

Access to Facilities – Follow up Survey October 2020



Purpose and Reach of Survey

In August 2020, YouthLink Scotland asked organisations from across the youth work sector to participate in a survey that would provide a snapshot of current access to community facilities by youth work organisations across the country, and shed more light on the challenges and barriers faced by organisations carrying out digital, detached and outdoor youth work, whilst making preparations for safe indoor working. This first survey was done in advance of the opening of indoor youth work, which didn't occur until 31st August¹, with updated youth work guidance² issued on the 4th September, after the survey closed.

A second, shorter survey to track change over time was carried out between September 28th and October 9th 2020. Over that period 133 organisations accessed the survey and 108 submitted responses (compared to 46 responses in the earlier survey).

Of these:

- 20 represented Local Authority youth work / CLD teams (compared to 9 in the earlier survey)
- The rest were local third sector organisations, including 76 responses from local branches of Scouts Scotland
- The ratio of third sector youth organisations to Local Authority youth organisations was 80/20 in both surveys
- As with the earlier survey, organisations participating this time around were widely geographically dispersed, operating in 29 of Scotland's 32 local authorities. Edinburgh was particularly well represented, with 18 responses, and more than 10 responses were also received from Fife, Renfrewshire and North Lanarkshire

Details of the information gathered through the new survey are summarised below.

Where is outdoor youth work taking place?

Most of the organisations who participated in the survey said that they were offering outdoor youth work, in a diverse range of locations. These include parks, youth centre grounds, woodland, community green spaces, open countryside, outdoor centres, beaches, local streets, school grounds, church hall grounds, allotments and campsites. Five organisations said they were unable to offer outdoor youth work due to a lack of suitable space locally.

Only 5% of organisations said that they were not yet able / permitted to offer youth work services. This is a significant shift since our earlier survey was completed in early September, when 39% of respondents said they were not yet offering face-to-face youth work outdoors or indoors due to guidance from their national body, or due to local concerns about safety.

It's clear that youth workers are finding creative solutions to offering youth work in the outdoors – under tarpaulins and gazebos, by 'a spray-painting wall', in a polytunnel – even in car parks. Some groups have moved meetings from week day evenings to weekends to make the most of daylight hours and more

¹ Some youth work indoors that was part of regulated work, such as that within schools or with vulnerable groups in other settings had been occurring before the 31st August.

² A full list of the guidance is available at <https://www.youthlinkscotland.org/covid-19-guidance/youth-work-recovery-resources/> We are still awaiting Guidance relating to the use of Community Centres.

manageable weather conditions. It is clear, however, that conditions are restrictive, uncomfortable - and that they offer little privacy for vulnerable young people who need individual support. The anxiety is that, once again, young people who are most in need of support are being most adversely affected:

“We’re doing youth work under tarpaulins. The young people really want face-to-face contact, so they are happy to come, but it’s getting colder and we can’t work like this indefinitely – not least because many of them are just not equipped with the warm clothing they’d need to meet outside at this time of year.”

“There are cultural barriers – families don’t like young people – particularly girls – to be outdoors or on transport after school.”

‘...youth members who are meeting at the grounds of our halls have access to the building’s toilets but when meeting at local parks we have no facilities.’

“We will be restricted by lack of light, heating and wash facilities.”

“We’ve only just set up street-based services with no facilities apart from our own cars, bags etc.”

Access to facilities for indoor youth work

It’s important to note that we have not surveyed exactly the same group of organisations as we did in August – the sample on both occasions was self-selecting. Our results are not a like-for like comparison. However, the ratio of local authority youth work teams to third sector organisations is the same in both surveys, so the comparison is still a very useful one to explore.

The charts overleaf show that, whilst access to indoor facilities is somewhat improved in some settings, particularly third sector youth centres, there is no clear improvement in others. Leisure centres remain the least accessible venues, providing only partial access to around 5% of the organisations who hope to use them (this compares unfavourably to 15% access in the original sample, possibly because some summer holiday childcare hubs were still operating out of leisure centres at that time).

Comparing the responses of local authority teams and third sector organisations also highlights some significant differences (see appendix for full comparison):

- 47% of Local Authority youth workers have some access to Local Authority Community Centres compared to just 15% of third sector organisations who would like to have access.
- 42% of Local Authority youth workers have full or partial access to schools, compared to just 18% of third sector organisations who would like to have access.
- 45% of participating third sector organisations say they are accessing outdoor centres compared to just 13% of Local Authority Youth Workers – it’s important to note that these are almost exclusively Scouts Activity Centres, due to the high number of responses from Scouts groups in the sample of third sector organisations.

Fig 1: Access to facilities in August / September (all participating organisations)

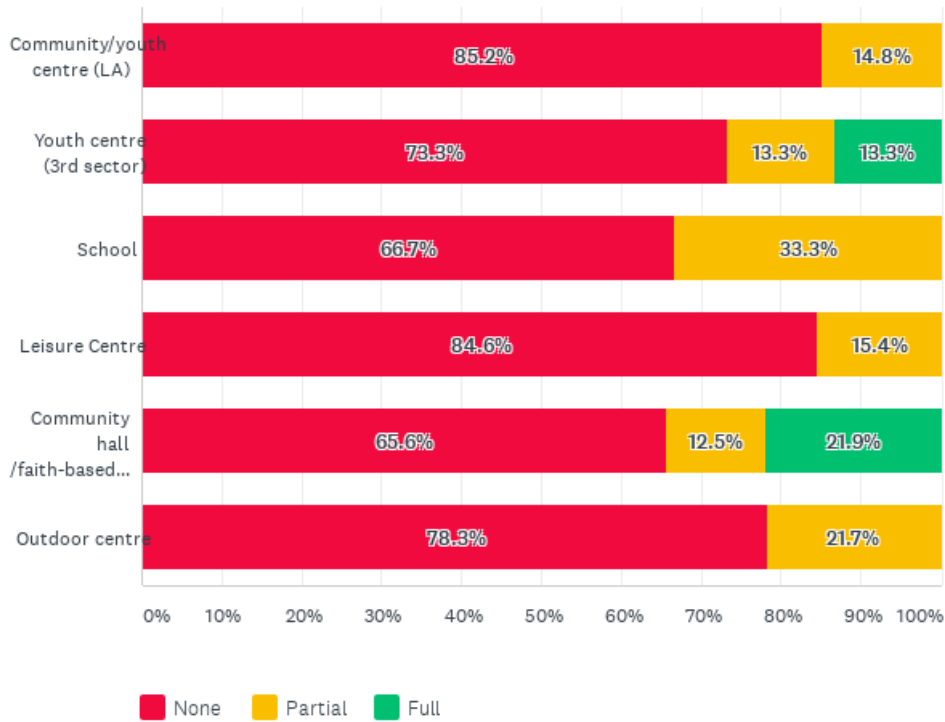
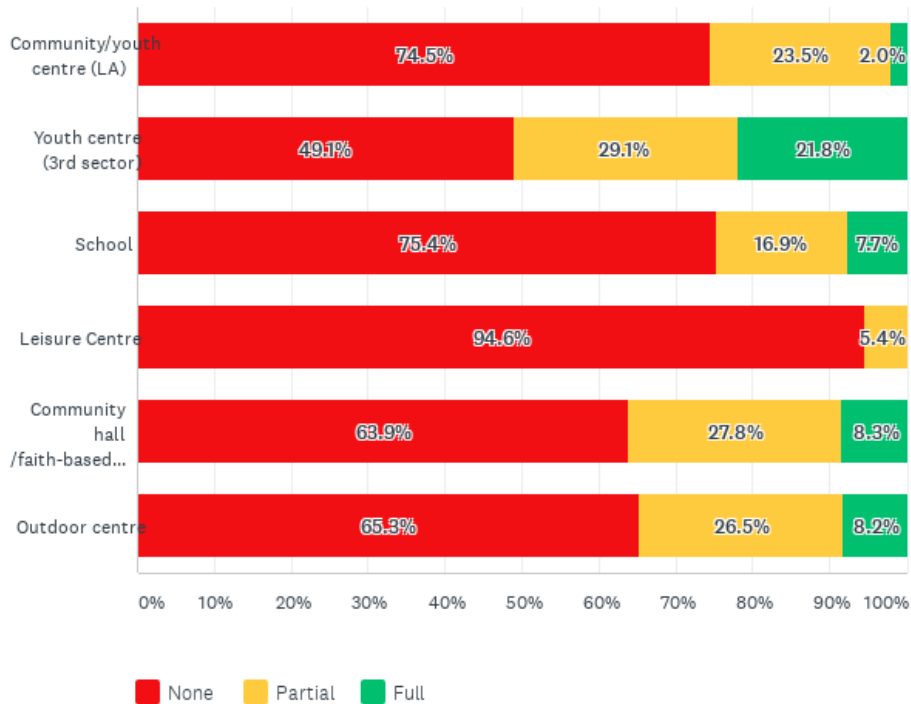


Fig 2: Access to facilities in October (all participating organisations)



Most Common Barriers to Access

Guidance for indoor youth work has been in place since September 4th, but it is clear that the challenges around access to facilities to allow this to take place are far from resolved. The picture is a complex one and challenges relating to access are varied and interrelated. Key issues, based on frequency of mention, are outlined below:

1. Local / organisational interpretation of national guidance means that community facilities remain closed.
2. Local/ organisational interpretation of national guidance has resulted in community facilities and schools being inaccessible to youth work organisations.
3. Indoor facilities are not deemed safe to open, following risk assessment.
4. There is confusion / anxiety about guidance– and possible associated liabilities – amongst venue providers, particularly volunteer-led committees, who are responsible for the management of community halls.
5. Social distancing for the over 12s makes meeting difficult – there is a need to work in smaller groups / rotate contact.
6. There are difficulties with cleaning requirements - usually linked to cost.
7. A lack of adequate washing facilities restricts use of some older spaces.
8. Even when venues are open, they are not operating at full capacity.
9. Some local guidance requires youth workers to operate out of a single local facility.
10. Transport logistics can be complicated and add to costs of activity.
11. Youth work volunteers in third sector organisations are struggling to make time to deal with additional requirements relating to risk assessments.

“[There is] still a genuine fear that in some way you will be breaking the rules or contracting and spreading the virus.”

“There has been little guidance / support to the voluntary committees who manage community centres - that has delayed their opening.”

“Volunteer committee that run hall are getting to grips with rules and cleaning schedules as we would be first group back. Anxiety about liability...”

“... we are hampered by lack of knowledge in others of youth work guidance (that we are able to operate) and lack of certainty with those managing the spaces unable to make definite bookings.”

“Our group are struggling with the resources needed to fulfil Covid-19 risk assessments such as deep cleaning, sanitising of toilet and kitchen facilities. There is also a heavy burden on the adult volunteers to manage youth meetings and equipment. Our hall requires upgrades to the kitchen and toilet facilities to aid hygiene standards plus disabilities access.”

“At present many of the schools are using the community use side of the building - such as for extra rooms for music etc. and for additional toilets, to cater for the needs of the pupils in line with Covid guidelines. This means that the community associations are unable to hire out these facilities for community use such as youth club.”

Concerns and Frustrations

It's clear from the responses to the questionnaire that youth workers are fully cognisant of the difficult decisions that councils and volunteer committees face regarding access to facilities- and the seriousness of

what is at stake. They are also sympathetic to the fact that community centres are still awaiting guidance – and it's clear that when this is in place, they are willing to work in partnership with them, and support them to prepare for opening:

“Many independent halls, all of which are run completely by volunteers do not yet feel that they are in a position to open as they require to get a lot of guidelines in place. Within...CLD we will support them to do this, but as yet there is no national guidance for them to follow in re-opening.”

They also accept that certain kinds of youth work are incompatible with the requirements of test and trace:

“We will not...launch drop-ins for the foreseeable (too hard to do in Covid context without compromising our youth work values).”

Inevitably, however, concerns and frustration are growing because youth workers are aware that urgent needs of young people are not being met:

“A young person might contact us in a lot of distress and we are trying to offer support on a doorstep, or on a walk. It's desperate.”

“You can't have a conversation in a Costa Coffee shop about a child protection issue or about self-harming...no one seems to factor in that we are often working with vulnerable young people.”

“Outdoor group work has been possible, but with reduced light and climate, is challenging. Youth workers are seeking spaces in coffee shops, supermarkets, and carparks to be able to have shelter/conversations with young people for support and meetings on projects. The digital challenges continue and return to face-to-face is what young people are requesting.”

Youth workers feel councils are moving too slowly and not communicating well:

“The council are very difficult to get a hold of and have not been very forthcoming with information regarding when or if they will allow us to gain access to indoor premises. We have equipment stored in the premises we use and we are not permitted to access to retrieve this equipment either which is very frustrating. All this and we haven't even had the opportunity to risk assess the venues to ensure there are adequate facilities in place.”

“We lease the building from [the council] though have no access and no timescales for access. We have completed all risk assessments, paperwork etc. and have appropriate insurance in place though are still not granted access to deliver controlled indoor youth work. We have submitted and continue to do deputations to [the council] to progress this, though at this stage are still no further forward. Our local Recovery Group initially granted us access to resume indoor youth groups but have since withdrawn that permission. We are unable to operate school based youth groups as we don't have access to school lets in the evening and after school. Only school groups are using our youth centre on a few hours per day.”

“We had a very comprehensive risk assessment done. To resume our let of the local school - this had to be submitted. Changes were asked for on 3 occasions that had nothing to do with risk assessment. We complied with each request, then had our application turned down at the last minute when we were led to believe what we had was good and should get the go ahead - even though we submitted the national guidance ... The next date for this to be reviewed was not until mid- October. I asked who we could appeal to. Council came back to us and said that they would review our application. Another 3 rounds of insignificant amendments, again that should not be on a risk assessment, but we finally got approval to return. First night back inside was Monday 28th September.”

“...youth centre from which we operate was risk assessed for Covid-19 and all necessary precautions and procedures put in place to resume limited indoor youth work. This was approved by the council Covid-19

recovery group. Then Thursday 24th September, one day before the first session resumed, the approval was withdrawn.”

“there are no Primary School evening lets and Community Centres remain closed. Disgraceful!”

“While we own our own youth centre which is predominately used for 16+ support services, our core funding for this comes from [the council] who are not funding us to restart programmes as of yet.”

“Frustrations include lack of communication and no- one has considered asking if we could meet safely as I am sure we could put measures in place ... I feel that fear has caused a blanket ban on all group meetings instead of allowing choice and thinking about the needs and capabilities of different groups.”

“Local community centres staff are still furloughed so no communication other than it may be the end of October or end of January before the centres open.”

There is frustration that volunteer committees are putting up unnecessary barriers due to a lack of understanding of the guidance

“The Hall Exec Committee are also being awkward in that they are stating they will have to apply for a Public Entertainment Licence before they can re-open and that this will all take time. Having contacted a friend who works in the Licensing Dept of our local Council, an Entertainment Licence is not required at the moment as due to Government restrictions, there will be no live music, dances, film shows taking place in the premises. We are hitting our heads off a brick wall!”

There are perceived inconsistencies in approach

“Use of Church Halls.... it is a very long unclear process for gaining access, as each church is doing something differently. At present we are still not getting access even though they have granted access to a small fitness class. We have full Covid Approval with approved Risk Assessments etc. in place. It would be great if you can pressure... to ensure a consistent approach.”

“Community Centres and Halls are run by a Trust who appear to be opening up income generating facilities first.”

There is a feeling that colleagues in formal education could sometimes be more supportive:

“The University haven’t given us permission to use the...gardens. The police keep being called.”

“I have asked if we could pay to use the playground in the school where we would usually meet which is a safe, secure, gated, AstroTurf area but been told no.”

“...access to toilets and handwashing is a real concern - partners such as schools are not meeting their health and safety responsibilities to partners.”

There are worries about medium term impact on engagement - and potential associated impact on funding

“Not able to meet... Losing interest and connection to leaders and young people”

“Young people losing interest in online meetings...no access to indoor meeting place as we approach winter”

“We have suspended subscription fees until January but will face financial issues should we not return to a regular face to face programme”

October Survey – Appendix

Comparison of Local Authority Youth Work and Third Sector Youth Work Access

Figure 1: Local Authority Access to Facilities

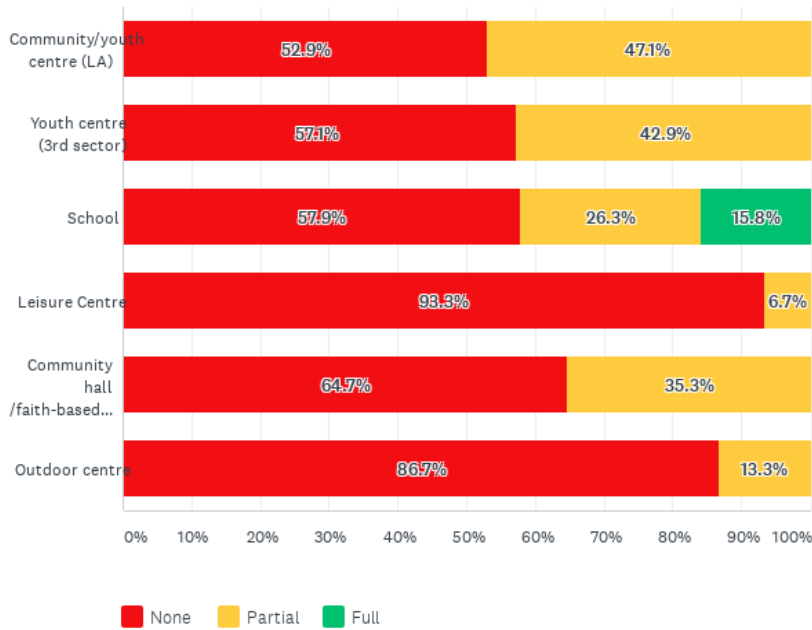


Figure 2: Third Sector Access to Facilities

