

Written evidence submitted by Marine Society and Sea Cadets (MSSC)

The impact of COVID-19 on education and children's services MSSC submission

1. We know before the shutdown 1.4 million young people were actively engaged with uniformed open access youth work such as cadet forces and scout groups. At the Marine Society and Sea Cadets (MSSC) we engage 15,000 young people aged 10 to 18 across the UK, in adventurous and challenging activities that help prepare them for all the complexities that life brings.
2. This submission is broken into four key impacts of Covid-19 upon the work of Sea Cadets (and other uniformed youth organisations) with young people:
 - On our services to young people, particularly those who are most vulnerable
 - On the services and opportunities that young people transition to creating additional pressures to children services
 - On local youth charities, and national youth federations
 - On volunteers which are essential to uniformed youth work delivery

Impact on young people and how we support them

3. We know our cadets find their time with us has helped them to weather the storm of the Covid-9 outbreak. A recent nationwide 'how are you feeling' survey of our cadets aged 13+¹ asked them how they are coping with the current shutdown. It found that 7 in 10 cadets either agreed (49%), or strongly agreed (22%), that Sea Cadets had prepared them for the tough times ahead. We believe it incredible that being a part of Sea Cadets had so positively impacted such a high proportion of our young people to prepare them to cope with the most momentous crisis of our lifetimes.
4. But especially as we look forward we are really concerned about the long-term impact of Covid-19 on uniformed youth services such as ours.
5. We know uniformed youth work often provides a safe and stable environment for young people who don't get school. A place for them to develop self-confidence and find passions that stay with them for the rest of their lives. We know many of these young people come from environments that mean they face more

¹ The survey was emailed directly to cadets, using personal email addresses so for data protection reasons was limited to those aged 13+ (8636 cadets), it had a response rate of 15%, a confidence level of 95 and a confidence interval of +- 2.49

challenges than most. Our 'how are you feeling' survey found 14% of our cadets aged 13 or over² are looked after children³ and 7% are young carers⁴, with just over half of our cadets having at least one type of vulnerability⁵.

6. We agree with the point raised by the Prime Minister at the recent Commons liaison committee about the importance of any measures that can be taken to 'level up' support for disadvantaged young people, and his concerns about the *'huge social injustices taking place at the moment because some kids are going to have better access to tutoring and to schooling at home'*.
7. We believe that uniformed youth groups have been playing a significant role in delivering some of this levelling up throughout the crisis. Drawing from our own experience
 - Within days of lockdown we launched a virtual offer, Virtual Sea Cadets and have repurposed our extensive face to face training programmes to be delivered via live virtual sessions via our amazing 9,000 volunteers. Currently over 85% of our units across the country are providing regular e-learning sessions for young people to engage with their unit while they're not able to attend in person, augmented by a programme of district, area and national courses, ensuring access for all.
 - The Sea Cadets Emergency Digital Grant, has just been launched which provides micro-grants to cadets to afford things like tablets and Wi-Fi connections so they can engage in our virtual offer during lockdown.
8. As we continue to take on new adult volunteers, we have also developed essential online training for them to ensure proper and safe induction.
9. We are also aware that for all of our young people when they first return to units they are going to be in a different place to where we left them, the impact on their well-being, their socialisation, their education will have been significant.
10. The youth sector is going to be one of the front lines of helping all young people from all backgrounds to re-engage with and thrive in society following the end of Covid 19, and we feel this is an area where real coordination has to take place between government, public sector, and the youth sector to make sure we can make biggest impact on young people's lives at a crucial period in the medium to long-term responses to Covid 19.
11. We are beginning to prepare for this as well as investing heavily in digital development so that we are able to continue to deliver and flex a virtual programme alongside a socially distanced partial return to face to face activity.

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³ Around 20 times the national average

⁴ Compared to approximately 5% of the national average

⁵ At least one of child carer, looked after child, comes from an economically deprived background, lives in a left behind area (as defined by Left Behind understanding communities on the edge, a report by Local Trust), or has a disability

But the sector urgently needs financial support to both, continue to exist, further develop online services, and as lockdown is loosened provide good quality socially distanced and safe support for young people. In some locations there are good informal relationships with local schools. But this could be improved significantly by the positive engagement of schools with their local uniformed youth groups to ensure cohesive support for young people.

Limitations on the next step in young people's journey and the impact on youth work

12. A really important part of our work is preparing young people to launch into the lives they want to live. We know this is something young people themselves are also increasingly mindful of, seeing engaging with youth work such as our own as an essential part of their personal development. Effective youth work is only the first few steps on the journey for young people that will affect their whole lives. But that wider journey is currently being disrupted by Covid-19 with its impact on the economy and the further and higher education system. This risks young people missing out on that essential next step beyond focussed youth work and this in turn creates new challenges for youth work to prepare and equip young people for their futures today.
13. MSSC is in a relatively unique position, since alongside our work directly with young people through the Sea Cadets, we also operate the Marine Society, which provides lifelong learning and support for seafarers in the merchant and Royal Navies. We have recently expanded our services for seafarers, to include a new focus on career promotions and development of courses and apprenticeships⁶ for those starting out on a maritime career. Through this we will better align to the DfT priorities set out in Maritime 2050 and continue to reinforce our close links with industry bodies such as Maritime UK and the UK Chamber of Shipping. We think it's really important that these sorts of partnerships are supported, encouraged and highlighted by government, to help build progression pathways between the youth sector and the places that young people need to be able to transition into the world of work. This helps both groups empower and strengthen each other and is particularly valuable during this difficult in minimising the negative impacts of Covid-19.

Impact on local youth charities and National youth federations

14. We like other major uniformed youth charities such as the Scouts or Guides are a Federation. Each of our local units are independent charities run by volunteers, who receive support from the central federated organisation.
15. These local community charities run on micro-budgets (the average Sea Cadet unit has an annual turnover of just under £20,000). They are often highly dependent on income from membership fees or weekly subs paid by young people, as well as community facing local fundraising.

⁶ MSSC is a registered approved training provider (RoATP) and has UK provider training provider status (UKPRN)

16. While some of their costs have reduced due to the shutdown they've not disappeared entirely and we are really concerned about the impact of Covid 19 on these groups. They do not have the on the ground paid staff to help navigate the numerous opportunities the government has provided for financial support, and their volunteers are often themselves under extreme pressure in their working lives, further reducing their capacity to engage.
17. We are concerned that this could mean that when young people need their support most, as the lockdown is being loosened, and young people are facing the trauma of both Covid 19 and the shutdown itself many of these local branches won't be there to help, or won't have the resources they need to make a real difference. This is particularly true for those in less well-off or left behind areas⁷ where both the impact on their finances can be even more significant, and the work they do with young people is particularly important.
18. We therefore think it's really important not only that government makes sure there is sufficient support in place for local uniformed youth charities, but also that it works closely with the federations that support them. As without permanent staff on the ground it is generally only these federations that will be able to identify the branches that are most in need.
19. This is also particularly important to consider as many of these national youth federations are themselves in a challenging financial position with fundraising, trading and investment income massively reduced and the focus of much of particularly public sector support linked to the immediate crisis of Covid 19. And yet the role of these national youth organisations has risen significantly, rapidly developing additional services to continue to deliver and support the 1.4 million young people who are part of uniformed youth groups in the UK and the hundreds of thousands of volunteers essential to their delivery.
20. We also know especially for organisations such as ourselves who have sport or physical activities and run large scale residential courses as a key part of their curriculum with young people, these federations are potentially particularly vulnerable to facing a relatively slow reopening. The nature of many team sports (or in our case maritime activities), is a close proximity of young people with each other. Residential delivery in dormitory style accommodation also raises significant social distancing issues for some of the services we deliver. We therefore expect that many youth charities are likely to have a longer period than most other charities where they are not able to fully reopen all of their services. Where delivery of these services is augmented with employed staff (such as the Sea Cadets offshore fleet of ships, normally taking 60 young people on offshore voyages every week) wind down of government support such as Furlough will force many to lay off otherwise essential staff until they reach a point to safely re-open.

⁷ 97 units (approximately 1/4 of our total units), are in 60 of the 80 local authorities which contain the most left behind neighbourhoods (based on Left Behind understanding communities on the edge, a report by Local Trust)

21. We believe it's really important that the essential infrastructure role provided by these federations is recognised to make sure the government can effectively partner with them to support their members who can in turn provide for and support young people.

Impact on volunteers

22. Volunteers are the lifeblood of effective youth work. We would not be able to do what we do without our 9,000 volunteers and we know the same is true, for any of the major uniformed youth charities.

23. More broadly when looking at how government engages with youth work we worry that at times the importance of volunteers is not fully recognised.

24. As we did with cadets we've been collecting data about how our volunteers are doing during the shutdown. Provisional results tell us just over 4 in 10 of them are key workers, and 16% are currently shielding. So we know it's an incredibly difficult and stressful time for many of our volunteers. We also know that seeing the difference they make in young people's lives is often a really important part of their personal well-being. We are therefore particularly worried about the impact the Covid-19 is having on the well-being of volunteers in the youth sector, facing a combination of both the same stresses and anxieties that are hitting everyone and losing one of their main anchors, the work they do with young people.

25. Taking a step forward as the shutdown loosens we also think it's really important there's appropriate help and support to help volunteers to transition back into volunteering in the same way we know there will be to help people transition back into the workplace. We are already looking, based on current government guidance, at how to best support volunteers in delivering effective socially distanced and safe support to young people not just for the good of young people but also for the health and well-being of the volunteers themselves; but no matter what we do this is an area where we know there will be significant impact for the sector, and it is an area that needs to be recognised.

26. Positive public recognition of the work that volunteers do for young people and the critical role they have to play at this time, would go a long way to re-invigorate them as well as inspire others to join them.

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