

Headlines from the Access to Facilities Survey November 2021



Introduction

This is the fourth survey of the youth work sector on the issue of access to facilities. The survey results continue to show a concerning situation for young people involved in youth work, in particular vulnerable young people who rely on that support. Lack of access to appropriate facilities has left many youth work organisations still experiencing barriers to the facilities they need to deliver youth work services.

There is an improvement on the picture back in June – but the challenges remain acute, with access to services severely restricted in some areas due to very limited access to facilities, and evidence of high levels of need.

Our latest survey shows that only 54% of youth work have access to the facilities they need. We have serious concerns around the lack of vital youth work support and the impacts this will continue to have. We know young people are already dealing with the detrimental consequences of the pandemic. The impact on learning loss and mental health will only be further exacerbated while the current challenges surrounding the re-opening of youth work persist.

We have to ensure young people have access to the support they need, it is essential that safe spaces for youth work are available. We know that youth work is key to reaching and engaging young people, to provide mental health support, signpost to other services, tackle isolation and help young people re-engage in learning.

As we move into November, the opportunities to conduct youth work activities outdoors will no longer be option. This situation is urgent and critical, solutions to the current barriers need to be brought forward now.

Overview

329 responses to the survey, which came from all 32 council areas in Scotland. It is the biggest response of our 4 surveys to date – almost 50% up on the returns in June 2021 when we had 220 completed surveys. Response suggests this is still an issue of urgent concern.

As ever, it's a complex picture. Whereas in June the biggest issue was local interpretation of national guidance, the most commonly cited reason for lack of access is that 'local authorities are not providing lets'. This doesn't necessarily mean lets are closed across the board. More often, the data suggests that some facilities are open, but a combination of staffing issues (and associated opening hours), social distancing and cleaning requirements is limiting access to some facilities - and other facilities remain closed, increasing the pressure on those that are open, and creating logistical issues such as young people having to travel further to venues.

Decisions on school access vary school by school in a number of areas. Even where services are happening, they are often compromised – for example shorter / fewer sessions; cooking and eating not possible where this was previously an important element of support; it is still difficult to offer drop-in support.

Levels of need remain high – and young people are being impacted in a number of important ways, most particularly in terms of support for health and wellbeing. The pressures on indoor facilities will only increase as the weather gets colder and the nights draw in.

Overall

The picture across the board is improving:

- Only 54% of total respondents have access to the facilities they need, compared to just 22% in June
- 78% of respondents who have their own premises respondents) now have full access, compared to only 29% in June

Whilst things are moving in a positive direction, the survey suggests that significant issues remain:

- 44% of organisations wanting access to schools have no access of any kind (76% had no access in June)
- 41% of organisations wanting access to local authority lets have no access of any kind (83% had no access in June)
- 47% of organisations wanting access to leisure centres have no access of any kind (88% had no access in June)
- 30% of organisations wanting access to faith-based centres have no access of any kind (74% had no access in June).
- 20% of organisations wanting access to other community venues have no access of any kind (65% had no access in June)
- 28% of those wanting access to outdoor centres have no access of any kind (69% had no access in June)

The third sector youth work providers who would normally operate in schools and local authority facilities continue to find it more difficult than local authority youth work services to access these facilities:

- 21% of LA youth work services have no access to schools compared to 48% of local 3rd sector providers who want access to schools, and 57% of national third sector organisations who want access.
- 14% of LA youth work services have no access to local authority facilities compared with 60% of local 3rd sector providers who want access.

Reasons for restricted access

'Local authority not yet providing lets' is still the most commonly cited reason for issues around access (58 respondents still highlight this as an issue).

Reasons given for restricted access	Number of responding organisations affected
Local authority not yet providing lets	58
Building not open due to guidance / restrictions	37
Building not open due to prohibitive cleaning / maintenance costs	21
Building not open due to volunteer committee hesitancy about cleaning	15
Limited access due to restricted numbers in buildings	11
Limited access due to competition in relation to use of venues	10

Limited access due to lack of staff	7
Building being used as vaccination centre	7

There is some anecdotal evidence that paid lets are being prioritised over lets that have historically been offered free of charge/at a reduced cost.

22% still have no clarity at all about when they will have access to some of the facilities they need.

Comments from respondents

"No local authority staff available to open and close venue we hired. No communication from local authority about cancelling lets."

"Council say that we can have access but we have spent weeks going round in circles and being bounced around different departments trying to jump through the hoops that they have erected."

"The goalposts keep changing."

"Even the councillors can't get a straight answer."

"Checks must be passed by school head teacher to approve or not. Makes planning difficult."

"Access to school facilities appears to be more challenging in general. Access to facilities in primary schools, which are used mostly by community groups and third sector organisations is determined by Head Teachers. Gaining access to some schools and it's very much dealt with on a school-by-school basis as each HT has their own views, opinions and risks to consider."

"End of financial year is the next point this will be reviewed."

Direct impacts on young people

- Half of local authority youth work services and community-based third sector organisations continue to report that some young people are unable to access important relationships with peers and youth workers due to restricted access to facilities.
- More than 40% of these organisations also highlight that limited access to facilities means that young people are unable to access much-needed support with health and wellbeing.

Other comments from respondents

"We have had a massive increase in membership, young people just want social contact."

"Having suffered a drop-off in young and adult members, we are seeing a good recovery to pre-pandemic numbers."

"Some of our boys did not attend the Zoom meetings we organised earlier on, but have started to come back 'into the fold' now that we are back in our Church halls."

"They are getting cold and wet and soon darkness! This impacts on learning, enjoyment and attendance."

"Our meetings are restricted to outdoors. This can lead to meetings being cancelled at short notice if the weather is bad. Danger to child safety meeting outdoors on dark nights."

"Young people are not mixing outside their own small groups and territorialism and gangs are increasing."

"As we need to hire facilities, our meetings have been reduced to once per week which is affecting young people's personal development progress and our ability to provide inputs from external providers."

"Increased travel due to limited venues can prevent young people from joining"

"The lack of access for voluntary sector youth practitioners to schools is of particular concern. Many third sector organisations could be offering specialist support to young people in recovery - but there are limited organisations trusted in formal educational settings."

"As we cannot utilise the school, our number vary drastically depending on weather and we cannot deliver our planned programme due to cold/dark outdoor nights."

"Vast increase in Leader workload to maintain "normal" Service."

"Last summer, we were planning to close our 80-year-old charity for good. We staved that off, just. But where COVID-19 could not kill us off, council inactivity and bureaucratic nonsense just might."

Some examples of qualitative feedback

"We cover a massive area with many isolated villages within that. Due to not being able to look at community settings centrally, it means that multiple families living in poverty will have to look at 2/3 buses to access our face-to-face activities."

"We are starting to see a rise in ASB in some communities. Reduced access to opportunities for young people could be seen as contributing to this. Whilst Detached Youth Work has offered some opportunities for young people we are keen to have young people back in buildings especially in the face of inclement weather."

"We are struggling to keep motivated with the lack of guidance on when we can get access to the school. The headteacher has been fantastic and allow us to use the school grounds, but no access to running water or toilet facilities. Our leaders are drained. We cannot spend another winter delivering scouting purely outdoors."

"We previously supported breakfast clubs and lunchtime activities in schools. No access to school permitted to continue this support. Our young people are struggling in school and tell us they need safe spaces to seek support. We are unable to offer this at the moment."

"We have built very little relationship with S1 and S2 pupils who we would normally work with in school who would then attend our youth work services in the evening. We have missed 2 years of our future young people who we would normally retain attending youth provision till S4+"

"Restricted access to the school means that our partnership relationship is based only on our outdoor work during school time (wellbeing walks) we are unable to build relationships with young people who do not attend the project and are unable to deliver Cool Calm & Connected to every

S1 as we usually do, cannot co-deliver Princes Trust or support small group work for vulnerable young people in school."

"We often have to meet with young people in public places such as cafes where confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. As a result, workers are not able to provide the same level of focused support as pre-covid. Young people don't want to talk about their private lives in public."

"The lack of routine for many in Muirhouse has provided a lot of isolation for young people. Young people want to engage but we are usually an afterthought or priced out by an external organisation out with the community. The importance and need for the local community organisations have been huge from schools, police, young people and families. However, we are trying to do our work with both hands tied behind our backs!!!"

"Working within local authority guidelines we have been locked out all our buildings and have been doing streetwork to support young people. Though the streetwork is going well, it doesn't offer opportunity to work on any accreditation or give clear structure to our delivery. Partner agencies have opened their doors and been very reactive throughout the pandemic, and deserve praise for their amazing contribution. This however makes local authority look useless in comparison, as we have no buildings, our hands are tied with red tape through our own management. Working closely with vol orgs is only way I have been able to support young people."

"The young people with additional support needs who were unable to access our online service during the pandemic - have been waiting 20 months to re-join our sessions. They are now almost two years older! We are not sure if they can wait for our services to reopen."

"Young people have NO access to any building-based youth work. Therefore, we are not able to maintain regular contact with the majority of our young people. We are also not able to keep in contact with parents and families - we are a well-established service provide and are a first port of call."

"Working from our own premises allows our members to take ownership of the project. In the past they have been able to use our premises several times a week but we are now only operational one evening a week as there is a financial impact on the organisation. Not only for venue hire but in terms of reimbursing travel expenses. We also like to cook for our young people to ensure they have a hot meal but again this is not possible out with our own premises."

"Young carers are facing delays to receiving Young Carer Statements - something that they have a right to by law - because it is taking time to negotiate access to certain schools. This lack of access can also affect our ability to raise awareness and visibility of young carers and their needs."

"Massive impact on the older teens early 20s mental health which impacts physical health, future options and aspirations and general feeling of not belonging or not being supported. We have funds from grants but our council will not release building to us despite our agreement to pay for everything and having had private rental before. The local council do not see this as a priority. So disrespectful to our young people and volunteers who take time out from their own lives."

"As a CLD Worker, I feel like I cannot offer the services to young people that they need most due to budgeting and staffing constraints which are led by the priorities of another service who are only willing to open a building if it will make a profit for their service."

"Since lockdown and restricted access to our meeting place we have lost half our volunteer leaders and around half our members. As a charity who have sole responsibility for the management and

upkeep of our premises, we may soon find it uneconomic to continue with a group that has provided vital youth development services for 81 years since its formation."

"I am District Commissioner and there are a couple of hundred young people who have not had Scouting since the first lockdown. This is 2 years of their young lives that they can never get back. Missing out on learning skills for life, friendship and teamworking. Many are from deprived areas with unemployment/single parent families. No one I have approached from school lets to the Chief Executive at the Council/MPs/Councillors etc have helped at all."

"In all honesty, as part of the recovery process we have been really lucky in accessing safe spaces for young people by working in partnership and collaboration with colleagues in culture and leisure and the community based voluntary sector so that access and safe spaces was created."