exams

18% of young people felt very unprepared for school exams. Due to a lack of motivation and possible lack of support with revision.

The responses above make it clear that participants feel an effect of the lockdown on their education whether positive or negative, particularly their performance in the upcoming exams, perhaps they would feel slightly more prepared if the lockdown hadn't taken place? Overall very few people feel prepared for their exams after lockdown, a situation that may be irrecoverable for upper sixth form students, but for which lower sixth form students still have time to prepare.

Students should receive more recognition for the hard and unconventional work they put in, and more support could be given to year 12's with revision as they missed out on exam experience, lessons on revision techniques and scheduled slots for revision lessons with teachers.

Q13 Reasons for Unpreparedness

An open ended question was used to understand why students felt this sense of unpreparedness. A total of 43 students responded to this question. The answers were coded into five different categories as shown in the chart below.
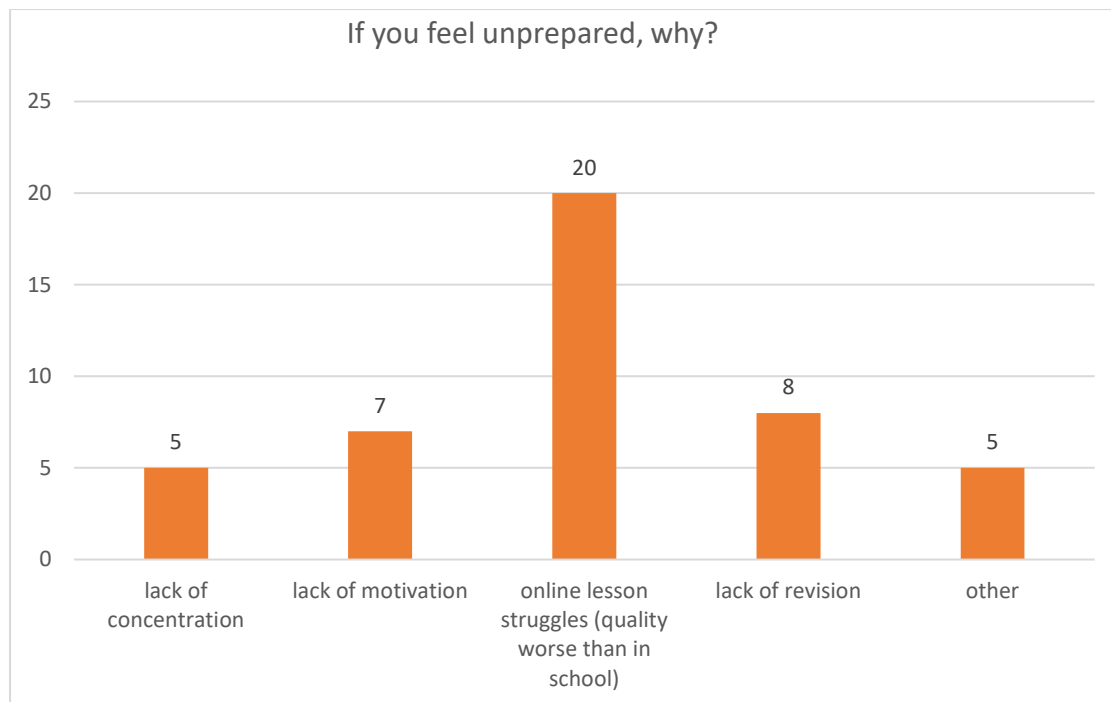

Figure 14 Reasons for Unpreparedness

The majority of people felt unprepared due to struggles with online lessons:

"I don't think I learnt as much as home as I would have done at school as motivation was low"

"I didn't take in a lot of the online lessons the same as I would've if I was in class"

"The teaching provided to us over the lockdown did not match what we have received in school since, as the learning is far less active than in a classroom. We were often provided with a worksheet and told to complete it without assistance nor much explanation, which is far less than what would be expected/considered 'adequate' to happen consistently in school".

The next most frequent reason was a lack of revision:

"Because I couldn't work well at home on my own and missed out on a lot of content"

"Not gone over things as much, less revision time as missed things on online school"

"A lack of revision, I didn't feel very motivated to do it outside of immediate work. Thankfully, our assessments are a bit easier to manage. I don't know what I would do if we had actual physical exams by June."

I don't remember most of the things that I learned in lockdown, if these were full exams I would definitely been doing much worse as I can't remember whole topic's.

"This could have been solved by more frequent revision lessons to catch people up. Students may have found interactions with teachers helpful rather than passively learning by note taking and worksheets. The switch to this style of learning may account for the lack of motivation and concentration students reported here".

Whilst there might be little opportunity to support year 13 students, schools could discuss exam preparation with year 12 students and plan steps to recoup lost ground together in the coming year.

Q14 Effort Applied to Learning

This question used a five point Likert scale to understand effort put into work.
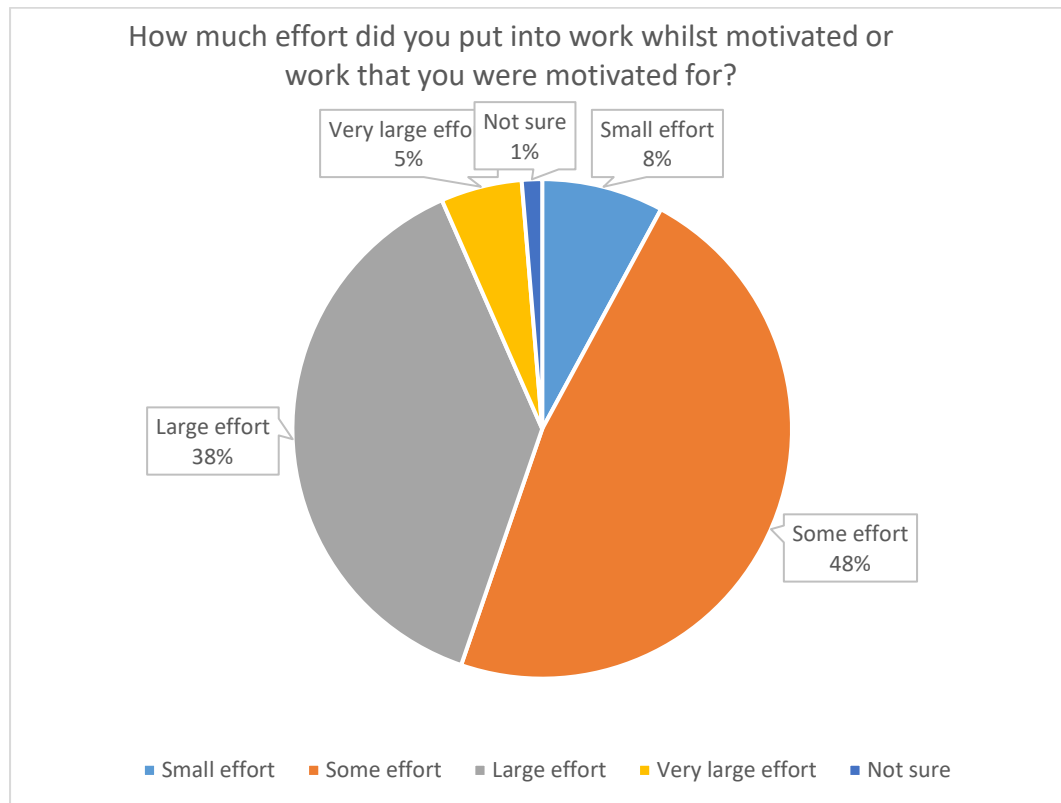

How much effort did you put into work whilst motivated or work that you were motivated for?

- Very large effort 5%
- Not sure 1%
- Small effort 8%
- Large effort 38%
- Some effort 48%

Legend: ■ Small effort ■ Some effort ■ Large effort ■ Very large effort ■ Not sure

Figure 15 Effort Applied to Work

5% of students tried very hard and 38% of students put a large effort into their work indicating students were keen to try to learn. Despite this, the majority of students, 48% only put 'some effort' into work they were motivated for and 8% put in a small effort. This shows a range of responses to home learning. Some young people put in effort, others did not, and it is not clear is this would correlate to the effort they put into work in school. It is possible, however, that young people did not put in effort due to the lack of concentration and motivation already reported. External factors like stress, distractions and workload may also have decreased the effort students could apply.

Schools could help keep levels of motivation high and make sure they don't fall. For example, students that feel like they have lack of gratification for work competition should receive more gratification.

Q15 Reasons for Putting Effort into Work

An open ended question was used to understand why students felt this sense of unpreparedness. Only nine students responded to this question. The answers were coded into six different categories as shown in the chart below.
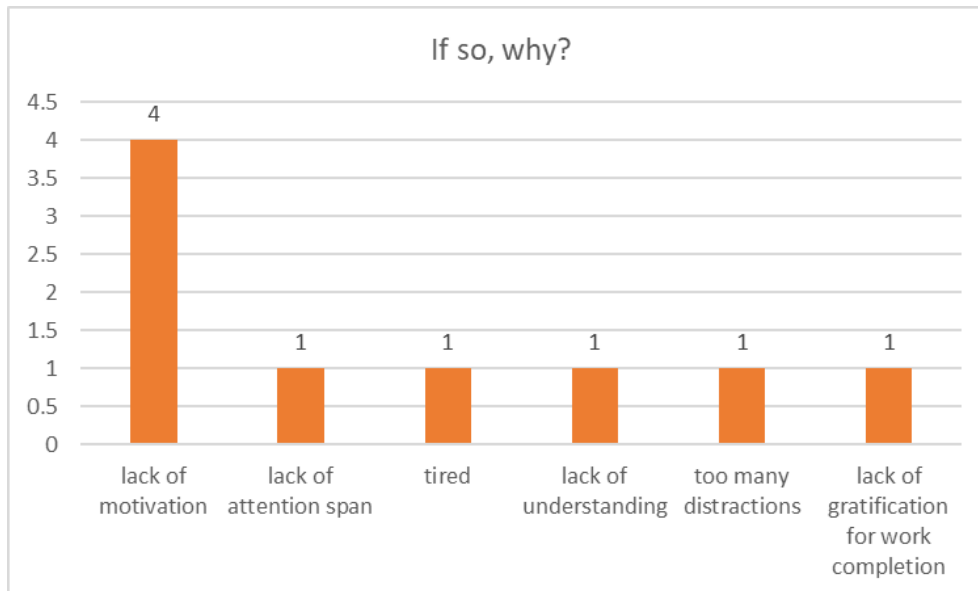

Figure 16 Reasons for Putting Effort into Work

Out of all the responses the most common theme and reason for not putting effort into work was lack of motivation:

"To clarify I was rarely motivated. I was aware of the significance that the work might have towards my final grades at the end of year 13, however, pre-existing mental health conditions that were exacerbated by lockdown made productivity even hard, and I was an only child with two key worker parents".

This led to people not being able to use their 'full potential' so they wouldn't put full effort into their work:

"I was really unmotivated and rather than using my full potential while doing homework I would just want to get it over with, therefore I would do it as fast as I could to tick it off the list".

There were other reasons among the responses like being tired and having too many distractions. This may well be due to the fact that people worked in their bedrooms which is meant for relaxation rather than work as one student pointed out:

"I have no attention span, I cannot focus on work in an area that is meant for relaxation such as my bedroom"

"I often felt tired and unorganised"

"There are too many distractions at home"

Schools should provide recommendations for students to help increase effort put into work. These should be recommendations to increase things like motivation, lack of attention span and lack of gratification for work completion.

Q16 Stress Alleviation Activities

Respondents of the survey were asked in a closed question whether they did activities at home to help with stress. They were given a range of options including 'no', 'yes', 'sometimes' and 'not sure'.
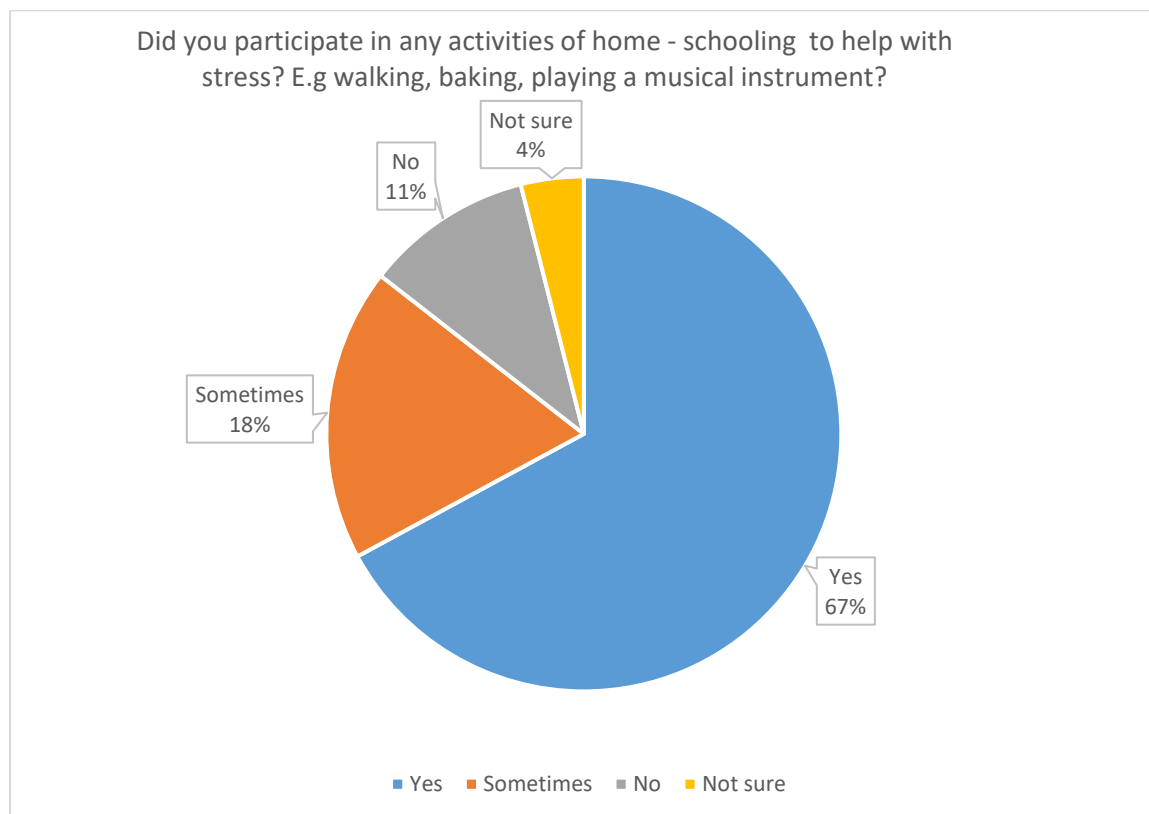
Figure 17 Use of De-stress Activities

67% took part in an activity/activities to help to de-stress, suggesting participants were of the ability/maturity to help themselves in a perhaps stressful time which is positive. But maybe more time was needed to partake in these activities, instead of hours and hours doing schoolwork?

Schools could set up clubs that appeal to young people's interests that help relieve stress. Also schools could recommend students activities to partake in like running and yoga.

Q17 What did they Involve

Survey respondents were asked an open question as to what activities they used to de-stress. These were coded into different categories as shown in the chart below.
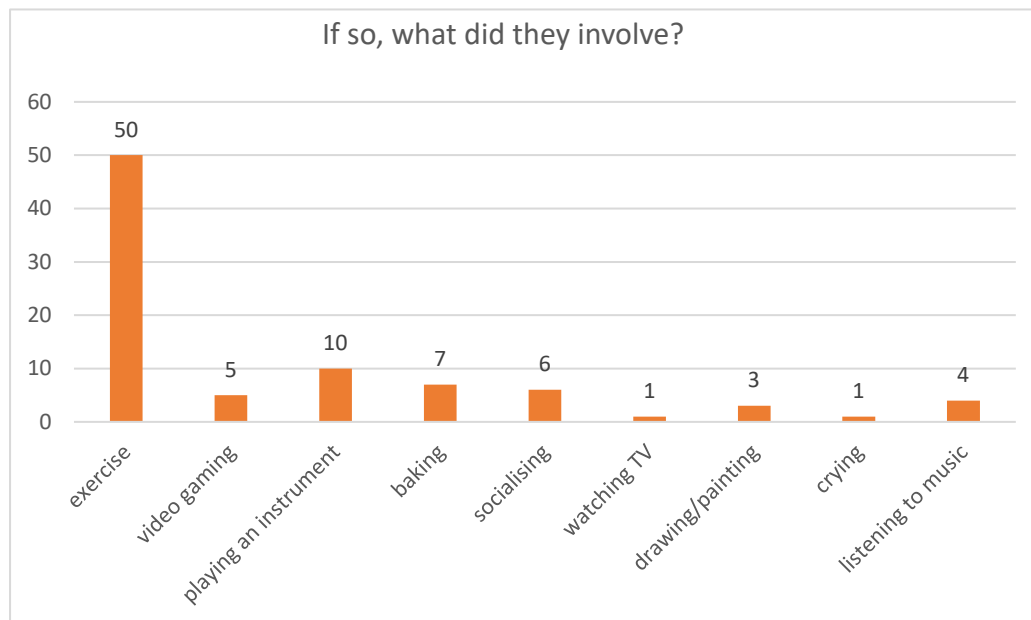

Figure 18 Types of De-stress Activities

The answers to this question illustrate the importance of exercise during lockdown. This was the most frequent answer indicated by 50 people:

"Walked everywhere. Ran out of walks, got repetitive"

A range of eight other activities were used to de-stress with relatively low frequencies each. These included playing instruments, gaming, baking, socialising, watching TV, drawing and listening to music:

"I picked up learning guitar in the first lockdown, in March 2020, and have continued the hobby frequently since. I also went out for walks with my dog, and also played video games as they provided a world to escape from the stress of the different learning/life environment into"

"playing an instrument, walking the dog, watching netflix/disney+"

"I started playing the tin whistle, walking, planning a hike I will be doing with my mum, planned for university (watched lots of videos, also helped motivate me when I was low), read when I had time, exercise (tried all sorts including running and pilates), focused on eating healthy and trying to add veg to my meals (but sometimes binge ate when I was bored or sad)"

"Mostly talking online with my friends and walking far with my dog"

One person stated that they de-stressed by crying, showing the importance of emotional release.

We recommend that a wide range of de-stressing activities are built into young people's regular lives so that they are well equipped to cope in any future pandemics or lockdowns. School could promote the importance of trying different techniques and finding the ones that work best for you.

Q18 Usefulness of De-Stressing Activities

Respondents were asked to indicate on a Likert scale how helpful these activities were in supporting them to de-stress.
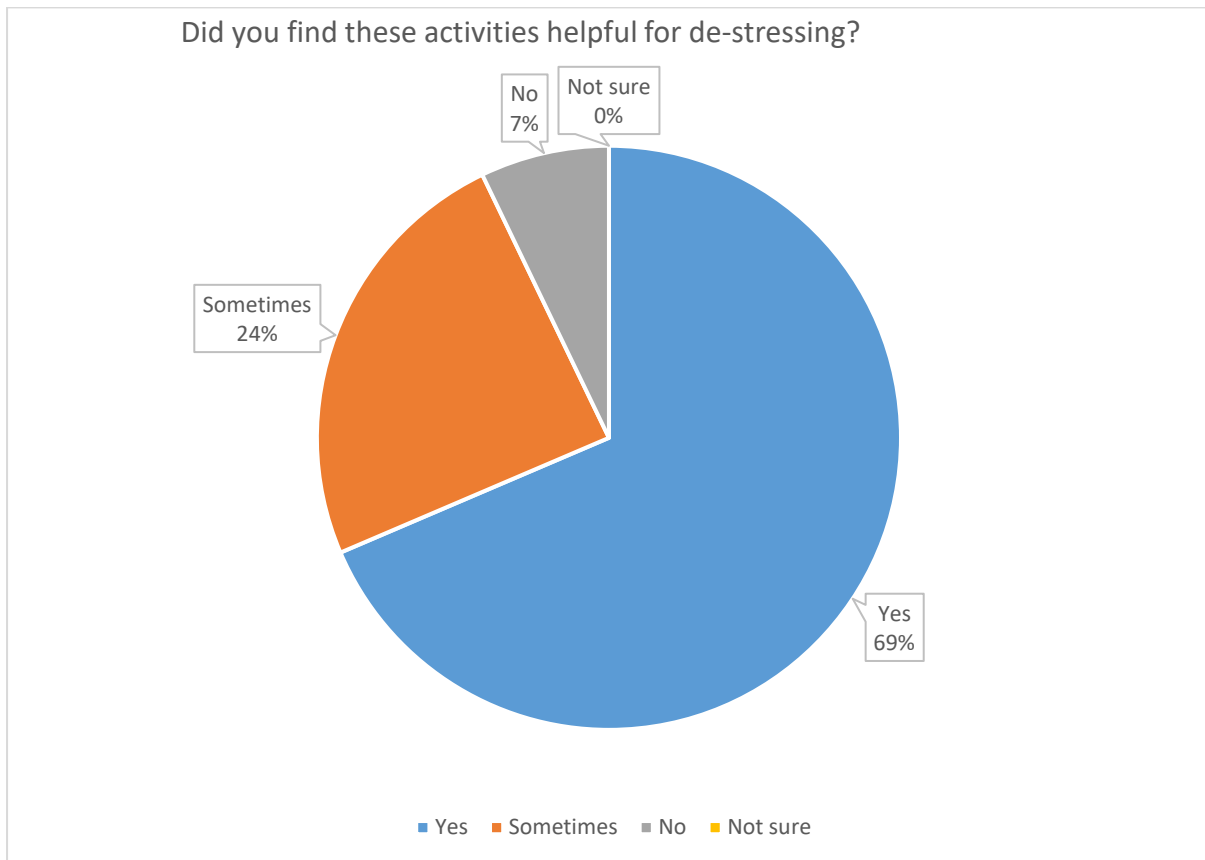

Figure 19 Helpfulness of De-stress Activities

69% found the above activities helpful when dealing with stress, which may suggest that to learn efficiently and effectively, students need to be taught with an incorporation of activities that make the workload more manageable.

This further reinforces the importance of young people having a range of tools to help them de-stress.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The Covid-19 pandemic created unprecedented challenges across society. Schools were not exempt and the decision to close schools and commence home learning was extremely challenging for them to manage. Schools put in huge efforts to translate dynamic classroom learning experiences into an online format, often learning new technology alongside students to make this happen. Sixth form might be considered a key stage of transition for young people. They are becoming young adults, making career choices for the future and working to achieve the grades needed to realise these ambitions. The lockdown may therefore have affected them more profoundly than other year groups in schools.

Despite the great efforts by schools many of the sixth form students who participated in this research experienced a lack of motivation, excessive stress and a dread of workload. Rather than blaming schools for what was not done, we hope these findings and recommendations could offer ideas as to how to manage any future pandemics and home learning. There may also be some factors that would be beneficial to students even in school based learning situations.

Question	Finding	Recommendation
1	The respondents in the survey were often unmotivated, possibly due to the lack of an effective working environment and distractions at home.	Schools could monitor and help students manage motivation. Motivators and incentives usually present in school could be recreated in virtual settings.
2	Routines mostly did not work to support learning at home.	Routine based learning could be promoted in school so that students are better prepared for home learning, or higher education learning. Additional support could be provided for students who struggle to maintain routines.
3	The majority of learning routines were well prepared and structured but some had inconsistent or varied routines.	Daily plans could be sent to students which would help them adhere to a prepared routine.
4	Stress was experienced by half the respondents due to home schooling. Previous responses suggest an unstructured day and distractions may be key factors.	Schools could provide sessions and talks for students who feel stressed. Schools should also be encouraged to prepare for any future lockdown so they can provide support good enough to help students while remote learning.
5		

	There were many reasons identified for feeling stress during lockdown and school seems to have been one of many factors.	Schools could arrange meetings for students to speak about how they feel regarding stress and mental wellbeing. As some students prefer to keep their feelings to themselves, there should be an easy way for them to open up. For example, students could be given the chance to sign up to anonymous questionnaires ran by the school to help them feel more comfortable about opening up.
6	Workload was experienced in different ways and there was no consistent answer to this question. This highlights that some young people will have managed whilst others will have struggled during home learning.	Lessons should be kept the same or as close to the same as normal classroom lessons, with the same amount of work given to complete, as many people felt that extra work was being set as they were at home. If this is not possible, students should be able to have weekly check-in meetings with staff members to discuss the workload and mutually agree on how to work through the problem.
7	44% of the young people dreaded the workload during home learning suggesting it was too much or too pressured for many students.	Schools could provide clear guidance on expected workloads and check they are being adhered to.
8	The level of support from teachers was inconsistent and many students felt they had too much work.	Teachers could be told or informed by the student about how the student's situation at home affects learning, they could also implement a weekly timetable of hours expected and work set to make handling catch-up and a backlog of work easier.
9	Many young people did not ask for the support they may have needed or felt they could not ask for support when they needed it.	Help should be widely available and shouldn't be a daunting task, to combat this teacher could be more lenient in the way they handle requests for extra time on essays and projects and make an inclusive environment where there is lots of question and answering in lessons to reduce the anxiety that asking for help in online lessons creates.
10	The majority of young people felt it was easy to ask for help, however 29% were less confident and may have gone unsupported.	Schools could explore a variety of ways for students to ask for help, on different media platforms, and through different networks of support (e.g. teachers, specialist staff, peer mentors).

11	The majority of students found teacher responses to requests for help supportive, but this was not a unanimous response and some found teacher responses unhelpful.	Support from teachers should remain consistent but also an optional aspect of a student's learning, so that students can feel independent with an optional support network.
12	Participants felt an effect of the lockdown on their preparedness for exams. There was a wide range of feelings about preparedness indicating there may be some inequality for students facing exams this year.	Students should receive more recognition for the hard and unconventional work they put in, and more support could be given to year 12's with revision as they missed out on exam experience, lessons on revision techniques and scheduled slots for revision lessons with teachers.
13	The students who felt unprepared did so because they had struggled with online learning and felt they had not revised enough. This indicates the direct impact of home learning on exam preparation.	Whilst there might be little opportunity to support year 13 students, schools could discuss exam preparation with year 12 students and plan steps to recoup lost ground together in the coming year.
14	Many students put a large effort into their work indicating they were keen to learn whatever. However, the majority put in either some or small effort perhaps suggesting a negative impact of home learning on effort.	Schools could help keep levels of motivation high and make sure they don't fall. For example, students that feel like they have lack of gratification for work competition should receive more gratification.
15	The reason students identified for putting in less effort was that they felt unmotivated, reinforcing the importance of the answers to question one.	Schools should provide recommendations for students to help increase effort put into work. These should be recommendations to increase things like motivation, lack of attention span and lack of gratification for work completion.
16	The majority of students took part in activities to help them de-stress suggesting a good level of self-awareness and maturity to help themselves in stressful times.	Schools could set up clubs that appeal to young people's interests that help relieve stress. Also schools could recommend students activities to partake in like running and yoga.
17		We recommend that a wide range of de-stressing activities are built into young people's

	A wide range of different ways to de-stress were shared, indicating the importance of individual choice.	regular lives so that they are well equipped to cope in any future pandemics or lockdowns. School could promote the importance of trying different techniques and finding the ones that work best for you.
18	The majority of respondents found their de-stressing activities they partook in helpful when dealing with stress, aiding the efficiency of their learning.	Schools could set up clubs that appeal to young people's interests that help relieve stress. Also schools could recommend students activities to partake in like running and yoga.

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Appendix 1: Survey Questions

Wellbeing survey about the January to March lockdown.

We are researching the effects of the January-March 2021 lockdown. We will ask questions relating to workload, stress and motivation. Please fill out the questions below truthfully. You have the right to withdraw your answers at any point. If you wish to do this, please email yparlockdownlearning@gmail.com and your answers & name will be removed. Please give your consent in the question box below if your over 16.

Yes

No

How often did you feel motivated whilst in the Jan-March lockdown?

Very often

Often

Not often

Don't know

Did you follow a routine?

Yes

No

Sometimes

If so what was your routine?

How often did you feel stressed as a result of school/home schooling?

Very often

Often

Not often

Never

Don't know

If yes, was it due to any factors other than school?

How far do you agree with this statement - "the workload was manageable"

Strongly agree

Agree

Disagree

Strongly disagree

Don't know

Did you wake up dreading the workload ahead?

Yes

No

Sometimes

If yes, why?

Did you feel like you could've asked for help if the workload was unmanageable?

Yes

No

Maybe/sometimes

How prepared do you feel for school exams after having spent 3 months in lockdown?

Very prepared

Somewhat prepared

Neither prepared nor unprepared

Somewhat unprepared

Very unprepared

Not sure

If you feel unprepared, why?

How much effort did you put into work whilst motivated or work that you were motivated for?

Very large effort

Large effort

Some effort

Small effort

Little effort

Not sure

If little or no effort, then why do you think that is?

Did you participate in any activities outside of home-schooling to help with stress? E.g. walking, baking, playing a musical instrument etc.

Yes

No

Sometimes

Not sure

If so, what did they involve?

Did you find these activities helpful for de-stressing?

Yes

No

Sometimes

Not sure

Have you read and understood the information about this study?

Yes

No

Do you have enough information about this study and what it is about?

Yes

No

Do you understand that you are free to withdraw from this study at any time via our email; yparlockdownlearning@gmail.com. And can do so without having to give a reason for withdrawal?

Yes

No

Your responses will be anonymised. Do you give permission for members of the research team to analyse and quote your anonymous responses?

Yes

No

Thank you for completing this survey! We appreciate your time and support. If participating in this research has caused you any distress, then please consider approaching Mrs Swan or any support service.

Appendix 2: Dissemination Routes

The research findings were distributed to:

Funders

NIHR NENC ARC public engagement team

NIHR NENC ARC children and families theme

NIHR NENC ARC marginalisation and inequality theme

Policy Makers

British Youth Council

Children's Commissioner for England

Member of Parliament for Cumbria

Children and Young Person's Councillor for Cumbria County Council

Councillor for Brampton

Governing Bodies

National Youth Agency

British Youth Council

Centre for Youth Impact

Sixth Form Colleges Association

Providers of Statutory Public Services

Department for Education

Public Health England

CAMHS

Director of Education and Skills, Cumbria County Council

Assistant Director for Children and Young People, CCC

Voluntary, Community and Charitable Organisations

UK Youth

MIND

Young Minds

Regional Youth Work Units x 5

Cumbria Youth Alliance

The Children's Society

The United Youth Foundation

National Youth Advocacy Services

Boing Boing Resilience Revolution

Princes Trust

Barnardos

The Francis C. Scott Charitable Trust

Place2be

Anna Freud Centre

Emerging Minds Network

North Children and Young People's Network