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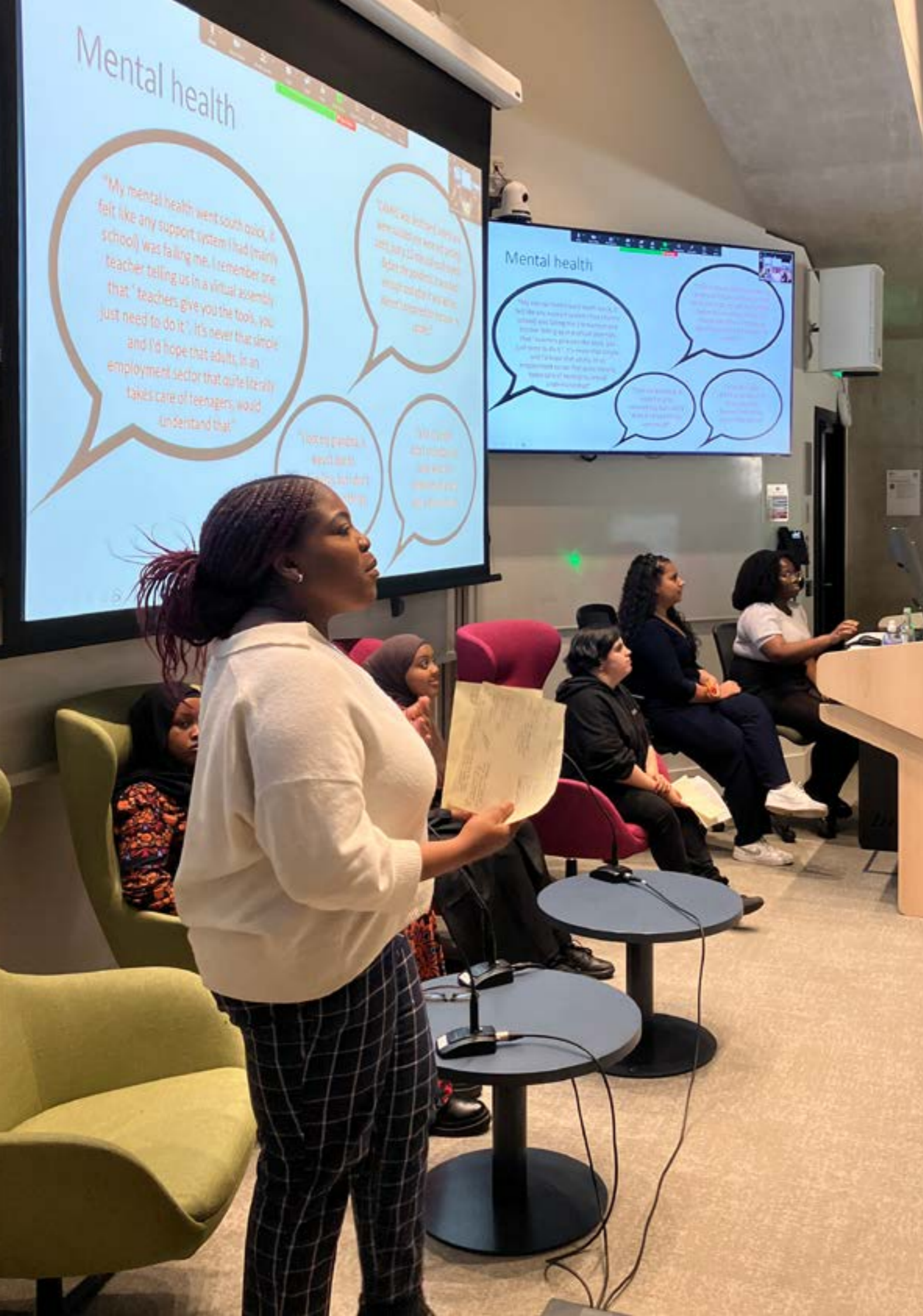


A FUTURE FIT FOR YOUNG PEOPLE:

REFLECTIONS ON YOUNG PEOPLE'S
EXPERIENCES OF THE PANDEMIC
AND THE CHANGE WE NEED TO SEE

OCTOBER 2023

**LEADERS
UNLOCKED**



REPORT OUTLINE

This report is based on a series of collaborative workshops with Leaders Unlocked and LSE, as part of the EU Horizon-2020 funded PERISCOPE project. It is led by a group of 11 young people who participated in the 'Commission for Pandemic Governance and Inequalities'. Reflecting on their personal experiences and their expertise as peer researchers of pandemic policy, the report outlines how the Covid-19 pandemic impacted young people's educational opportunities and mental health and well-being. In particular, it outlines the institutional failures of the pandemic response, which in many instances overlooked and neglected young people, particularly those who are minoritised, living in poverty or in institutional settings, or facing barriers to digital access.

Based on these reflections, the young leaders have devised policy ideas for a 'future fit for young people', based on the key principles of: clarity, consistency and collectivism. This led to 6 recommended policy approaches, including: improved communication and engagement; investment in vital services; tackling inequalities; prioritising mental health; fostering human connection; and rethinking education and digital inequalities. As in the work of Leaders Unlocked, it is crucial to consider young people's perspectives on the impact of health crises and related responses, to ensure that they are centred in decision-making going forward – countering the political abandonment of the younger generation fostered since Covid-19.

FOREWORD BY LAUREN ROBERTS-TURNER



This report has been co-produced by a group of young leaders from Leaders Unlocked, as part of a collaboration with the London School of Economics. It looks at how to create a future fit for young people as the UK moves forward from the Covid-19 pandemic. It outlines policies and approaches that value young people and make their experience central to both the ongoing pandemic recovery and to any policies enacted in the event of future pandemics.

But before we look forward, we must first look back.

Lost. This is the word I return to again and again when I think about young people's experience of the pandemic. This is most obvious in the absence of 100,000 so-called 'ghost children' from schools, placing these children at risk of significant harm¹. But young people also lost out and were lost in other less tangible ways due to Covid-19. Those who graduated secondary school, college or university into a locked-down world were left unmoored without the institutional support they were used to. Even those who remained within educational institutions throughout the entirety of the pandemic lost out.

All young people lost learning and core development experiences, but they lost other things too. They lost social connections with friends and key adults not in their family. They lost confidence and some of them lost hope, as they saw those that had always promised to protect them – schools, hospitals and the government – scramble to cope and sometimes fail to meet the challenges posed by the pandemic. This loss of trust in society more generally that many young people experienced is exemplified by a quote from an interview I did with a young person from my community during one of the lockdowns.

"I feel the pandemic has had a big impact on my personality, as I feel it has made me feel less optimistic about society due to a constant sense of dread of everything no longer functioning as it's meant to, because we failed to function properly as a society during the pandemic."

It is imperative that young people form the focus of the UK's recovery and any future pandemic policies, because we are living with the consequences of failing them during the pandemic we have just experienced. Whilst the resilience of the younger generations is a cause for celebration, and those in power were often making incredibly difficult decisions with very little information, there remains room to acknowledge that things were lost and the avoidable ways that people were failed.

We can find and support all our young people, but this is only possible if we take responsibility as a society for all our citizens, especially our young people, and acknowledge those that are starting out in the world now have faced different challenges.

This report outlines some of the ways we can create policies that do this and ensure that those who are young in the next pandemic remain cared for and supported to safely develop throughout the crisis.

In 2020, many of us gained a new word in our vocabulary. As thousands of people died of a new virus and the government and scientists tried desperately to control its spread, the word 'unprecedented' was on everyone's lips. Whilst the Covid-19 pandemic imposed huge deadly challenges that were to some extent 'never before known', the next pandemic will not be without precedent. We have suffered because of the errors in this pandemic but we must learn from them too.

This report is part of learning from young people's experiences so that we can build a future fit for young people. I hope that you enjoy reading it but most importantly I hope that you listen.

Lauren Roberts-Turner is a young leader working with Leaders Unlocked, and is currently a second-year student at Kings College London.

INTRODUCTION

In 2023, the LSE and Leaders Unlocked worked together to involve young people as leaders in the LSE 'Commission for Pandemic Governance and Inequalities'. This project was part of the EU-wide PERISCOPE project on the socio-economic consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic and recommendations for future pandemic preparedness.

Over the course of the year, the collaboration aimed to:

- Involve young people in **creating future pandemic policy** that better meets their needs.
- Identify what young people think **we need to do to recover from Covid-19** impacts and prepare for another health crisis.
- Support young leaders to **share their solutions and visions** to academic institutions, civil society organisations and policy decision-makers.

This report is a co-authored output led by young leaders involved in this project. We first outline our methodology. In section 1, we then focus on the impact of the pandemic on young people, particularly related to: education; social isolation; mental health; health inequalities; existing vulnerabilities; and financial insecurity. In section 2, we outline lessons learned during Covid-19 for future pandemic policy. Based on these reflections, in section 3, we outline suggested policy approaches to address these challenges in future pandemics. Throughout the report, there are testimonials to highlight personal experiences of the young leaders involved in this project. Key quotes from the workshops are also highlighted throughout the report to highlight our perspectives. We argue that the perspectives, experience and knowledge of young people should be centred in pandemic policymaking.

Our 6 recommendations for pandemic policy approaches are as follows, and expanded in section 3:

1. **Improved communication and engagement** should be at the heart of policy-making during any future pandemic.
2. **Investment in vital services** to support the running of public services during a global pandemic, including contingency funding for schools, emergency services, youth services and charity work.
3. **Tackling inequalities** by centring marginalised young people and children.
4. **Prioritising mental health** by investing in mental health resources and support systems.
5. **Fostering human connection** to limit the impact of social isolation on our well-being.
6. **Rethinking education** and the need for equitable access to technology and internet connectivity for all students.

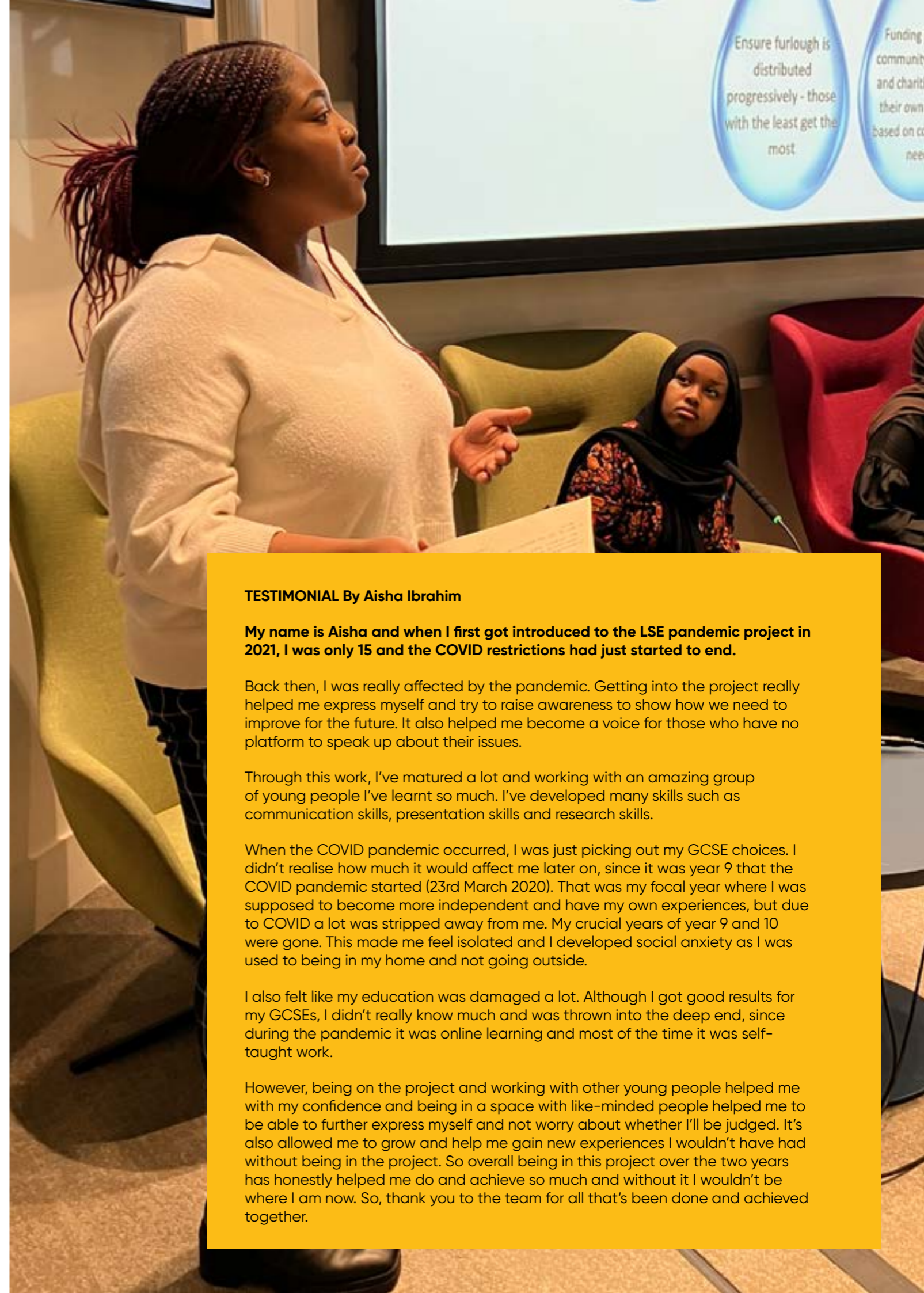
¹The Centre for Social Justice (2022) Lost but not forgotten: the reality of severe absence in schools post-lockdown. London: The Centre for Social Justice. www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/library/lost-but-not-forgotten

WHAT WE DID

The project has brought together a group of diverse young leaders aged 14–25 years from communities across England. We came together to reflect on our shared experiences of the Covid-19 pandemic and to share our solutions for future health crises.

"We are young leaders with experience working as peer researchers during the pandemic. We are connected with our own generation and with charities and social institutions working to support those in our communities. We have an understanding of the challenges and the change we need to see. We believe such change is possible."

- **Forming the group:** Leaders Unlocked recruited the young leaders for this project. They specifically targeted young leaders who had already been involved in investigating the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on their communities.
- **Online workshops:** We initially took part in two workshops online, which enabled us to familiarise ourselves with the group and discuss our collective experiences before, during and after the pandemic.
- **Creative session at the LSE:** This face-to-face session at the LSE allowed us to evaluate different government policies implemented during the pandemic. We split into groups and ranked the policies from most effective to least. We made suggestions that could have positively impacted the effectiveness of the policies in hindsight. We then worked together to create our own policy proposals that would be more beneficial and fitting for young people like those like us and the people we try to advocate for.
- **Creating our presentation and report:** Drawing together what we worked on, we created a presentation and shared our insights at an LSE conference in June 2023. Our presentation gained much positive feedback as people were amazed by what we had come up with. We have since written this report, which contains all the insights and solutions we have gathered during this project.



TESTIMONIAL By Aisha Ibrahim

My name is Aisha and when I first got introduced to the LSE pandemic project in 2021, I was only 15 and the COVID restrictions had just started to end.

Back then, I was really affected by the pandemic. Getting into the project really helped me express myself and try to raise awareness to show how we need to improve for the future. It also helped me become a voice for those who have no platform to speak up about their issues.

Through this work, I've matured a lot and working with an amazing group of young people I've learnt so much. I've developed many skills such as communication skills, presentation skills and research skills.

When the COVID pandemic occurred, I was just picking out my GCSE choices. I didn't realise how much it would affect me later on, since it was year 9 that the COVID pandemic started (23rd March 2020). That was my focal year where I was supposed to become more independent and have my own experiences, but due to COVID a lot was stripped away from me. My crucial years of year 9 and 10 were gone. This made me feel isolated and I developed social anxiety as I was used to being in my home and not going outside.

I also felt like my education was damaged a lot. Although I got good results for my GCSEs, I didn't really know much and was thrown into the deep end, since during the pandemic it was online learning and most of the time it was self-taught work.

However, being on the project and working with other young people helped me with my confidence and being in a space with like-minded people helped me to be able to further express myself and not worry about whether I'll be judged. It's also allowed me to grow and help me gain new experiences I wouldn't have had without being in the project. So overall being in this project over the two years has honestly helped me do and achieve so much and without it I wouldn't be where I am now. So, thank you to the team for all that's been done and achieved together.



PRIORITY 1: THE IMPACT OF THE PANDEMIC ON YOUNG PEOPLE

The Covid-19 pandemic has presented unique challenges for young people. From disruptions in education, to mental health struggles and employment uncertainties, it has not been easy.

DISRUPTION TO EDUCATION

One major effect of the pandemic was disruption to education. Schools and universities had to close temporarily, leading to remote learning and exams being cancelled or modified. This sudden change caused many challenges, in terms of adapting to online classes and maintaining motivation. Many institutions struggled to switch effectively to online learning and the variance between places was visible.

"Schools were slow to and often poor at adapting to online working- institutional sluggishness."

"Many young people fell behind and are still struggling to catch up. This is a cause of anxiety for some young people."

"As someone who was in year 11 when it ended, I feel like schools didn't really care. It was difficult for different age groups. We were deprived of interaction that we all need."

With the suspension of 'normal schooling', students were left to rely on digital devices. Unfortunately, many families were unable to provide a suitable learning environment, due to work commitments, digital poverty and living situations. Low-income families and overcrowded households were severely impacted by the closures of schools.

"School closure and the digital and space inequality made it harder for many young people in poverty and young people from ethnic minority backgrounds."

SOCIAL ISOLATION

The pandemic highlighted the huge impact of social isolation on our well-being. The conditions of COVID and lockdown removed balance and stability from young people's lives. People are more susceptible to loneliness when they are forced to isolate for a prolonged period of time and there is no certainty when it will end. This results in feelings of hopelessness and restlessness, periods of low mood and depression or anxiety. Because of this many young people left the pandemic feeling demotivated, disoriented, more prone to depression and anxiety, more dissatisfied with life, and feeling generally worse.

"We were kept inside our university rooms in a strange environment, only allowed to go out at certain times, it felt cold and almost like I was a prison. everyone so confused and felt disconnected – losing connection with reality because of all the rules that didn't make sense."

"Social isolation has had an impact both on young people's mental health and their ability to engage socially post pandemic."

"Some young people had increased anxiety about coming back to usual face to face activities."

MENTAL HEALTH

Prior to the pandemic, there had been a rising rate of young people struggling with their mental health. Mental health services were already inaccessible to many young people, due to high access thresholds and rejected referrals.

The conditions of lockdown, which exacerbated feelings of anxiety, depression, and loneliness, contributed to a mental health decline in many young people, whether they had a pre-existing mental health condition or not. Many young people experienced bereavement during the pandemic, which impacted their mental health and for which they often received little support. Existing mental health services were put under an incomprehensible strain and many young people were failed.

"My mental health went south quick, it felt like any support system I had (mainly school) was failing me."

"CAMHS was destroyed, unless you were suicidal you were not getting seen, just a 15 min call each month. Before the pandemic it was bad enough and after it was worse. Weren't prepared for increase in uptake."

HEALTH INEQUALITIES

Marginalised groups of young people were hit especially hard by the conditions of the pandemic and the sudden removal of structure that was essential to their development.² Young people from minority ethnic backgrounds were reported to be disproportionately affected, particularly in regard to mental health and general health. Young Black men, for example, were reported to have experienced a 14% deterioration in their mental wellbeing.³ Additionally, a large number of young people from Black and ethnic minority communities had been getting in contact online platforms like 'Kooth', making requests for urgent help or reporting cases of depression, self-harm, and suicide ideation.⁴

"As the eldest daughter of immigrant parents with different health difficulties I found it difficult to navigate and after the pandemic I kind of just tumbled. There was no normal anymore."

YOUNG PEOPLE LIVING IN INSTITUTIONAL SETTINGS

Young people living in certain settings were more likely to be disproportionately impacted by the pandemic. The government didn't seem to account for young people who were currently incarcerated or those living in children's homes. Those in residential care settings often didn't have access to devices or quiet space to fully engage with online learning. Young people living in hostels didn't have access to adequate support and often state support, such as finally receiving their own flat, was put on hold by the pandemic.

"I didn't really receive any support; I live alone and am estranged from my parents. They ignored a large number of people."

"The care system wasn't built to cope with a pandemic. You're already in a stressful situation in a children's home. [There was] no guidance for anyone. [the government ignored those in care] because you are an inconvenience."

FINANCIAL INSECURITY

The economic impact of Covid-19, as well as a rise in inflation and Brexit, has affected us all – from businesses to schools, families and young adults. Those with lower incomes have been hardest hit. Not only are they unable to afford their bills, they can't afford to heat their homes or do a full grocery shop. Some even lost their homes as a result of the pandemic.

During the pandemic, many people lost their jobs, as businesses struggled to survive. The government's Furlough scheme supported employees who were unable to work, but it was not progressive for lower earners, particularly young people with below average earnings.

²Lenoir R, Wong KK. Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on young people from black and mixed ethnic groups' mental health in West London: a qualitative study. *BMJ Open*. 2023 May 5;13(5):e071903. doi: 10.1136/bmjopen-2023-071903. PMID: 37147089; PMCID: PMC10163329.

³Abdinasir, K. and Carty, S. (2021) Young Black men's mental health during Covid-19 - Experiences from the Shifting the Dial project. issue brief. Centre for Mental Health. www.centreformentalhealth.org.uk/publications/young-black-mens-mental-health-during-covid-19

⁴Campbell, D. (2020) Covid-19 affects BAME Youth Mental Health More Than White peers - study, *The Guardian*. www.theguardian.com/society/2020/jun/21/covid-19-hits-bame-youth-mental-health-worse-than-white-peers-study

the government's support for young people
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lost existing support
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health and for which they often received little support



SECTION 2: LESSONS LEARNED

The global Covid-19 pandemic has served as a profound teacher, offering us invaluable lessons and leaving us with essential takeaways for future policy. In this section of the report, we highlight the lessons that need to be learned.

BEFORE THE PANDEMIC, THE UK WAS RUNNING ON EMPTY

Before the pandemic, the UK was 'running on empty'. Years of austerity had resulted in fragile public services that were already under strain before COVID hit (Marmot et al, 2020).⁵

Severe public health cuts left the UK more vulnerable to COVID. The legacy of under-investment in communities, youth services, health services and schools, all made the pandemic's impact deeper and more devastating than it needed to be for young people. We can't let that happen again. Proactive investment is needed to enable services to have reserves to respond effectively to the next crisis.

CURRENT SUPPORT SYSTEMS STRUGGLED TO COPE AND ADAPT

Vital support systems for young people, such as education and mental health, were not all prepared for the pandemic. These systems struggled to cope and adapt. Services were generally poor at switching to online ways of working, and many paused or reduced what they could offer. Mental health services were put under an incomprehensible strain. Many young people lost their existing support, and a lot of young people were failed.

YOUNG PEOPLE AND THOSE THAT DIDN'T FIT INTO A 'TYPICAL' HOUSEHOLD WERE OVERLOOKED

People who didn't fit into a '2.4 kids' model of a family were missed out in pandemic policy. Young people generally felt as though they were an afterthought in government policy. Education was the main focus of the government's support for young people. Inequality made it difficult to implement policy successfully, with digital poverty preventing online learning specifically.

Please see Appendix 1 to see our analysis of successful and unsuccessful policies from the Covid-19 pandemic.

⁵ Marmot M, Allen J, Goldblatt P, Herd E, Morrison J. (2020) Build Back Fairer: The COVID-19 Marmot Review. The Health Foundation. www.health.org.uk/publications/build-back-fairer-the-covid-19-marmot-review



SECTION 3: WHAT WE WANT FROM FUTURE PANDEMIC POLICY

KEY PRINCIPLES FOR FUTURE POLICY

After reviewing the successes and failures of policy approaches during the COVID19 pandemic, we deduced that the main issue came from a **lack of positive government-public communication and engagement.**

As such, we centred our policy approaches around these three principles:

- Clarity
- Consistency
- Collectivism

We believe these principles are essential for every governed system, as they ensure that policy-makers outline the fundamental aims behind their decisions to the public. When people understand these decisions, the citizens become a part of the measures taken by the government, and new policies are accepted, becoming the standard behaviour.

Messages must be comprehensive, repeated and inclusive of the public to ensure the people are not simply recipients of solutions, but also partners in the fight for their health. This will result in a more consistent approach to creating and enforcing policy, speeding up the implementation and reception of policies. It will provide a more collectivist approach and breed community spirit, making possible future pandemics easier to handle and fostering human connection which Covid-19 has shown to be so fundamental to health and well-being.

These principles also compel more funding for public services, including schools, mental health and community services. This will help to prepare for future health crises and will ensure that young people are offered consistent support. This is particularly crucial for marginalised, neglected children and young people, who we argue should be prioritised in decision-making.

POLICY APPROACHES

IMPROVED COMMUNICATION AND ENGAGEMENT

Improved communication and engagement should be at the heart of policy-making during any future pandemic. In future health crises we recommend:

- Establish citizens' panels to regularly evaluate and build on policies.
- Establish a transparent body to increase awareness of policy implementation and reduce misinformation.
- Provide clear and regular messages from government with timeframes to ensure people know what to expect.
- It is important for young people to stay informed about vaccination opportunities and make informed decisions for their own health but also that of those around them.

INVESTMENT IN VITAL SERVICES

To support the running of public services during a global pandemic, more funding needs to go into them. There needs to be a contingency plan for public services like schools, the emergency services and youth work. Not only will this mean that the most vulnerable in our society will be protected and supported during another pandemic, but will also mean that young people are less likely to fall through the cracks. In future health crises we recommend:

- Make sure there is a minimal ring-fenced fund to protect vital youth services in the event of future crises.
- More money should be put into schools so they can be 'future proofed' and better set up for a pandemic. Give schools more money than they need each year to run, so they have a contingency fund.
- Invest more into youth workers who are specifically trained in mental health and young people.
- Give key workers and mental health workers better shift rotas and time off with support.
- Provide funding pots for community services and charities to run their own services based on community needs.

TACKLING INEQUALITIES

The Covid-19 pandemic highlighted and exacerbated the inequalities in our society. Already disadvantaged groups were the hardest hit, and were the most overlooked in government policy. In future health crises we recommend:

- When making policy, think about marginalised groups – the invisible children who don't get thought about, neglected and abused.
- Provide vulnerable children with a place to go if the schools are shut – to get support, laptops etc.
- Ensure Furlough is distributed progressively – those with the least get the most. There should be a minimum income guarantee for everyone.
- Reutilise effective policies from the COVID 19 pandemic, e.g. Free School Meals and rent freezes.
- Every young person should get a named person who is dedicated to them, e.g. youth worker or teacher. Extend the duty of care for young people beyond 18 years of age.

PRIORITISING MENTAL HEALTH

We now understand the need to invest in mental health resources and support systems. We have learned that it is crucial to seek support when needed, whether it is through therapy, online resources, or simply reaching out to loved ones. We have also realised the significance of destigmatizing mental health issues and promoting open conversations about it. In future health crises we recommend:

- When making policy, put people and their well-being first. This is especially important when it comes to young people.
- Establish a widely accessible mental health service without having to 'fit a set of criteria'. Offer quality support and alternative interventions.
- Provide after care for young people with bereavement experience.

FOSTERING HUMAN CONNECTION:

The pandemic has highlighted the impact of social isolation on our well-being. We've learned that human connection is fundamental to our happiness and mental health. It has made us appreciate the value of face-to-face interactions and the importance of maintaining strong social networks or 'social infrastructures'. We have also realised the significance of finding creative ways to stay connected virtually, whether it is through video calls, online communities, or virtual events. In future health crises we recommend:

- Further develop community apps to limit social isolation and help people stay connected.
- Establish safe work bubbles during lockdown to counteract loneliness and provide peer support.
- Open up more community spaces where people can safely meet and interact to combat isolation.

RETHINKING EDUCATION

The pandemic has forced us to rethink traditional education models and embrace new approaches. We have discovered the power of technology in facilitating remote learning, allowing students to continue their education from home. This experience has highlighted the need for equitable access to technology and internet connectivity for all students. In future health crises we recommend:

- There should be ringfenced funding for resources for tackling digital inequality.
- Provide enhanced funding for schools to recognise their value as points of community and well-being for young people.

CONCLUSION

Through this project, we have had the opportunity to reflect on the lessons of the Covid-19 pandemic and think about our priorities for the future. We now understand the need to invest in mental health resources and support systems. We have recognised the potential of technology in enhancing education and ensuring access for all. We have gained a deeper appreciation for the power of human connection and the importance of fostering strong relationships.

We also want to recognise that young people have shown incredible resilience, adaptability, and creativity in navigating these difficult times. The pandemic has sparked creativity and innovation among young people. Many have embraced online platforms to showcase their talents, pursue hobbies, and connect with others. It is amazing to see how young people have adapted and found new ways to express themselves despite the challenges.

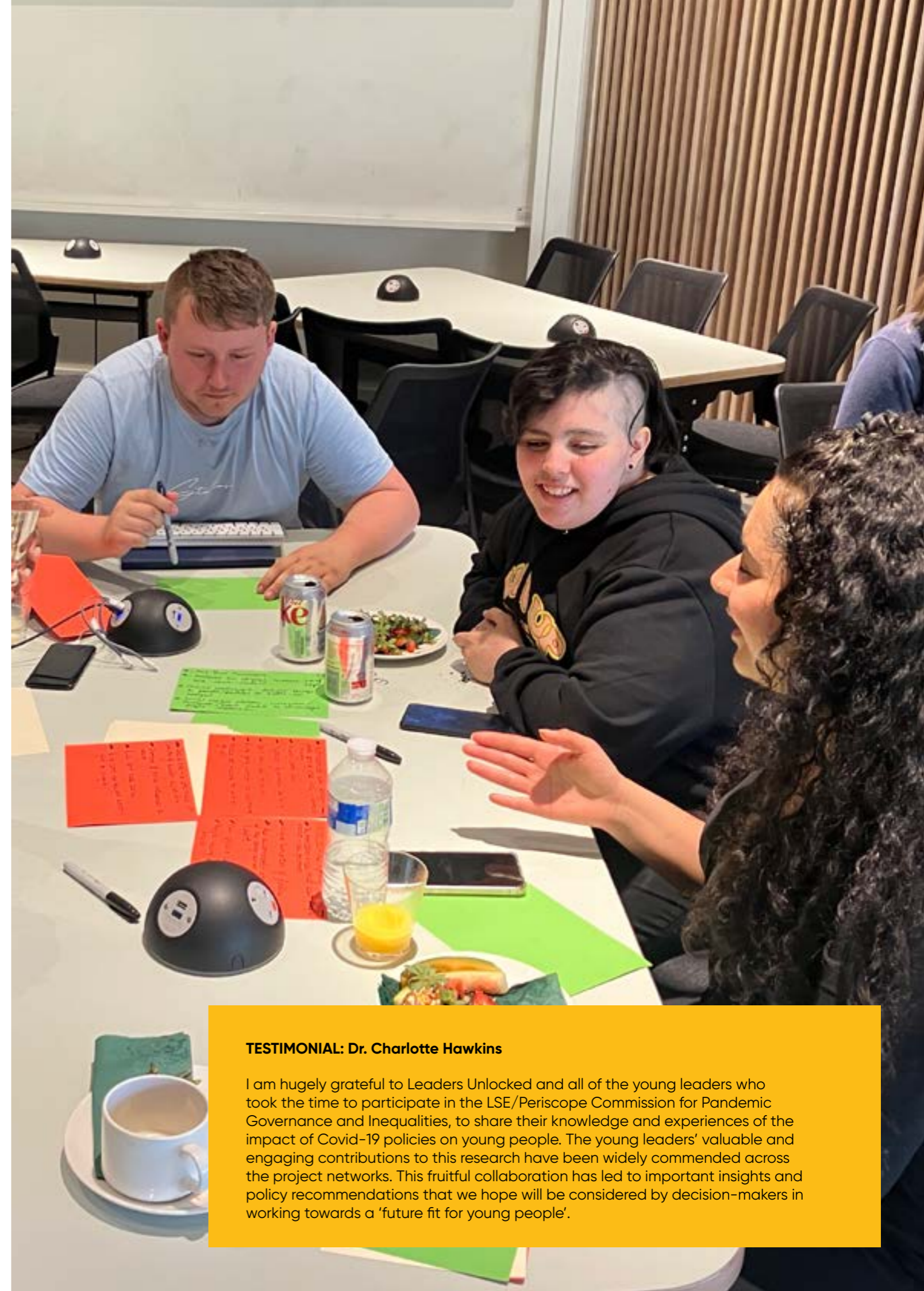
As we emerge from the pandemic, let us carry these lessons with us and continue to prioritise mental health, embrace innovative educational approaches, and foster meaningful connections. Together, we can build a more resilient and compassionate society.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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The partner organisations are: Leaders Unlocked, a social enterprise that supports young people to have a stronger voice and influence over the issues that affect them. The London School of Economics Department of Anthropology and the Horizon-2020 funded PERISCOPE Project. This builds from earlier collaboration as part of the The London School of Economics (LSE) COVID and Care Research Group, which is a part of the LSE's Anthropology department. Special thanks to Dr. Charlotte Hawkins for your ongoing support and guidance.

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TESTIMONIAL: Dr. Charlotte Hawkins

I am hugely grateful to Leaders Unlocked and all of the young leaders who took the time to participate in the LSE/Periscope Commission for Pandemic Governance and Inequalities, to share their knowledge and experiences of the impact of Covid-19 policies on young people. The young leaders' valuable and engaging contributions to this research have been widely commended across the project networks. This fruitful collaboration has led to important insights and policy recommendations that we hope will be considered by decision-makers in working towards a 'future fit for young people'.

APPENDIX 1: SUCCESSFUL AND UNSUCCESSFUL PANDEMIC POLICIES

In our workshops, we worked together to analyse the policies and interventions that were adopted during the Covid-19 pandemic, and to assess what worked and what didn't work for young people. The table below shows the policies we felt were successful, partly successful and unsuccessful for young people.

Successful

- **Free School Meals and food vouchers in the holidays:** These were an example of very positive policy, supporting those economically affected by the pandemic.
- **The roll-out of the vaccine:** The UK made great strides in vaccinating the population, including young people. This has played a crucial role in reducing the spread of the virus and allowing a gradual return to normalcy.

Partly successful

- **Furlough:** Whilst this supported those unable to work due to the pandemic, the approach should have been more progressive, with lower earners, particularly young people with below average earnings, receiving more than 80% of their pay.
- **Economy:** The "Eat out to help out" scheme was high cost (over £800m) but only provided short-run benefits; the failure for the government to protect small/independent businesses, especially in the hospitality sector, was also highly evident.
- **Collusion:** The deregulation used by the CMA were effective at preventing supply shortages and quick vaccine development. Application – correct policing and implementation was difficult, especially with the lack of evidence and effective training to adapt to new policy.

Not successful

- **Inequality:** Government failed at taking the different impacts on different groups into account. Inequality made it difficult to implement policy, with digital poverty preventing online learning specifically.
- **Failure to adapt to virtual working:** There was a lack of infrastructure/ ability/ skills/ willingness within institutions to go virtual.
- **Mental Health support:** CAMHS and other services were not prepared for a spike in cases and the shift to online working. CAHMS was slow to adapt and people fell through the cracks. Vulnerable young people were left without support and some are likely to have fallen off the radar all together (as happened with education).
- **School:** Schools were unable to effectively switch to online learning and the variance between regions was incredibly visible. Years 11 and 13 felt 'abandoned' and exams were felt to be prioritised over children more so than ever.
- **Inconsistency of policies:** This caused a lot of anxiety fear and confusion. There was too much inconsistency in measures across the different nations and throughout the pandemic.
- **Lack of communication:** Not enough communication between national government and local and devolved governments.



POLICY SNAPSHOT – Collusion By Michal Pietrzak

During the pandemic, the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) made efforts to safeguard the supply of grocery items and accelerate the research and development of the Covid-19 vaccine through a series of collusion exemptions for firms. An example of this included enabling the collaboration between Pfizer and BioNTech, which resulted in the world's first approved vaccine for the virus and made the UK the quickest to begin the vaccination process. The UK Health Security Agency estimated that by September 2021, this prevented over 24 million infections and 105,000 deaths. The exclusion orders surrounding grocery supply chains also seemed effective, with the CMA reporting a substantial decrease in price-related complaints after implementing these countermeasures. These included sharing labour, facilities and information on supply by ferry companies, grocery suppliers, dairy suppliers and logistics companies.

During this time, the CMA also remained vigilant of unfair practices by firms looking to exploit consumers and misuse the exclusion orders. As a result, the CMA forbade firms from sharing information on pricing, and four investigations involving unfair pricing of medical/hygiene products by pharmacies, such as hand sanitiser, were opened. Most exclusion orders have since been reverted, to ensure fair practice and competition. In conclusion, the CMA's response to the pandemic, regarding collusion, was excellent and protected both consumers and firms from supply issues, whilst potentially saving thousands of lives by speeding up the vaccine roll-out.

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