



# **The Listening Fund (Scotland): Final Learning Report**

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June 2021



## The Centre for Youth Impact

The Centre for Youth Impact is a community of organisations that works together to progress thinking and practice about impact measurement in youth work and services for young people. Our vision is for all young people to have access to high quality provision and services that improve their life chances, by enabling embedded approaches to impact measurement that directly inform practice. Our work, therefore, is dedicated to three objectives, together with our expanded networks and other organisations from across the youth sector: curating the debate, building the movement, and shaping the future.

## Acknowledgements

The Centre for Youth Impact is grateful to Corra Foundation, Comic Relief, the National Lottery Community Fund, and the Gannochy Trust, and the William Grant Foundation for funding this evaluation as part of their shared commitment to the Listening Fund. Additionally, we would like to thank the 11 Listening Fund partners for participating in the evaluation, and for their willingness to share their perspectives and experiences to support wider learning on organisational listening with young people. We are especially thankful to the three organisations – Impact Arts, Elgin Youth Development Group and Hot Chocolate Trust – that took part as case studies.

Given the ethos behind the Listening Fund, it was fundamentally important that this evaluation incorporated young people’s views on listening, to understand when and how they felt heard and empowered to become agents of change. We are therefore very grateful to all the young people who contributed to the evaluation, through their participation in interviews, focus groups, and surveys.



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## Executive Summary

### Background and aims

The Listening Fund aims to advance the ability of the youth sector to listen and respond to their core constituents: children and young people. The Listening Fund Scotland is supported by the National Lottery Community Fund, Corra Foundation, Comic Relief, the Gannochy Trust, and the William Grant Foundation. 11 youth organisations (referred to as ‘partners’) were funded over two years, from 2018 to 2021, to develop their listening practice. The total Fund size was £340,000 and grants ranged from approximately £17,000 to £40,000.

The Centre for Youth Impact has conducted an evaluation of the Listening Fund, aiming to learn about specific aspects of listening to support the learning of the funded organisations and to advance practice in the sector as a whole. A parallel Listening Fund ran in England from March 2018-March 2020, and the evaluation in Scotland draws on the experience and learning from the England Fund, for which the final learning report can be found [here](#)<sup>1</sup>. The central research question for the evaluation of both cohorts was: *‘What is the impact of dedicated funder support on organisational listening practice?’*

The Fund in Scotland included a further research question reflecting the addition of a ‘development phase’ at the start of the fund to allow young people to input into fund design. The evaluation of the Fund in Scotland also aimed to answer: *‘To what extent have young people shaped the development of the Fund and the actions and decisions of the funders themselves?’*

This is the final report from the Listening Fund Scotland. Research for this evaluation was conducted using a combination of light touch quantitative methods and more in-depth qualitative methods. All methods were designed, firstly, to provide direct insights for each partner organisations to improve their listening practice, and secondly, to enable the evaluation team to draw out learning at the cohort level. Various resources to support the development of listening for organisations working with young people, including a feedback survey for young people and an organisational self-assessment, are publicly available and are signposted throughout this report.

### Impacts of the Listening Fund

Overall, the findings suggest that dedicated funder support for organisational listening can result in positive change to organisational delivery and strategy, with an improved focus on and response to young people’s needs. A key piece of learning from the evaluation is that, to ‘do listening well’ – in a manner that is driven by young people and leads to tangible action based on what they say – is challenging and requires dedicated time and investment. This is something that is often underestimated and, through providing a dedicated resource, the Listening Fund has resulted in some significant progress in partners’ abilities to listen.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.youthimpact.uk/uploads/1/1/4/1/114154335/listening\\_fund\\_report\\_final.pdf](https://www.youthimpact.uk/uploads/1/1/4/1/114154335/listening_fund_report_final.pdf)

Overall, partners reported that they were listening more consistently, and were more intentional about co-designing activities with young people. From the start to the end of the Fund, partners reported:

- drawing on a greater range of mechanisms to listen to young people;
- greater focus on ‘representative listening’; and
- a greater depth of listening for co-design of provision activities and overall strategy.

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, partners felt that their listening practice improved their ability to respond to young people’s needs.

Young people reported a range of positive change over the course of the Listening Fund, including:

- gaining greater influence and decision-making capacities within organisations;
- improved delivery of provision; and
- feeling better supported through having their voices heard at critical moments within their lives, both within and beyond their organisations.

Many partners have made progress towards embedding better and more consistent listening practices within their organisations through the codification of these practices and supporting staff to build their confidence in listening. Importantly, many partners felt they were still just at the beginning of their listening journey – this is a long-term process that will take further time and energy to embed in organisational practice. Relatedly, there needs to be a greater understanding of the investment (both in terms of time and resource) that is needed to ‘do organisational listening’ sustainably and consistently well. Findings have also shown that there is room for more progress to be made in areas like ‘closing the feedback loop’, and highlighted that support is needed for young people’s voices to meaningfully inform organisational strategy.

We advocate for a focus on listening, both within organisations and from funders, as an opportunity to improve outcomes for young people. Change happens for young people as a result of:

- relationships with trusted adults, peers, and their environment;
- spaces for interaction and engagement; and
- opportunities to lead and influence.

Listening to young people allows practitioners to simultaneously measure the extent to which these conditions are present, while also enhancing them.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 The Listening Fund

The Listening Fund supports youth-focused organisations to develop their practice of listening to young people and responding to what they hear. The Fund's objective is to advance the ability of the youth sector to listen to the voices of young people, to enable them to have a greater say in shaping the provision they receive and to be agents of change on issues affecting them.

The Listening Fund in Scotland is supported by the National Lottery Community Fund, Corra Foundation, Comic Relief, the Gannochy Trust, and the William Grant Foundation. The £340,000 Fund supported 11 organisations (originally 12) (referred to as 'partners') to develop their listening practice over two years, from 2019 to 2021. Grant sizes ranged from approximately £17,000 to £44,000. A parallel Listening Fund ran in England funding 22 youth organisations from 2018 to 2020. The Listening Fund evaluation in Scotland draws on the experience and learning from the England Fund, for which the final learning report can be found [here](#)<sup>2</sup>.

The partners in the Listening Fund Scotland varied geographically, in types of provision, and the young people they engaged. Across the partners there were organisations offering targeted provision, as well as more universal offers. Activities delivered as part of the Listening Fund included:

- evaluations/reviews of current listening practices (including drawing on external support);
- developing listening policies, toolkits, and staff training;
- recruitment of dedicated youth workers to coordinate specific listening activities;
- targeted listening work to capture the voices and needs of particular groups;
- supporting young people to undertake peer-listening activities and feed back into the organisation; and
- creating opportunities for and supporting young people to directly engage with external stakeholders.

The full list of partners and details of projects funded can be found in the Appendix A.

### 1.2 Defining 'listening'

By 'listening' we are referring to an active process where young people are given tangible opportunities to have a say in, and shape, youth provision, or to influence wider policies and practices. There are two related but distinct types of listening that partners' projects focused on:

- Internally-focused listening: a process where an organisation takes account of young people's views, opinions and experiences with the aim of developing their offer, in terms of the activities and services they deliver and how they are delivered; and

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<sup>2</sup> [https://www.youthimpact.uk/uploads/1/1/4/1/114154335/listening\\_fund\\_report\\_final.pdf](https://www.youthimpact.uk/uploads/1/1/4/1/114154335/listening_fund_report_final.pdf)

- Advocacy-focused listening: a process where an organisation provides young people with opportunities to influence external organisations, agencies or institutions, such as local authorities or national bodies, on the basis of their views and experiences.

Some partners' funded projects were more internally focused and some more advocacy-focused. Often, projects had elements of both types of listening, with examples of project activities and where they sit on a spectrum of internally- to advocacy-focused outlined in Figure 1 below.



Figure 1: Examples of internally- and advocacy-focused listening from Funded activities

### 1.3 The Listening Fund Evaluation

The Centre for Youth Impact was commissioned to evaluate the Listening Funds in both Scotland and England, in order to optimise learning from the Funds. The evaluations aimed to understand the impact of the Listening Funds on the practice of the funded organisations, whilst also making a broader contribution to the evidence base around organisational listening. The central research question for the evaluations was:

*What is the impact of dedicated funder support on organisational listening practice?*

To answer the above research question, the evaluations for the Listening Fund in Scotland (and in England<sup>3</sup>) addressed the following sub-questions:

1. What changed for partners as a result of the Listening Fund? (in listening practice and in organisational practice)
2. What changed for young people as a result of the Listening Fund? (in experience of provision and in outcomes)

<sup>3</sup> Three learning reports have been published detailing the findings from the evaluation of the Fund in England. The [first report](#) explores early findings from the first partner self-assessment, the [second report](#) shares interim findings from the mid-point of the Fund, and the [third report](#) is the final report for the England cohort, building on existing findings with additional research that took place over the second year of the Fund.

3. What are the enablers to meaningful practice in organisational listening and responding to young people?
4. What are the barriers to meaningful practice in organisational listening and responding to young people?

In addition, the evaluation of the Listening Fund Scotland aimed to answer:

5. To what extent have young people shaped the development of the Fund and the actions and decisions of the funders themselves?

The additional research question was added because, in the early stages, all five funders in the Listening Fund Scotland flagged it as a key priority to hear the views and opinions of children and young people to help shape and develop the Fund itself. Therefore, it was agreed that a three-month development phase would be initiated prior to the roll out of the Fund, which aimed to listen to youth organisations and young people about what the focus of the Fund should be. The learning and outcomes from this process are explored in the [interim report](#),<sup>4</sup> and in Section 3.6 of this report.

Over the second year of the Fund, the evaluation also sought to focus on three specific areas of interest, guided by key learning points from the interim report:

1. Given the consensus that the process of completing the partner self-assessment was valuable in terms of generating discussion and creating time for self-reflection, the Fund(ers) should focus on ways of maintaining open lines of communication and conversation around listening practice with, and across partners.
2. Following on from the Fund development phase, a youth advisory panel has been established. It will be valuable for the Funders to further explore and trial ways to engage young people in the Fund, for example considering how to increase the presence and participation of young people in partner learning days.
3. In light of the increase in the use of listening practices to shape organisations at a strategic level, the evaluation should explore the impact of engagement with listening practices on senior leadership and organisational strategy, to highlight examples of good practice.

These three areas will be touched upon throughout this report.

Our intention is that the Listening Fund evaluations will not only offer insights for the organisations and funders that are directly involved in the Fund, but also that this learning will be applied more widely. The evaluation of the Fund in Scotland stands separate from the evaluation of the Fund in England, but we aim to use the combined learning to enhance the understanding of listening practice, highlighting similarities and differences across the two nations. Given this, references to the findings from the evaluation in England can be found throughout the discussion.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.youthimpact.uk/sites/default/files/2021-04/LF%20Scotland%20Interim%20Report%2031.07.2020%20FINAL%20%281%29.pdf>

## COVID-19

Data collection for this evaluation was impacted by the UK-wide lockdown in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. In particular, the young people’s feedback survey, and the mid-point and end-point partner self-assessments were collected after March 2020 and reflect the disruption that has been caused to youth provision since this time. The impact of this disruption on the partners’ progress is therefore accounted for in this final report – touched on throughout and discussed explicitly in Section 3.5.

Additionally, the impact of listening practice on provision specifically in the context of the pandemic is explored in this report.

## 2. Methodology

In designing the evaluation for the Listening Fund, a key consideration was ensuring that the research methods were beneficial to partners. This involved guaranteeing they were low burden and that they facilitated actionable learning. The evaluation involved elements of co-design to ensure the process was relevant (such as the design of the questions in the listening feedback survey and self-assessment) and encouraged critical reflection through the self-assessment process.

The Listening Fund evaluation drew on a range of data sources. These include:

- a self-assessment completed by partners;
- semi-structured interviews with the Fund managers and young people;
- a feedback survey collected by young people;
- in-depth case studies with three partners; and
- 18-month project update reports submitted to the Fund by partners.

These methods were selected and designed with two aims:

- to provide insights for each partner organisation to develop and improve their own listening practice; and
- to enable the evaluation team to draw out learning at the cohort level in order to identify effective approaches, as well as areas of challenge.

Table 1 shows the timeline of evaluation activities according to data collection method. Data collection tools, including the partner self-assessment, feedback survey for young people, and interview guides can be found in appendices.

*Table 1: Evaluation methods*

<b>Evaluation method</b>	<b>Project Year and Date</b>	<b>Response rate</b>
Partner self-assessment (baseline)	Year 1 (April 2019)	All 11 partners
Telephone interviews with the Fund manager and young people involved in the design of the Fund	Year 1 (March 2020)	Two young people interviewed; Incoming and outgoing Fund manager interviewed (Year 1)

Evaluation method	Project Year and Date	Response rate
Interview with the Fund manager	Year 2 (March 2021)	Fund manager interviewed
Partner self-assessment (mid-point)	Year 1 (April 2020)	All 11 partners
Young people's listening feedback survey*	Year 2 (October 2020)	106 completed surveys from nine partners
In-depth organisational case studies with three partners	Year 2 (March 2021)	Case studies: Elgin Youth Development Group; Hot Chocolate Trust; Impact Arts
Review of 18-month progress update report submitted to the funder	Year 2 (March 2021)	All partners submitted update forms
Partner self-assessment (end-point)	Year 2 (March 2021)	All 11 partners

\*Delayed due to disruption to youth provision by the UK lockdown in response to the COVID-19 pandemic

## 2.1 Partner self-assessment

Most novel in the evaluation of the Listening Fund was the partner self-assessment. This tool was designed to explore different elements of how the partners listen to young people: as far as we are aware, this is the first of its kind. Originally designed for the Listening Fund in England, it was adapted for the context of the Scotland Fund. The self-assessment takes a broad conception of organisational listening, drawing on Jim Macnamara's 'Architecture of Listening' framework,<sup>5</sup> which adopts the following definition:

*“Organisational listening is comprised of the culture, policies, structure, processes, resources, skills, technologies and practices applied by an organisation to give recognition, acknowledgement, attention, interpretation, understanding, consideration, and response to its stakeholders and publics.” (Macnamara 2015)*

The self-assessment contains 24 core questions, related to the above definition, which are framed specifically within the context of working with young people. It includes questions on:

- listening practice;
- culture;
- skills;
- resources;
- communication; and
- acting on what is heard.

The assessment tool was tested and refined through engagement with four organisations not funded as part of the Listening Fund. The purpose of the tool is both to aid the partners' reflection

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<sup>5</sup> Macnamara, J. (2015). *Creating an 'Architecture of Listening' in Organisations: The basis of engagement, trust, democracy, social equity, and business sustainability*. Sydney: University of Technology Sydney.

on their listening, as well as enabling the evaluation team to identify change in the cohort over time. Two questions were added at the mid-point self-assessment, plus a further question was added at the end-point, to understand the adaptations, challenges and opportunities that have occurred as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The quantitative data from the self-assessment has been analysed using Microsoft Excel 2010. The open responses were collated with other sources of qualitative data (case study interviews and 18-month progress reports) and subjected to thematic analysis. An overview of themes, sub-themes and supporting data extracts can be found in Appendix B.

Feedback on the self-assessment tool from partners was that it is both valid as an assessment of organisational listening practice, and useful as a reflective tool to plan improvements. Partners felt that the self-assessment had given new insights, and provided an opportunity to celebrate success and progress, as well as motivation to continue focusing on listening. The self-assessment tool is publicly available for any organisation across the youth sector to use to reflect on and analyse their own listening practice. The tool can be found on [the Listening Fund website](#)<sup>6</sup>, alongside other supporting resources, and can also be found in Appendix C.

### Limitations of evaluation methodology

In their feedback on the evaluation process, partners that the self-assessment tool does have some practical limitations. It was perceived to:

- potentially limit the variance within organisations between different projects, teams and individuals because only one set of ‘scores’ was submitted;
- involve a lengthy completion time of up to one hour for some partners; and
- contain some complex questions that needed breaking down in order to be addressed.

Despite these limitations, partners clearly saw the value in having time for self-reflection, and some requested a copy of their responses to allow them to evaluate progress. This suggests that the original tool requires some revisions but overall is a worthwhile process to aid active reflection on organisational listening practice.

There were also some challenges encountered with collecting responses for the listening feedback survey during the pandemic: not all young people had access to devices to respond digitally, and social distancing prevented the survey being conducted in person. This inevitably introduced bias in the respondent sample, evidenced by the fact that two partners did not collect any responses from young people, and numbers of responses varied significantly between partners (from two to 39). Additionally, for the case study research it is likely that the young people who took part were those who were already typically more engaged with, and dedicated to, organisations’ listening activities, therefore influencing the findings.

We recognise that the overall structure of evaluation was designed by the Centre for Youth Impact and the funders before final selection of funded partners had been made. The evaluation also sought to draw comparison across cohorts, which meant there was little flexibility in methods

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<sup>6</sup> [www.thelisteningfund.org/resources-for-partners](http://www.thelisteningfund.org/resources-for-partners)

used in Scotland. This evaluation has taught us the importance of being flexible to the changing needs of funded organisations, given the challenges that the pandemic has created for the youth sector. Specific consultation at the mid-point of the Fund, to explore the feasibility or delivery of evaluation of activities may have garnered insight into where they could have been adapted (for example format of the young person feedback survey or timing of the end-point self-assessment) to be more valuable to partners. Finally, given the focus on developing tools for reflective practice, it is suggested that in future, data from individual organisations (i.e. the self-assessment and young person's feedback) are shared in real-time with partners, to allow them to undertake their own analysis and respond to the findings.

### 3. Discussion of key findings

This section explores the findings from the evaluation, structured according to the main research questions and drawing on and triangulating data from the various research methods that were employed. A section dedicated to understanding the challenges and opportunities of listening during the pandemic is also included. All quotations in the following sections are taken from staff members involved in the Listening Fund and are representative of broader views and experiences that the evaluation team heard or collected. Respondent IDs can be found in Appendix A.

#### 3.1 What changed for partners as a result of the Fund?

Overall, partners have found taking part in the Fund to be an extremely valuable process. It both supported an understanding of where their current listening practices were effective and led to some specific changes for partners around their approach to listening. Key learning themes under this question included:

- the value of an intentional focus on 'listening';
- design and mechanics of listening;
- codifying listening practices and mechanisms;
- ensuring listening practices engage young people representative of the young people partners work with;
- engaging young people in the whole listening process; and
- using listening to inform organisational strategy.

##### 3.1.1 The value of an intentional focus on 'listening'

Dedicated time and resources to focus on listening allowed partners to be more reflective in their work, and stretch themselves to work with young people in more collaborative ways. Partners became "*more aware of what we are already doing*" and with that awareness, recognised areas for improvement.

The challenge with this listening practice, which is core to youth sector values and therefore often assumed to be happening as routine, is that when there is no specific resource or structured plan, it can be easy to lose focus. Partners have recognised the value of having space to intentionally focus on listening, to position it "*first and foremost in people's minds*". Accordingly, the number of partners reporting that staff working directly with young people actively create opportunities for listening to young people 'to a great extent' (5 on a five-point scale) increased from two to eight

between the start and end of the Fund. Six partners also reported that their leadership teams created structured time for listening ‘to a great extent’ at the end of the Fund, versus none of the partners at the start.

One project lead observed, “*I think this is the most valuable project I've been involved in since I joined [organisation]. It's about being relevant to young people*”. Partners have reported that an intentional focus on listening has given them a better understanding of the multiple forms and mechanisms for listening to raise young people’s voices and allow them to have meaningful input, both internally and externally.

### 3.1.2 Design and mechanics of listening

Partners used a variety of mechanisms to listen to young people. Figure 2 outlines the main mechanisms used and how they have changed across the Fund. As suggested above, an intentional focus on listening has allowed organisations to stretch themselves in the way they listen to young people. This has meant that partners have been able to test and refine particular tools (Figure 2) to “*trial different ways to and different approaches to get that voice*”. Figure 2 shows an increase (or maintained) use of almost all listening mechanisms included in the survey.

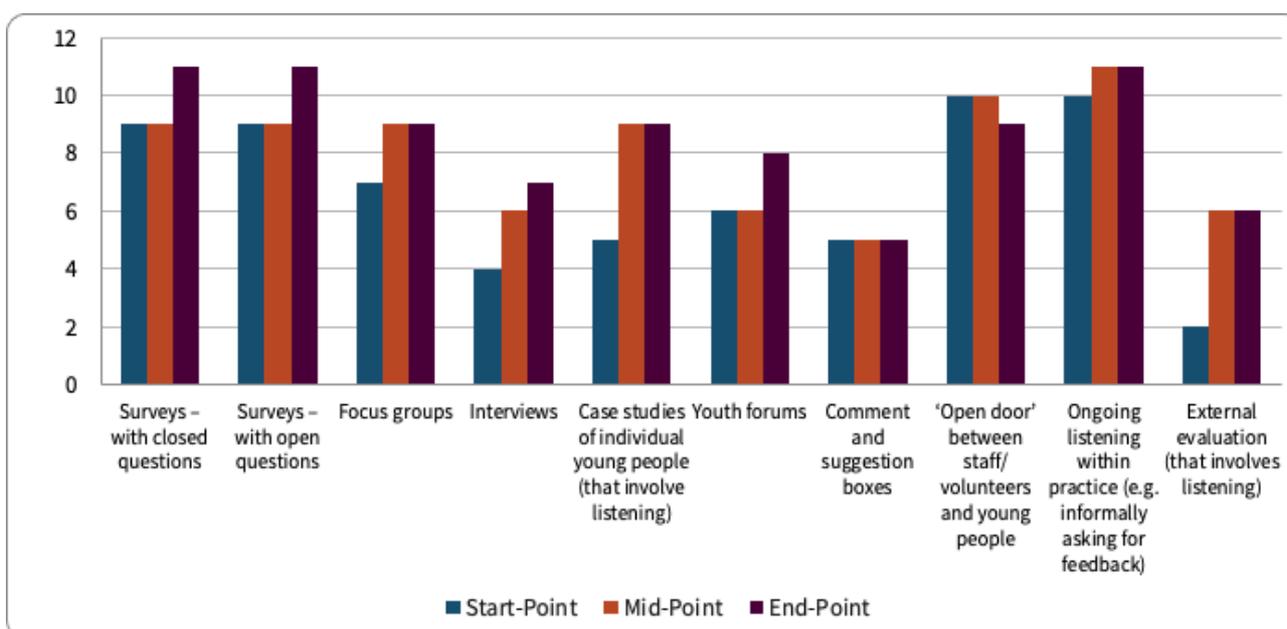


Figure 2: Forms of organisational listening

Partners were also asked questions about the regularity of their listening practices and whether young people could engage anonymously. As a cohort, partners were listening regularly at baseline (i.e. the start of the Fund), with eight partners reporting some kind of weekly listening activity. This regularity of listening has been maintained, with nine partners reporting weekly listening activities at the mid-point self-assessment, and ten at the end-point. Partners also reported providing more opportunities for young people to engage anonymously, with six partners reporting doing this at the start and nine at the mid-point. This increase in opportunities to engage anonymously was maintained over the second year of the Fund. These findings indicate

that partners have maintained a commitment to engaging young people in regular, varied listening practices.

Some partners indicated in the self-assessment that providing regular opportunities for young people to feed back through various methods (anonymously, and in different forms) has been invaluable while engaging young people in online or digital youth work. Partners have reported both a need to listen more attentively and frequently to young people's needs, and the challenges of undertaking more in-depth listening since moving delivery online:

*“Most of our listening is online. Whilst this has allowed engagement to continue, it does not provide a full, active listening experience. We are limited in being able to pick up on body language, change in mood etc. Also, not all young people are comfortable on screen and either refuse to take part or switch their cameras off, further limiting our ability to hear them.”*  
(Respondent A, self-assessment open-ended response)

In the young people's survey, the majority of respondents (68%, n=86), knew at least one way to suggest an idea for improvement in their organisations. 48% of respondents (n=59) reported knowing 'lots of ways to suggest improvements to their organisation'. 10% (n=13) did not know any way tell their organisation about ideas for improvement. Overall, this feedback mostly endorses partners' work in developing a range of listening mechanisms through their projects, though it also indicates room for improvement, for example in terms of publicising opportunities for young people to be listened to more widely and consistently.

### 3.1.3 Codifying listening practices and mechanisms

Many partners have undertaken a process of codifying their listening practices as a way to formalise mechanisms and embed them more deeply within organisational policy and strategy. This has included:

- five partners developing an organisational listening policy or updating existing policies to include aspects of listening (vs. no partners at the start of the Fund);
- the development of listening toolkits for staff to draw upon;
- the development of young people-friendly evaluation and/or feedback tools;
- nine partners including an explicit focus on listening in staff role descriptions (versus four at the start of the Fund); and
- building listening into staff inductions and training.

This codification of the design and mechanics of listening was largely undertaken in collaboration or consultation with young people. This enabled partners to ensure that the tools they were developing were appealing to young people and would be used in the ways intended. A key point of learning is that whilst this is a valuable and worthwhile process, it is often lengthy and non-linear. Understandably this has been challenging during the pandemic when being undertaken remotely, and keeping young people engaged and interested in the process was not always easy.

### 3.1.3 Representative listening

It is important that listening is representative: that is to say, the types of young people that engage in listening activity are similar to the young people who engage more broadly in the organisation's

work. Encouragingly, partners reported that their ability to listen to a representative sample of young people had improved over the life of the Fund, with ten organisations rating the extent of the representativeness of their listening as a four or five at the end-point, versus just four at the start (Figure 3).

Four partners reported that they were already undertaking specific outreach activities at the start of the Fund to engage groups of young people who were less inclined to participate in listening activities. These included:

- experiential workshops to build relationships with young people;
- targeted detached youth work projects; and
- school outreach work.

This number had reduced to two partners at the end-point, as a consequence of lockdown restrictions and the corresponding reprioritisation of their services. However, four partners in the cohort sought to broaden the reach of their listening practices: thinking about who they normally engage, how representative this was of the young people they (seek to) work with, and how they could capture the voices of a greater diversity of young people. A one partner suggested:

*“We had pretty good listening processes in place [...] but our membership had become quite narrow [...] it was a lot of the same kind of kids, so I think for us it was about listening to young people that we weren’t engaging with.”* (Respondent A2, interview)

This required partners to work with external organisations to build new relationships, and provide new channels for listening that may be more appealing to particular groups. Endeavouring to listen to young people not currently engaged with provision opens up organisations to new voices. They should consider how they can respond, and may also have to prepare to respond in new or novel ways.

As part of broadening their reach, two partners also recognised the potential value of user and engagement data as an additional, indirect mechanism through which they could ‘listen’ to young people and be more representative in their listening practices. Up-to-date user and engagement data was seen to allow them to:

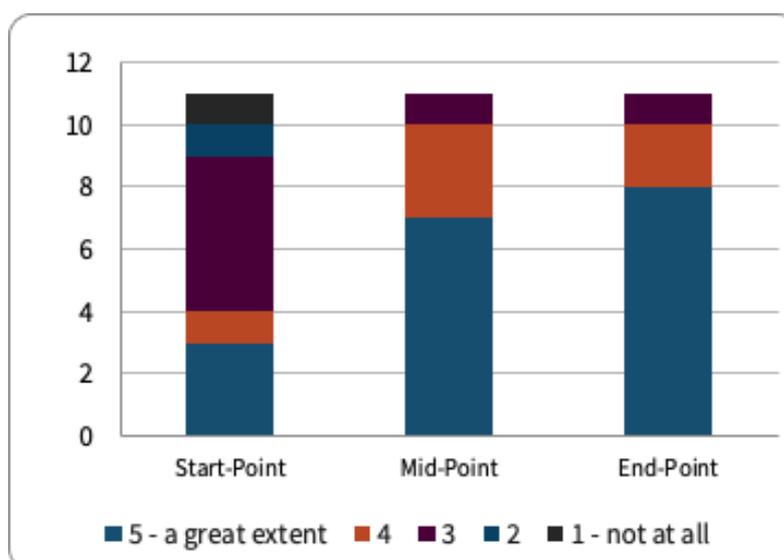


Figure 3: The extent to which partners assess their listening to be representative of the young people they work with

- understand which groups of young people they do/don't engage within their local community to support targeted listening; and
- understand how young people are using their services (e.g. frequency) and therefore whose voices they are more/less likely to be capturing through listening activities.

This highlights the opportunity for organisations to think about the tools they already have at their disposal to enable them to listen to young people. It also points to the value of routine user and engagement data, alongside feedback and outcomes data, in supporting organisations to know where their listening efforts should focus. This can support and enable more equitable listening practices.

Whilst the self-assessment does not show a reported increase in partners checking for biases in who is responding to their listening practices, these activities clearly evidence an awareness of bias, and a move towards ways to identify and address it.

### Case study spotlight: Hot Chocolate Trust

#### *Listening to those less heard*

Hot Chocolate Trust realised they could make better use of their current user and engagement data to understand which young people might be going 'under the radar'. Their internal database gives an indication of the level of activity of a young person within the organisation and therefore *"the level of time and energy, and resource that each young person is getting from us"*. This information allows them to see how equal their distribution of resources is – e.g. who is accessing 1:1 sessions and group workshops every month, and who only does one per year. For Hot Chocolate, this has become another way of listening:

*"Our youth work manager now, is on a regular basis, every couple of months, sitting down with the rest of the youth work team and saying 'look at these stats' 'what is this telling us?' You know, 'are we being too comfortable always going with those young people that we know?' Or 'who are the people that are really low down that engagement list' and 'how can we be much more deliberate in kind of targeting them and listening to their voices that aren't being heard just now?'"* (Respondent B1)

For Hot Chocolate, listening through their database is still in its early stages, but there is a sense that it could lead to a significant shift in the team's strategy over the coming year.

### 3.1.4 Engaging young people in the whole listening process

The self-assessment shows that, overall, partners rated themselves more highly in terms of the extent to which they discuss responses of their listening with young people, analyse the responses of their listening with young people, and create actionable recommendations with young people at the end of the Fund compared to the start (Figure 4). There was a slight decrease in the number

of partners rating themselves a five ('to a great extent') across these aspects of listening between the middle and end-point, which may be as a consequence of focusing on emergency response and remote delivery during periods of lockdown.

Partners were also asked to rate themselves on Hart's Ladder (1997), which presents eight levels of youth participation. Overall, partners rated themselves higher on the ladder at the mid- and end-points of the Fund, with the common self-assessed ratings being level five (young people are consulted and informed) and level six (adult initiated, shared decisions with young people). Important to note is that young people's input and engagement at the various stages of listening can vary significantly, based on a young person's individual circumstances and their level of interest:

*"We've learnt from the young people's responses through this project, that they don't always want to engage in detailed analysis of our listening practice. Sometimes they're just happy to share what's on their mind, and trust the team to respond accordingly. Therefore, each piece of work and interaction with a young person needs to be sensitive to this."* (Respondent B, self-assessment open-ended response)

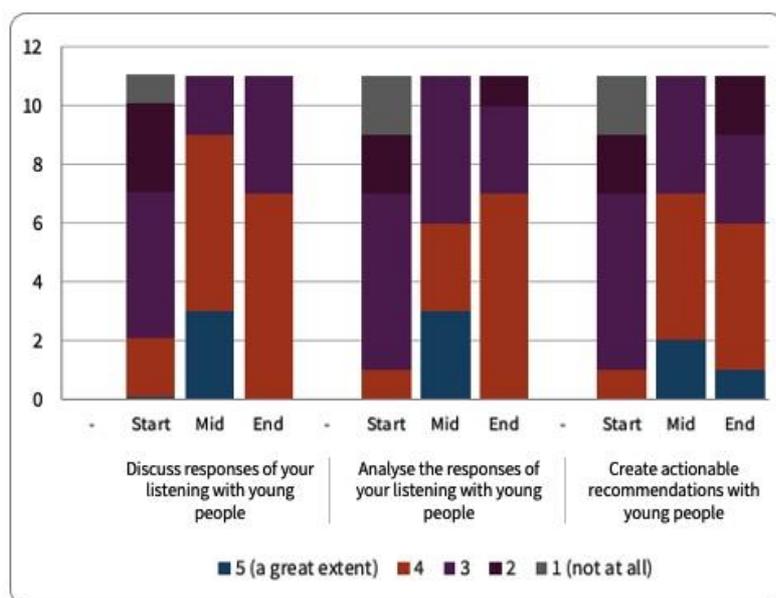


Figure 4: The extent to which partners engage young people in listening in the different ways

This is in line with partners' experiences of engaging young people in strategic level listening (discussed below). It is important not to expect organisations to be able to engage young people in every aspect of the listening process all the time. As noted above, creating actionable recommendations with young people, for example through listening toolkits or guides, can be a lengthy process that requires communication with the young people involved to maintain motivation and enthusiasm. Planning is needed to ensure young people find the process enjoyable and worthwhile.

### 3.1.5 Using listening to inform organisational strategy

Through the Fund, seven partners aimed to explore how they could incorporate young people's voices at a higher level within their organisations. The interim report highlighted this as a key area of interest for the second year of evaluation. Whilst some of this activity was delayed due to the pandemic, partners have reported that engaging young people in decision making processes at a strategic level has supported them to:

- understand how and where they are meeting the needs of young people;
- focus on ensuring work is relevant to local young people's issues, needs and wants - especially in a transition to the 'new normal';
- take action based on listening that is co-designed with young people; and
- enable young people to input into funding applications and business plans.

The main mechanism partners drew upon for using listening to inform organisational strategy was through a youth board or steering group. For many, this created a connection to their organisation's board, through creating opportunities for the trustee board and youth board to contribute to each other's agendas. Creating youth boards or steering groups was also a way of supporting young people to guide listening activities, as they could collect data from other service users and feed this into the organisation or use it to generate ideas and requests to take back to the trustee board.

Whilst for many organisations allowing young people to input at a strategic level is the end-goal, partners reflected on some key challenges and learning around this process:

1. Inviting young people to input into organisational strategy and responding to their ideas requires organisations to be less reactive to funding calls and opportunities, and more strategic in seeking funding that matches service-users requests and ideas.
2. Young people will also need to be supported to input: for example, they may need an explanation of terminology around funding or business models, or support to develop their skills such as using email (particularly when organisations were asking young people to engage digitally).
3. Young people may not be in a position to respond to invitations to input strategically, for example if they have too many personal challenges to invest in this type of listening activity – organisations may need to carefully scaffold strategic listening with pastoral listening activities and relationship building.
4. This work can often be quite 'dry', for example, many young people don't want to sit through a board meeting. It is important to focus on how to make it fun and engaging for young people and a key question needs to be 'what is in it for the young person?'

Mechanisms for listening and engaging young people in listening processes fall along a spectrum – from resource-light mechanisms generating surface level feedback data, through to in-depth, resource-intensive mechanisms that generate richer insights and often invite greater active involvement of young people. The mechanisms chosen will be dictated by the data the organisation is seeking to collect, the level of involvement young people wish to have, and the resources and time available.

Overall, enabling young people to input into organisational strategy was valued by partners, but there was a clear acknowledgement that young people should want to engage in listening activities in this way, and need to be supported to do so. Engaging young people in listening activities through a steering group is more time intensive for both staff and young people. Accordingly, partners reported needing a variety of “*entry points for young people to access projects*”, ranging from light-touch, anonymous opportunities to feedback that captured a range of voices, through to opportunities that required greater commitment, but generated richer

insights into a smaller number of young people's experiences and opinions. For example, one partner approached strategic input from young people in a less 'intensive' way, by consulting young people to get feedback on provision and incorporating quotes from this feedback into fund applications. This has become a less resource-heavy way for them to input listening into their organisational strategy and business plan over the next three years.

### **Case study spotlight: Impact Arts**

#### ***Supporting young people to input strategically***

Through developing the capacity of the Sketchy Youths to contribute to Impact Arts at a strategic level, it became clear that there needs to be careful consideration of what support young people might need in order to contribute, and sometimes getting young people to this point can be a challenge in itself:

*“The young people that we work with as an organisation are some of the most disadvantaged disenfranchised young people, who don't necessarily have confidence in terms of their voice, you know, and have all sorts of other barriers and issues and challenges in their lives. And I think that has been really quite an ongoing challenge in terms of creating that coherent Sketchy Youths group.” (Respondent C2)*

The take-away for Impact Arts was that they needed to provide extra support to these young people, for example in terms of hard skills such as using email or understanding the language of funding bids. They also saw the need to provide wider social and emotional support, which has now been brought in, in the form of mentors for the steering group. Impact Arts also realised that the groups of young people they were working with very much determined their input, and at times Impact Arts needed to manage their expectations. Sometimes there was a trade-off between supporting the young people who had put themselves forward, and their desire to have young people's input at a strategic level – there is a balance to be struck here.

## **3.2 What changed for young people as a result of the Fund?**

In response to listening to young people, partners made changes to their provision, which we can hope has resulted in higher-quality experiences from young people. Young people also experienced opportunities to lead and influence within their provision through an increase in opportunities for co-design. The key learning themes relating to this question relate to:

- acting on listening;
- young people being listened to at 'critical moments';
- opportunities for co-design; and
- closing the feedback loop.

### 3.2.1 Acting on listening

At the end of the Fund, all partners rated themselves as a four or five out of five in terms of the extent to which they act on what they have heard through listening, compared to seven at the start of the Fund. In line with this, seven partners believed they use listening ‘to a great extent’ (5/5) to develop their services at the end of the Fund, compared to three at the start.

In feedback surveys, young people were directly asked what changes they had seen organisations make in response to what they had told them. Their responses included:

- making changes based on suggestions put forward by the youth board;
- improving the organisation’s website based on specific feedback;
- adding staff bios to information boards;
- providing better guidance on how to use digital tools; and
- implementing ideas for activities.

Partners also highlighted a range of ways that they had acted upon what they heard through their listening. Some of these are presented below, with specific examples from across the cohort.

**(Re)designing physical spaces to meet young people’s preferences and needs.** For example, Girvan Youth Trust, which works to support young people in their locality to make positive and healthy life choices, has developed a Building User Group. This group of young people works closely with the Project Co-ordinator to provide feedback on their youth facility and input into plans for building refurbishment.

**Developing appropriate provision during the pandemic.** For example, The Junction, which offers health-related services, education and support to young people, took on board feedback from their Summer 2020 *Voice Your Choice* survey to inform its work after the first lockdown. Feedback from young people told The Junction team that the focus should be on: street outreach; sharing information on self-care and service availability; and maintaining the option for young people to access remote support. The team started to make better use of social media to share self-care ideas and wellbeing resources and promote opportunities.

**Developing user-friendly listening tools and feedback processes.** For example, Moira Anderson Foundation, which supports adults, children and young people affected by childhood sexual abuse, co-designed an evaluation form for gathering feedback. The Foundation worked in consultation with both young people and adult service users to replace the outdated form that was quite “*clinical and adult-centric*” and not regularly used by service users.

**Incorporating listening into organisational strategy.** For example, Access to Industry, which works with people aged 16+ facing barriers to unemployment, worked with young people to develop a toolkit of resources for listening best practice. This guidance is now used by caseworkers and in new staff inductions. Access to Industry also reviewed operational strategies and created policies that were much more youth-focused (for example around safeguarding, cyber-bullying and codes of conduct) to sit alongside its current policies.

### 3.2.2 Being listened to at ‘critical moments’

Some partners were also attentive to ‘critical moments’ - both within the context of their organisation and young people’s lives - during which listening and supporting young people became even more important. This learning has crystallized around the pandemic, where particular groups of young people have become increasingly vulnerable and in greater need of channels to speak through and be heard. These critical moments were seen to require heightened or more frequent means of listening, to ensure young people’s needs are being met. They also provided opportunities to support young people to take action, shape action with the organisations that support them, and give strength to young people’s voice – as one partner put it, “*beyond our four walls*”. Example of partner activities include:

- employment of professional ‘listeners’ for young people to access during rehearsals for the summer production (Toonspeak);
- young people supported to share their views with the Scottish Youth Parliament for their manifesto consultation (The Junction); and
- working with young people to develop a campaign around LGBTQ+ rights (Hot Chocolate Trust).

Partners also reported engaging in projects that involved embedding young people’s views in wider policy documents or service design at both a local authority and national level. The Junction’s activities outlined above are an example of this, as is the work of Edinburgh Young Carers, who intend to use their research findings to engage with stakeholders on how they support and understand sibling young carers, including offering a new training course. This demonstrates the importance of both strengthening mechanisms for listening at critical moments, and focusing on ways that young people’s voices can be elevated in these moments.

### 3.2.3 Opportunities for co-design

As well as consulting young people on their needs and acting on this feedback, as some of the examples so far have indicated, several partners also sought to increase opportunities to involve young people in co-design processes: of service provision, best practice guidance and listening toolkits. For partners, this has led to “*more effective ways of listening across their provision*” and more effective provision itself, actively informed by young people. Project examples include:

- the whole staff team and Junction Youth Advisors are working with external consultants to develop an evaluation framework and a set of evaluation tools that can be used across our services (The Junction);
- five young people were employed (paid a living wage) to consult with their peers on the design of the annual *Tune In Speak Out* event, and deliver and evaluate the event (Toonspeak); and
- young people inputted into the design stage of new premises, which resulted in a number of architectural changes (Reeltime).

### 3.2.4 Closing the feedback loop

Whilst there is evidence that partners have been able to take action and make changes based on what they hear, the final piece of the listening puzzle is not always so simple. ‘Closing the feedback loop’ refers to the act of informing young people what changes have been made as a result of

listening, and it is widely considered to be a key component of the listening process. It emphasises that listening is not a one-way interaction, and young people should be kept informed as to how their contributions are used (or not used) to affect change.

In the end point self-assessment, seven partners believed they communicated their actions to young people who have engaged in their listening processes to a high extent (i.e. a four or five on a five-point scale). In the listening feedback surveys however, whilst over a third of young people (n=38) reported seeing changes in response to feedback they had given, a further third (n=32) were unsure if they had seen changes, and a small percentage (8%) (n=8) stated that they had not seen any changes. This indicates that organisations still have work to do in closing the feedback loop. This finding correlates with over one third of young people (n=47) also indicating that in order to be better listeners, they wanted their organisation to explain what changes they had made in response to what they heard from young people.

Partners noted that closing the feedback loop is more challenging remotely. One partner also suggested that it often comes down to staff capacity, and building good habits and processes:

*“I think it seems to relate a bit to workload again because it’s like actually all it is, is asking young people what they think, taking action on that, and then summarising that and putting it out on social media, ‘based on feedback. We’ve done this this month’. You know, and it’s kind of like, I think perhaps the perception of that process is it takes longer than it does?”* (Respondent C3, interview)

The process of closing the feedback loop was also considered in relation to the whole organisation, with the importance of having formal mechanisms in place for feeding up to leadership level and back down again through the chain of staff to young people:

*“[The feedback loop] is so crucial in terms of actually how we then give the feedback that was responding to the listening and I think not just from the young people but the people working with the young people as well. You know how that’s fed up to the managers, to myself, and then change is made, actions come out of that and how that’s all fed back and disseminated.”* (Respondent C2, interview)

### **3.3 What are the enablers for meaningful listening practice in organisational listening and responding to young people?**

Through their projects, partners have explored a range of ways to bring listening into their organisations, both in terms of specific mechanisms for listening and ways of embedding a listening culture. This has highlighted a number of ‘enabling’ factors, including:

- having a listening champion;
- safe and supportive listening environments; and
- upskilling and empowering staff teams to better listen.

### 3.3.1 Having a listening champion

Partners often used the Fund to create a staff role dedicated to listening, either giving existing staff time to do this work or bringing in external expertise<sup>7</sup>. Some partners created specific roles, such as a *Listening Expert*, a *My Voice Matters Facilitator*, or a *Listening Fund Youth Worker*. Other partners built listening into the job description of more management-level positions such as the Operational Lead or Assistant Director, to drive the embedding of youth voice into organisational strategy. Towards the end of the Fund, partners were also creating new posts to ensure the continuation of their listening work, such as a youth steering group coordinator or youth worker dedicated to youth voice. The number of partners including listening explicitly in the job description of staff or volunteers rose from four to nine between the start and end of the Fund.

### 3.3.2 Creating a safe and supportive environment for listening

There were a number of factors that organisations expressed as important in creating the ‘conditions’ for listening activities to be effective and allowing young people to engage:

- **Providing a variety of opportunities for young people** to take part in listening activities, ranging from light to in-depth, and congruent with young people’s interests, skills, and enthusiasm.
- **Listening ‘flexibly’** so that empathetic listening wasn’t over-ridden by getting feedback on provision. To enable and support engagement, listening practices need to be able to flex to meet the needs of the young people organisations work with. For example, listening mechanisms for specific feedback becoming more light-touch at times to allow more space for open-ended empathetic listening to young people.

As one partner described:

*“There’s certain times where actually the conversation is ‘the best thing for you right now is to focus on you’ and to step back from this role [youth board], so it can become that balance between support and listening, very quickly, and in a completely non-linear path as well.”*  
(Respondent C2, interview)

- **Openness, equality and respect:** The three young people interviewed as part of the case study research spoke about the importance of feeling like an equal, who has as much input into, and ownership over the organisation as staff do. This was connected to organisations being open to *all* young people’s voices and demonstrating that they took those voices seriously. This is a virtuous circle: where young people see or perceive that their thoughts and opinions are valued and taken seriously, they are more likely to engage in listening activities in the future.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> This matched a key learning in the England cohort, that listening requires particular skills and expertise, and often a dedicated member of staff to guide activities.

<sup>8</sup> In addition to these findings, the England cohort highlighted the importance of managing young people’s expectations; having appropriate safeguarding in place; avoiding putting young people under unnecessary emotional stress; and

## Case study spotlight: Elgin Youth Development Group

### ***Growing confidence and 'unboxed' thinking***

*"That's the biggest transition I've seen in the last two years, the confidence the team has got to take what young people are telling them and turn that into a tangible project."*  
(Respondent A1)

Prior to the Listening Fund, the team were attentive to young people's needs however, *"I don't think we were a listening organisation to the team, to each other"* (Respondent A2). The process of going through the Listening Fund enabled a realisation that they could do things differently, and the confidence and creativity of the staff team has grown, such that *"we're not as limited in our thinking, and in our ambition, as we were"* (Respondent A1). This came through a process of listening to groups of new young people and taking new ideas on board, but also through listening to staff, and giving them licence to suggest and try new things: *"[Staff] were given the freedom, so it wasn't just the young people [project lead] was listening to, it was her youth workers"* (Respondent A4).

Whilst these types of changes can take time to embed themselves, there is the feeling within Elgin that this cultural shift has been rapid and widespread. Culturally *"it has become more acceptable to act upon what you're hearing, as opposed to checking out 'is it ok?'"* (Respondent A2). There has been huge value in equipping youth workers with the confidence to act on what they hear in creative ways. It is as if the parameters of what staff are allowed to do have been removed, as the project lead explained, *"the project was a boxy shape, and now it's a massive splat!"* (Respondent A1).

### **3.3.3 Upskilling and empowering the staff team**

Whilst many partners had a dedicated member of staff leading on listening activities, they have also focused their efforts on upskilling the wider staff team to better listen to young people, through both external and internal training. As Figure 5 shows, there was an upward trend in partners' self-assessed skills in listening through different channels and analysing data they receive through these channels.

In their case study interviews, both Elgin Youth Development Group and Hot Chocolate Trust reported that a significant change within their organisation as a consequence of their funded activities had been building the capacity of their team to undertake listening activities. For these partners, the impacts of this change have been:

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supporting young people to use external platforms effectively and acting as a gatekeeper where external stakeholders wanted to engage with young people.

- increased levels of confidence within staff teams to put listening practices in place;
- encouraging staff to think outside the box, and develop new ways of listening to young people, which may not follow ‘normal’ protocols within organisations;
- a ‘democratisation’ of listening process and practices to share the workload and allow for greater creative input; and
- greater ownership within the team over this process, rather than responsibility resting with one member of staff.

Raising the skill level of the team was an important part of acknowledging that in order to move listening practices forward there needs to be an element of shared ownership within organisations. All members of staff need to feel some responsibility to drive listening practices, and have confidence in their ability to suggest and pursue ideas. It should be noted that, as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic, partners reported some disruption to processes of upskilling, practicing and embedding new listening skills in partners’ work with young people, which may have influenced the results.

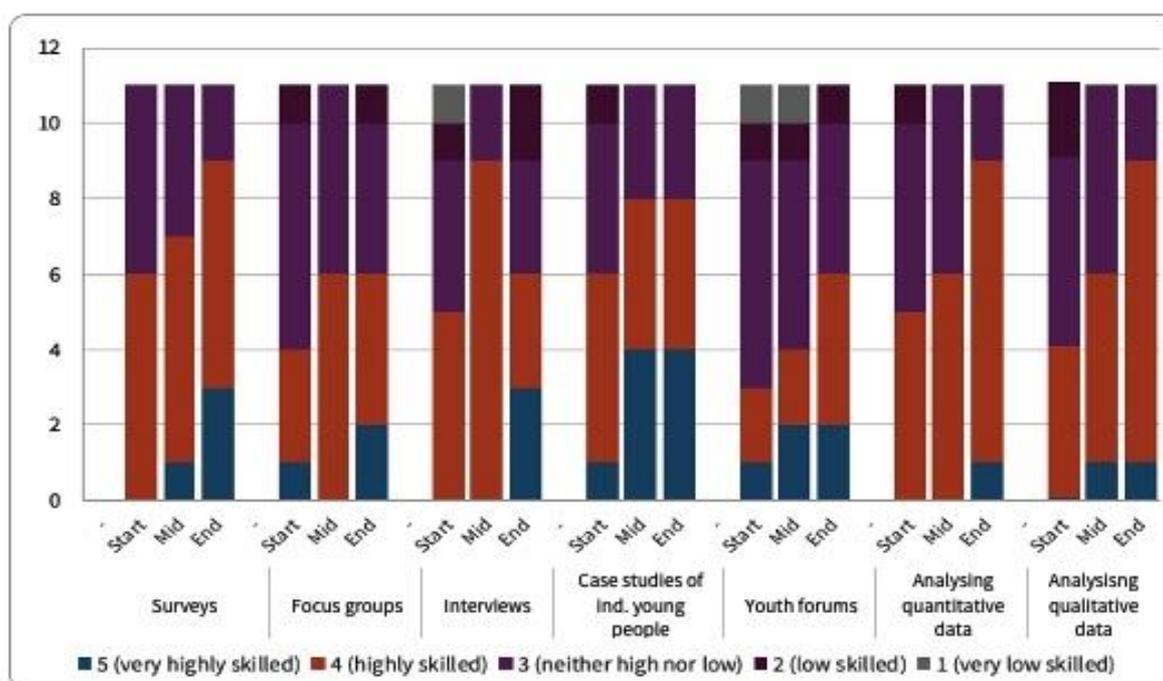


Figure 5: Partners rating of skill level in particular areas of listening

### 3.4 What are the barriers to meaningful listening practice in organisational listening and responding to young people?

Whilst partners were enthusiastic about the Fund and had made progress in various areas of their listening practice, there was also a feeling that they were not where they hoped to be at the end of the Fund. Whilst COVID-19 was a significant factor (the impacts of this will be explored in detail in Section 3.5), there were also other factors that limited progress: mainly disconnected services and resourcing.

### 3.4.1 Disconnected services

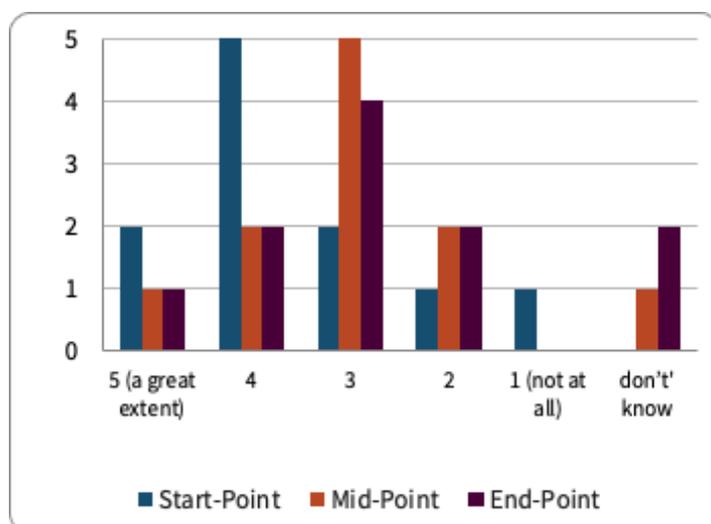


Figure 6: Partners' perception of variability of listening practice across their organisation

In the self-assessment, partners we asked to rate the extent to which listening practices varied across their organisation, in terms of consistency of opportunity for young people to feedback on or input into delivery of provision. The data indicates that partners perceived levels of variability to have decreased from the start of the Fund to the end (Figure 6), although three partners still rated variability as either a four or five on a five-point scale (with five being 'to a great extent') at the end-point, and two partners were unsure. As one partner, who was spread in terms of geography, user demographic and types of provision offered, observed:

*"There's different levels and nuance within what we hope to get out of it, you know, and it's how best we then integrate that across, you know, a team of 50 people split across 10 Local Authority areas. I think that has been quite a challenge."* (Respondent C2, interview)

Reflecting on this challenge, one strategy that was seen to have potential was focusing on embedding listening practices within one strand of the organisation's delivery, before disseminating this more widely across the organisation. Once again, it was seen as important to have someone to champion listening across the organisation, particularly at a senior level, to coordinate and share approaches and best practice internally.

### 3.4.2 Resourcing

In line with feedback from partners in England,<sup>9</sup> and whilst grant sizes varied significantly in Scotland (from £17,000 to £44,000), some partners reflected on the modest financial support that the Fund provided as limiting the progress that could be made in two years. We know that no funding is limitless, and this feedback suggests that the true resource required 'to do listening consistently well' is not fully known. Whilst the reality is that no additional funding is actually required to 'listen', partners valued having someone to hold them to account over their listening practices. There was a sense that without the specific funding, and the planning and reporting that goes with that, a focus on listening may start *"to wither away [and lack] that integrity and that sight on it"*. This suggests that a barrier to meaningful listening practice is an apprehension of what investment is required to undertake particular listening activities. This may lead to an underestimation of the time or resources needed to implement these activities and maintain and intentional focus to enable them to become established within organisations.

<sup>9</sup> Organisations in England received a maximum of £20,000

### 3.5 Listening during the COVID-19

*"We have used a combination of methods to actively listen to and engage with our young people [during the pandemic] on what support, activities and programmes they would like to see us deliver online. We've also done this to find out the best methods/apps/networks in order to communicate with our young people too. As an organisation, we have become more, making our Online Youth Work more inclusive as not all young people use the same communication networks/equipment/methods. Our staff team have also had to work on upskilling themselves on Digital Media/Online Youth Work in order to meet the needs of our young people."*

(Respondent D, self-assessment open-ended response)

Whilst this report so far has highlighted some of the good work that partners have achieved over the two-year Fund, the COVID-19 pandemic has, understandably, caused significant disruption to their listening projects and overall progress made. Most obviously, for all partners their priorities have had to change – a lack of capacity and shifting focus to emergency response and delivering core services has meant that some of their originally planned Listening Fund activities have been put on hold or taken much longer to progress than planned. Whilst the Fund was not officially 'paused' during this time, the lead Funder (Corra Foundation) adopted a flexible approach and supported partners to develop their listening practices in different ways that suited their need and context.

Unsurprisingly, and as the opening quote above suggests, partners have had to adapt their ways of working with and listening to young people. In many cases they have focused on the regularity of their listening to ensure their online efforts are meeting the needs of the young people they work with. Partners have also indicated the need to act quickly on what they have heard and be strongly guided by the feedback they received from young people. This listening has largely been facilitated by the increased use of light-touch online surveys to gather real-time feedback of young people's needs and experiences, alongside conferencing platforms (such as Zoom or Microsoft Teams) to bring together groups such as youth steering groups and youth leaders to support the design and delivery of remote provision.

Interestingly, in the feedback survey disseminated in October 2020 (post-lockdown), almost a quarter of young people (n=31) thought that in order to improve the way they listen, their organisation should provide more digital channels for listening. Given the current context of remote provision, this may reflect the challenges of getting digital listening mechanisms 'off the ground' and a need to carefully think through these to ensure they are effective.

Within the overall disruption that the pandemic has brought to the youth sector, there have been some specific issues related to listening to young people. Encouragingly, partners have also reported that a focus on listening has supported their ability to engage with young people remotely and provided some opportunities. The challenges and opportunities of attempting to listen during a pandemic are outlined in turn below.

## Challenges

- The constant flux in lockdown rules has made it difficult to plan ahead and embed listening mechanisms to enable organisations to collect listening data;
- Where consultation with young people or the development of youth boards/steering groups has been at the core of many listening projects, this has been more difficult to do online especially when young people had not developed relationships face-to-face first;
- Practicing and building confidence in listening skills and co-design with young people has been much more difficult where ‘business as usual’ provision has been so disrupted;
- Listening to young people in collaboration with external partners has often been limited by digital compatibility, for example young people not being able to access youth work services through their school networks; and
- Closing the feedback loop is more challenging to do remotely - social media is a useful tool but there were reservations over two-way communication due to privacy concerns.

## Opportunities

- New digital listening mechanisms have been seen to improve listening practices on the whole and will be incorporated into day-to-day systems;
- Partners have been able to listen in more ‘agile’ ways, implementing rapid cycles of learning and improvement, or as one partner put it “*reviewing, listening and building again*”;
- Partners have been able to extend the geographical reach of their listening activities through their digital networks to hear young people in the wider community; and
- Partners have been able to raise the voices of their young people more ‘loudly’ through (wider) digital networks with external stakeholders.

The opportunities and challenges listed above clearly demonstrate that whilst partners’ ambitions for their listening projects may have been delayed, a focus on listening enabled them to deliver better remote provision. They have been more aware of *how* they are listening and creating extra opportunities for this, and using what they were hearing to develop their online offer in consultation with young people. For example, The Junction developed a digital drop-in service that has been improved through regular anonymous feedback, and Hot Chocolate Trust undertook an additional COVID-specific census to help them respond to young people’s needs. Partners felt that the result has been emergency response work that genuinely responded to the needs of young people in particular moments through the pandemic, and was able to flex with these needs, through listening and responding in ‘agile’ ways.

## 3.6 Reflections on Fund design

Learning about the Fund design was of keen interest for the second year of the project and evaluation. Specifically through:

- investigating ways of maintaining open lines of communication and conversation around listening practice with and across partners; and
- exploring ways to engage young people further in the Fund.

### 3.6.1 Partners' experiences

Overall, the opportunity to have a specific fund dedicated to developing listening practice enabled partners to bring listening front and centre in their practice. Whilst the pandemic has delayed certain aspects of their work or reduced their ability to focus on active listening in the way they had planned, partners reported that their listening practices had improved as a result of taking part in the Listening Fund. As one partner fed back, *“there have been very clear and impactful developments around our listening practice, and most importantly (obviously) improved support and opportunities for the young people as a result”*.

In particular, many partners found the social, emotional, and practical support gained through being part of the cohort valuable. As the Fund manager suggested:

*“You really do build that relationship, and the importance of that is when people are struggling or they come up against challenges, there isn't that fear of not being able to raise that, so people are really honest and open. And I think that is something that I definitely feel with the Listening Fund and the partners [...] with the coffee mornings the feedback always is: 'this is the only meeting I look forward to', you know, because they're able to talk honestly and openly about the challenges that they're having.”* (Fund manager, end-point interview)

The coffee mornings mentioned above were instigated by the Fund manager on a monthly basis via Zoom in the second year of the Fund as a way of providing support for partners through the pandemic. These replaced partner convening days and training events that had been planned prior to the pandemic. The Listening Fund is designed to be a learning fund, *“and that has to involve partners coming together and talking and sharing”* (Fund manager). The coffee mornings generated regular opportunities for peer learning and support, as one partner testified:

*“For me, being part of this cohort has been a fantastically positive thing. [Coffee mornings are] one of the good things that has come out of lockdown, because this would not have happened if we didn't have to go online. [...] The camaraderie, the shared experience and the honesty as well that comes from that.”* (Respondent A1, interview)

Whilst it was acknowledged that the convening day model would have allowed for greater involvement of young people, the coffee mornings were seen to allow ideas and relationships to flourish through the regular sharing of learning, knowledge and practice. Therefore, this trade-off was accepted. Partners reported both mentoring other partners through aspects of their listening activities, or picking up hints or tricks to improve their own practice. Whilst not all partners engaged in the monthly coffee mornings (often due to capacity as opposed to motivation), it was felt that those who did engage regularly (approximately half) greatly benefitted, and accelerated their listening practice.

### 3.6.2 Young people's influence on Fund design and the actions and decisions of the funders

As noted in the introduction, a three-month development phase took place prior to the roll out of the Fund, which aimed to listen to a range of children and young people about their opinions of what the focus of the Fund should be. The process of consultation with young people in the

development phase and the learning from this is detailed in the [interim report](#). The output of six recommendations put forward by young people (Figure 7), of which five were included in the design of the Fund, suggests that young people shaped the development of the Listening Fund in Scotland in a meaningful way. This process also encouraged some organisations in the funding partnership to think more widely about how young people’s voices can be involved in other strands of their work where this is not currently a routine aspect of their work.

Following on from this development phase, a Youth Advisory Panel was established, led by Corra Foundation, with aim of getting young people from the partner organisations to feedback on their experiences of being a young person in a Listening Fund partner organisation. There was also an ambition to get young people more involved in the convening days, and the Panel was an opportunity to co-create these events, ensuring they included aspects that were important and interesting to young people.

1	2	3	4	5	6
<b>Age range</b>	<b>Partner size</b>	<b>Topic area</b>	<b>Grant size</b>	<b>Involving young people</b>	<b>Application writing</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The fund should support a mix of ages from 5-25</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Small and large organisations could apply but focus was on smaller organisations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No strong theme highlighted by young people so fund not too prescriptive</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Young people felt there should be no limit - no upper or lower limit put in place</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Applicants advised to include input from young people in their applications</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Young people felt they should have a direct role in writing applications</li> </ul>

Figure 7: The six recommendations put forward by young people in the development phase of the Fund

Unfortunately, the Youth Advisory Panel was significantly disrupted by the pandemic. In line with the experience of partners, Corra Foundation found that maintaining the energy and motivation of the group online was challenging, particularly as they had never met face-to-face. Even so, a number of online sessions were held, during which young people helped to plan what a face-to-face convening event will look like, when it is able to take place:

*“We've got loads of stuff that we've done throughout those sessions about what that should look like, what it should feel like, what was important to them and that kind of thing.”* (Fund manager, end-point interview)

Whilst there were ambitions to hold an online convening event, in line with the spirit of the Fund, it was ultimately decided *“what's the point? [...] Because who am I doing it for? Because it isn't going to be for the young people.”* It was evident that an online event would be limited interest to young people, and therefore their input will be used to shape a future in-person event, when this can happen. This decision was made through listening to young people and being guided by them.

The funders experienced similar challenges to the partners in trying to implement their listening practices. For example, when a convening day has multiple key audiences, *“how do you structure an event that meets the needs of all these different people so that everybody walks away from the event thinking 'I actually got something out of that'?”*. Whilst there were initial plans for how the

Fund would run and how young people would be involved, the funders have remained committed to doing this in a flexible manner.

Finally, as the Fund comes to a close, the question '*what next*'? should be considered. The funders have utilised feedback collected through the young person feedback survey to shape what a future iteration of the Fund might look like, and what activities it would support. Corra Foundation has also reported that it is likely that any future round of funding will be awarded in consultation with young people to assess applications. This suggests that the funders do value young people's input, and young people have shaped the actions and decisions of the funders.

## 4. Conclusions

Overall, the findings from this evaluation suggest that dedicated funder support for organisational listening can result in positive change to organisational delivery and strategy, with an improved focus on and response to young people's wants and needs. Partners have been challenged to review the extent to which their practices are youth-led, and young people have benefited through this process. It is important to note that this was not universally the case, as even with dedicated funder support, some partners' progress has been limited by various internal and external factors.

The findings demonstrate that there is no 'one size fits all' approach to listening, and effective practices will, and should, be shaped by organisational circumstances and beneficiary need. Nevertheless, various enablers have been identified that have consistently supported the development of meaningful listening across the cohort. Notably, listening is a multifaceted process that requires a number of enabling factors. It should not be assumed that organisations necessarily know what these factors are: a process of understanding how to create the right 'conditions' for listening is essential, which is achieved through sharing learning externally and undergoing internal exploration and testing with young people's input.

This evaluation has thrown a light on the slightly 'unknown' requirements for meaningful listening practices. Some mechanisms for listening are 'resource light', but the establishment of more in-depth, qualitative mechanisms, such as youth boards (which often allow young people to input at a higher level) or the generation of co-designed feedback tools, require a greater investment. The time needed to establish these more resource-intensive listening mechanisms, including getting young people's buy-in, can be underestimated. When looking to develop meaningful and effective listening practices, organisations need to set realistic timeframes for what they are seeking to achieve.

To support this process of better understanding the requirements for developing organisational listening practice, we suggest that the recommendations put forward by young people throughout the Fund (for example their suggestions for best practice guides and listening toolkits), and partners' learning around this process, could be made accessible to the wider youth sector. This would also bolster the aims of the evaluation to share learning from the Fund more widely across the youth sector and support the implementation of good organisational listening practices.

Finally, thinking more broadly in terms of the value of listening, whilst it is often not tied to outcomes, a key impact of dedicated funding is the re-centring of young people in provision design. This could, in turn, improve provision and young people's experience of it, and ultimately lead to greater change for young people. Change happens for young people as a result of:

- relationships with trusted adults, peers, and their environment;
- spaces for interaction and engagement; and
- opportunities to lead and influence.

Developing organisational listening practices allows practitioners to simultaneously *measure* the extent to which these conditions are present, while also *enhancing* them. Therefore, we advocate for a focus on listening, both within organisations and from funders, as a core opportunity to improve outcomes for young people.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: The Listening Fund partners and funded projects

The 11 organisations supported by the Listening Fund in Scotland were selected in 2018 and their projects began in Spring 2019, lasting for two years. The tables below give the full list of organisations, along with their research data ID and funded project summaries. More information about each partner can be found on the [Listening Fund website](#). The three partners that were investigated as case studies are marked with an asterisk. A twelfth organisation was selected to be funded, but unfortunately had to drop out during the early stages of the Fund.

Funded partners and research data ID:

Partner	Respondent ID	Case study respondent ID				
		Project lead	Leadership team member	Project worker	Young person	External stakeholder
Elgin Youth Development Group*	A	A1	A2		A3	A4
Hot Chocolate*	B	B1			B2, B3	
Impact Arts*	C	C1	C2	C3		
Girvan Youth Trust	D					
Access to Industry	E					
Toonspeak	F					
Edinburgh Young Carers	G					
Moira Anderson Foundation	H					
The Junction	I					
Reeltime	J					
Rosemount Lifelong Learning	K					

Details of partner's funded projects:

Partner	Target Group	Funded project summary	Mechanisms for Listening
Elgin Youth Development Group	Young people aged 11-18 in the community of Moray	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Independent review of current listening activity to better understand whose voices they hear in their community</li> <li>(Re)development of youth management group to support peer listening and feed into the board</li> <li>Targeted listening activities to engage young people currently underrepresented in their work (e.g. LGBTQ+ groups, young people with sensory impairments, and those from BAME and traveller communities)</li> </ul>	Youth management group, young leaders, M&E database
Hot Chocolate Trust	Marginalised young people aged 12-21 in Dundee city centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reviewing the way they capture and express young people's voices in their annual report</li> <li>Closing the 'feedback loop' by engaging young people in interpreting the 'census' data (their regular young people survey) and inputting into suggestions for action</li> </ul>	Annual 'census', annual report, involvement of young people in responding to census data

<b>Partner</b>	<b>Target Group</b>	<b>Funded project summary</b>	<b>Mechanisms for Listening</b>
Impact Arts	Children, young people and adults across Scotland	Employment of a 'listening expert' to support: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developing a listening strategy, which consists of: a listening policy; listening tool kit; and staff training</li> <li>• Building the capacity of the 'Sketchy Youths', their youth steering group, to support them to input across the organisation</li> </ul>	Youth steering group, youth ambassadors, dedicated project worker, listening toolkit and policy
Girvan Youth Trust	Young people in the community of Girvan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Formation and support of a locality YouthBank<sup>10</sup></li> <li>• Formation of youth voice group (Z1 Users Group) to work alongside the staff team</li> <li>• Hosted an event to feed into the Scottish Youth Work Strategy 2020-2025, attended by 50 young people, partner organisations and stakeholders, plus two follow-up events to develop a two-year Youth Work Priority Strategy for Girvan and South Carrick</li> <li>• Development of an S2 club and consultation with older young people (S2+) around their needs</li> </ul>	Youth voice group (Z1 Users Group), consultation events (broadly around local youth work priorities and specifically in relation to young people's needs)
Access to Industry	Unemployed young people and adults who facing disadvantage in accessing training, education and/or employment across the Central Belt of Scotland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recruitment of dedicated Youth Development Worker to build young people's capacity to ask questions and listen to each other</li> <li>• Development of questionnaire and undertaking focus groups to capture young people's voices</li> <li>• Training of a young person(s) to become a peer support worker to listening and feedback from other young people</li> <li>• Development of best practice guide and a toolkit of resources for caseworkers; review of policies to become more young person-centred</li> </ul>	Forthcoming youth advisory group, dedicated project worker, toolkit and best practice guide co-designed with young people, surveys, focus groups, dedicated social media page for young people to share ideas
Toonspeak	Young people in areas of social deprivation in Glasgow	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employment of two 'professional listeners' to support young people during the production of their summer show</li> <li>• Employment of a team of young people to plan, deliver and evaluate the 'Toon In Speak Out' (TISO) youth consultation event, in consultation with their peers</li> </ul> <p>Appointing a young person as a Media Coordinator and subsequently developing this role to employ young people as 'Connectors' who will be supported by a Connectors Coordinator</p>	Dedicated project worker (Professional listeners, Connectors Coordinator), youth steering group (for TISO), group of connectors

<sup>10</sup> A YouthBank is a grant making and empowerment initiative run by young people for young people in their local communities across Scotland. YouthBank builds on young people's skills and experiences to enable them to give cash for action, funding young people's ideas for the benefit of their whole local community.

<b>Partner</b>	<b>Target Group</b>	<b>Funded project summary</b>	<b>Mechanisms for Listening</b>
Edinburgh Young carers	Young carers across Edinburgh aged 5-20 who are struggling with caring responsibilities	<p>'Siblings Research Project'</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exploring lived experience and needs of young carers caring for a sibling (supported by an external consultant)</li> <li>• Research co-produced with young people acting as peer-researchers</li> <li>• Recruitment of part-time Siblings Development Worker to support implementation of findings to support sibling young carers</li> <li>• Dissemination of learning to external stakeholders</li> </ul>	Coordinated groups for delivering research activities, 1:1 interviews and focus groups, dedicated project worker (Siblings Development Worker)
Moira Anderson Foundation	Survivors of childhood sexual abuse (all ages) in North Lanarkshire	<p>Engagement of part-time researcher to support:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assessment of evaluation tools/methods/processes</li> <li>• Research and consultation with other organisations to understand their evaluation tools/methods</li> <li>• Co-producing a young person's evaluation tool with the MAF's Children and Young People group</li> <li>• Developing an organisational listening policy</li> </ul>	Children and Young People group ('MAF Champions'), new young person friendly evaluation tool, formalised listening guidelines/best practice
Reeltime Music	Young people experiencing disadvantage in North Lanarkshire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dedicated bank of 'listening hours' for staff to use with young people based on need</li> <li>• Upskilling staff in good listening practice through training with Listen Well Scotland<sup>11</sup></li> <li>• Establishment of a youth advisory group</li> <li>• Development and deployment of an annual 'listening survey'</li> <li>• Input of young people into design of new premises</li> </ul>	Listening survey, youth advisory group, dedicated 'listening hours'
Rosemount Lifelong Learning	Children, young people and adults in Royston and wider North Glasgow area	<p>Recruitment of 'My Voice Matters' (MVM) facilitator to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review best practice across the organisation</li> <li>• Create and support a youth advisory group</li> </ul>	Dedicated project worker (MVM facilitator), Youth advisory group
The Junction	Young people aged 12-21 in Leith and North-East Edinburgh	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dissemination of 'Voice Your Choice' survey to better understand young people's needs in terms of health and wellbeing services</li> <li>• Development of evaluation toolkit and a learning framework</li> <li>• Building capacity of the young volunteers (Junction Youth Advisors) to feed into senior leadership thinking and have a voice outside of the organisation</li> </ul>	Voice Your Choice survey, evaluation toolkit, young volunteers (Junction Youth Advisors)

<sup>11</sup> <https://listenwellscotland.org.uk/>

## Appendix B: Thematic analysis

The table below presents key themes and sub-themes identified through thematic analysis of the qualitative data (case study interviews, 18-month progress update reports and self-assessment survey open question responses). The frequency of themes is indicated using a traffic-light system, where: green = high frequency, orange = medium frequency, and red = low frequency. An inductive approach to data analysis was adopted, using the research questions to focus the scope of themes identified, whilst being open to ideas or concepts that emerged through the raw data.

Theme	Sub-theme	Supporting data extracts/examples
Practice development	Young people inputting at a strategic level	<p>“[steering group] has been the conduit by which we’ve really sort of connected to board level and had those strategic conversations, with myself and our Chair are attending the [steering group] meetings.” (project lead, case study interview)</p> <p>“The [youth advisors] have also recently been part of a full organisation discussion on recruiting a new chairperson. Their ideas for what values, qualities and experience a chair should have are included in the role description.” (self-assessment survey open response)</p>
	Young people inputting into service-design/delivery	<p>“Through consultation, we identified the need to form a youth voice group, where young people who use our centre can share their views and opinions about local youth work, its facilities and other related subjects. [...] the groups current piece of action is to work alongside the staff team, trustees and their peers to identify, and prioritise, upgrades, refurbishments and redecoration required to our youth centre.” (partner 18-month progress report)</p>
	Codification of listening practice	<p>“Our code of conduct and staff handbook have been rewritten to emphasise our desire to be listening and learning employer.” (self-assessment survey open response)</p>
	Increased skill level and confidence in listening and acting upon what is heard	<p>“That’s the biggest transition I’ve seen in the last two years, the confidence the team has got to take what young people are telling them and turn that into a tangible project.” (project lead, case study interview)</p>

Theme	Sub-theme	Supporting data extracts/examples
	Development of new mechanisms for listening	<p><i>“Our data collection and analysis has been enhanced with the introduction of a new database. It has been designed to capture more demographic information in order to better understand our users, their backgrounds and to capture all their activities with us. We will listen to this data as we reflect upon and amend our programme.”</i> (self-assessment survey open response)</p>
<b>Organisational shift in approach to listening</b>	Great awareness of potential biases in listening practice	<p><i>“Feedback from young people is very positive about our listening approaches. But, of course, we still don't know what we don't know. For that reason, we'll remain committed to reflecting on our unconscious biases, analysing the data we have to identify young people who aren't engaging much, and ensuring that we're deliberately seeking out the unheard voices of the young people.”</i> (self-assessment survey open response)</p>
	Intentional focus on listening and action and embedding this through a greater range of mechanisms and frequency of listening	<p><i>“The culture of the project, at every level, has embraced active listening. As we have reviewed our policies and procedures, we have ensured it is imbedded in them. As a result, the project feels better connected and everyone knows their voice and opinions are valued.”</i> (self-assessment survey open response)</p> <p><i>“We have identified the need to meaningfully embed youth voice at the heart of our youth work and as such find ourselves saying more and more often we need to ask the young people. Again, as our grant comes to an end we are already exploring opportunities and ways to keep these pieces of work continuing.”</i> (partner 18-month progress report)</p>
	Greater focus on co-designing listening/feedback systems with young people	<p><i>“One of the key activities undertaken with the [youth steering group] over the past months is co-producing and co-designing a children and young people-friendly evaluation tool to enable us listen to them in a better way on a regular basis.”</i> (partner 18-month progress report)</p>
	Understanding closing the feedback loop and considering effectiveness of current practice in this area	<p><i>“we require a focussed period of development and implementation to realise our ambitions for greater depth and consistency in our listening, feedback and analysis practices and to establish improved practices – e.g. consistent feedback loops for young people.”</i> (self-assessment survey open response)</p>

Theme	Sub-theme	Supporting data extracts/examples
Enablers	Individual listening 'champions'	<p>Several partners recruited specifically for a project worker to deliver this project, and have subsequently created new roles or built responsibility for listening (for example oversight of a youth steering group) into particular staff member's job descriptions.</p> <p><i>"I think there's a couple of things that we're embedding as a legacy that I think will certainly ensure, to a degree, it's embedded [...] [and] that is about how we've embedded the responsibility for the [youth steering group] into one of our core staff's remits; how we're building listening training into all staff's induction procedures, you know..."</i> (project lead, case study interview)</p>
	Team ownership over the process of listening to young people	<p><i>"Particularly what we wanted to achieve was to train up and grow confidence in the team, because they're really good at what they do, but I think because I'd been doing it [collecting young people's voices for the annual report] for a few years there was always a sense of 'that's [project lead's] thing.'" (project lead, case study interview)</i></p> <p><i>"The first internal annual listening survey highlighted to staff that young people felt listened to and that we were on the right track. This has led to a shift in mindset across the staff cohort where listening is seen as one of our key strengths. As a result, staff have been a lot more collaborative in working with young people (seeking input, co-designing projects etc)."</i> (partner 18-month progress report)</p>
	Creating an appropriate environment for listening	<p><i>"I mean like I feel like it's very good balance of like us wanting to do something and them either helping us to do it or sometimes, you know, they come up with something and they're like, oh, yeah, I think this would be good to see young people do, what do you guys think? Like, it's very balanced."</i> (young person, case study interview)</p>
Barriers	Embedding good practice across geographically spread or large organisation, or across disconnected services	<p><i>"I think that perhaps in a smaller organisation a consultancy role might work better. I think I probably didn't realize how large the organization was, even though I knew what they did. [...] Some more work needs to be done to embed all of it, you know. Some progress has been made and there has been an output but it's how to really embed that going forward."</i> (employed listening 'expert', case study interview)</p>

Theme	Sub-theme	Supporting data extracts/examples
	Resourcing: protecting time and space for focusing on listening practice and acting on what is heard when capacity is limited	“The challenge is – we're probably too it reactive so that funding comes out, you've got a quick turnaround [to get young people's input], and there you go, and then you don't necessarily get the funding, and so it's trying to manage those expectations and that timeline with young people.” (project lead, case study interview)
<b>Improved outcomes for young people</b>	Listening to and acting on feedback: improved delivery of key services	“Input in the design stage of our new premises resulted in a number of changes to the architectural plans. The online delivery during COVID-19 was co-produced with young people, and with changes made monthly in response to a monthly survey of everyone involved.” (partner 18-month progress report)
	Opportunities to co-design services and best practice guides	<p>“Our group of young volunteers have been meeting on a monthly basis to help us understand what young people are looking for and design appropriate services. They have also supported our Director with her influencing work. This included one youth advisor giving a presentation at a Triumph network event about mental health services in school.” (partner 18-month progress report)</p> <p>“In October 2019 we recruited a team of 5 young people who were paid a living wage of £9 per hour to plan, deliver and evaluate an event designed to gather feedback, ideas and opinions from their peers. [...]The group worked with support from our Chief Executive, Head of Finance &amp; Operations, Outreach Officer and Associate Artist, gaining experience in collaboration, facilitation, evaluation and event planning.” (partner 18-month progress report)</p>
	Better supported at ‘critical moments’	“[For] some of the most vulnerable participants our [professional] listeners helped, [it] generated the resilience to ensure that they saw the [annual] production through and took their place in the spotlight. We felt that the successful employment of professional listeners in support of our 2019 Summer production really demonstrated the efficacy of utilizing this in intensive rehearsal periods.” (partner 18-month progress report)
	Creating internal and external facing opportunities for young people to have a voice	“We supported young people to share their views with the Scottish Youth Parliament for their manifesto consultation. We arranged a focus group with LAYC so young people could share their opinions on mental health and smoking.” (self-assessment survey open response)

Theme	Sub-theme	Supporting data extracts/examples
Using listening to inform organisational strategy	Young people often need to be supported to input at this level (both soft and hard skills)	<i>“That was certainly a challenge, you know, [...] it's trying to give someone a very quick, as fast as you can, update on, you know, charity governance, running a business, you know [to input into a funding bid].”</i> (project lead, case study interview)
	This work can be quite ‘dry’ and there needs to be a focus on fun and engagement	<i>“In terms of the second most challenging thing [running the steering group] was engagement with young people [...] it's like, ‘so now I've had to sit through you talking about a strategy and stuff’. It's probably really dry. You know, and ‘you now want me to go off and do some stuff over the month’, and I just feel like it's a really big ask, you know?”</i> (employed listening ‘expert’, case study interview)
	This requires ‘strategic thinking’ to seek funding that matches service users ideas	<i>“It's not that we're finding funding and then telling the young people that this is avenue we're going to go down. It's the young people that are telling us that these are the experiences they're are having and anticipating that they're going to have, let's go and find the funding that matches that and allows us to do that work.”</i> (project lead, case study interview)
Influence on external systems	Working with partner organisations (incl. fund partners) to develop their own practices	<i>“New external partnerships have been built with sensory services, the LGBT community, schools, Active School coordinators. They are actively engaged in the project and have enhanced the experience for our young people and added to our professional practice and understanding.”</i> (self-assessment survey open response)
	Sharing project learning (1) around needs of groups of young people and (2) impact of improved listening	<i>“We have continued to raise awareness of sibling young carers outside of our organisation with other professionals e.g. health, education and social work.”</i> (self-assessment survey open response)
	Supporting young people to be heard by external stakeholders	<i>“We supported young people to share their views with the Scottish Youth Parliament for their manifesto consultation. We arranged a focus group with LAYC so young people could share their opinions on mental health and smoking.”</i> (self-assessment survey open response)

Theme	Sub-theme	Supporting data extracts/examples
Listening Fund approach	Dedicated time/resources: deemed necessary for this type of work	<i>"I guess the challenge if you don't have that as a specific fund, a specific plan, you know, with a structure and a reporting mechanism around it, is whether it actually manifests and you know, if it's something that starts to wither away and doesn't have the integrity and that sight on it. So I think it has brought it sort of a bit more, you know, first and foremost into people's minds which has been important."</i> (project lead, case study interview)
	Sharing and support through cohort and from funder	<i>"To share our fears, concerns or challenges, and share good practice [with other partners] – that has really enriched this project."</i> (project lead, case study interview)
Listening during COVID-19	Supported transition to remote delivery with genuine input from young people to co-design online provision	<i>"They [young people] have told us what they need in our online programme and have asked for, and received, specific support with their mental health and wellbeing."</i> (self-assessment survey open response)
	Supported rapid reviews of online services	<i>"We [have] worked in an 'agile' way with young people, listening to their thoughts and ideas, then building podcasts and webinars with them within short spaces of time. We then repeated the cycle by reviewing, listening and building again."</i> (self-assessment survey open response)
	Heightened awareness of importance and value of listening at critical moments and how to do this	<i>"So whether that's more regular censuses, or whether that's getting a hell of a lot better at listening on social media because, you know, you don't have the body language or the nuance or, we feel that we've lost a whole suite of tools from our toolbox, but we need to build up and learn new ones."</i> (project lead, case study interview)

## Appendix C: Listening Fund organisational self-assessment (public version)

Below are the 24 core questions used as part of the organisational self-assessment in both England and Scotland.

\*\*\*\*\*

*Welcome to the Listening Fund Organisational Self-Assessment. The purpose of the self-assessment is to aid organisation's reflection on different aspects of their listening practice.*

*The self-assessment takes a broad definition of organisational listening, and explores different elements of how you listen to and with young people, including questions on your listening practice, culture, skills, resources, communication and how you act on what you hear.*

*We recommend that you complete the self-assessment with at least two people in your organisation present, so that it generates collaborative reflection and conversation. This will likely include someone with a strategic overview of the organisation and someone who plays an active role in your organisation's listening practice. It should take around 30 minutes to complete.*

*We recognise that listening practice may vary considerably across your organisation (and there is a question that asks about this) but we recommend you respond based on your perception of your organisation overall.*

\*\*\*\*\*

**1. What forms of listening does your organisation undertake with young people? Please tick all that apply.**

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="radio"/> Surveys – with closed questions                                  | <input type="radio"/> Comment and suggestion boxes   |
| <input type="radio"/> Surveys – with open questions                                    | <input type="radio"/> 'Open door' between staff/volunteers and young people  |
| <input type="radio"/> Focus groups   | <input type="radio"/> Ongoing listening within practice (e.g. informally asking for feedback with a session with young people) |
| <input type="radio"/> Interviews   |  |
| <input type="radio"/> Case studies of individual young people (that involve listening) |  |
| <input type="radio"/> External evaluation (that involves listening)                    |  |

**2. On average, how regularly does your organisation undertake any form of listening with young people? Please tick one.**

- |                                 |                                  |
|---------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> Weekly    | <input type="radio"/> 6-monthly  |
| <input type="radio"/> Monthly   | <input type="radio"/> Annually   |
| <input type="radio"/> Quarterly | <input type="radio"/> Less often |

**3. Do young people engage anonymously in any of your organisation's listening?**

- Yes  
 No

**4. Does your organisation undertake any outreach activities in order to engage those groups who you have found it difficult to engage in listening?**

- Yes
- No
- Please specify: \_\_\_\_\_

**5. Does your organisation have an organisational listening policy?**

- Yes
- No

**6. What analysis does your organisation undertake on your forms of listening? Please tick all that apply.**

- Compare responses between young people
- Compare responses between services within our organisation
- Compare responses over time
- Other (please specify)
- Compare to external sources of data (e.g. school or government datasets)
- Check for any bias in who is responding to your listening
- Check for other biases

**7. Approximately, what proportion of the young people you work with engage in at least one form of your listening?**

- 0-25%
- 26-50%
- 51-75%
- 76-100%
- Don't know

**8. To what extent does your organisation listen to a representative sample of the young people that it works with? (By representative we mean that the types of young people that engage in listening activity are the same types of young people who you engage more broadly in your organisation's work)**

- 1 - not at all
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5 – a great extent

**9. To what extent does the leadership in your organisation do the following? Please select one for each row.**

	1 – not at all	2	3	4	5 – a great extent
Talk about the importance of listening	<input type="radio"/>				
Building listening into organisational or project-level budgets	<input type="radio"/>				
Refer to listening in organisational strategy	<input type="radio"/>				
Create structured time for listening	<input type="radio"/>				

**10. To what extent do staff/ volunteers who work directly with young people in your organisation do the following? Please select one for each row.**

	1 – not at all	2	3	4	5 – a great extent
Talk about the importance of listening	<input type="radio"/>				
Actively create opportunities for listening to young people	<input type="radio"/>				
Actively pass the insights gained from listening onto your organisation's leadership	<input type="radio"/>				

**11. To what extent are the young people you work with willing to engage in your organisation's listening?**

- 1 - not at all       2       3       4       5 – a great extent

**12. Overall, how skilled is your organisation around the following areas of listening? Please select one for each row.**

	1 – very low skilled	2 – low skilled	3 – neither high nor low skilled	4 – high skilled	5 – very high skilled
Surveys	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Focus groups	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Interviews	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Case studies from individual young people (that involve listening)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Youth forums	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Analysing quantitative data	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Analysing qualitative data	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**13. Is listening explicitly included in the role description of any staff/ volunteers in your organisation?**

- Yes  
 No  
 Please specify which staff/volunteers: \_\_\_\_\_

**14. Is there a specific budget line within the organisation for listening? Please do not include money received as part of The Listening Fund**

- Yes  
 No

**15. Does your organisation use any types of technology to support its listening?**

- Yes
- No
- Please specify which types of technology: \_\_\_\_\_

**16. Overall to what extent does your organisation act on what you have heard in your listening?**

- 1 - not at all
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5 – a great extent

**17. Use the box below to list examples of where you have acted on your listening, if applicable. This includes changes at the service level (i.e. influencing day to day practice) and changes at the strategic level (i.e. influencing strategic plans and goals)**

**18. To what extent does your organisation evaluate its listening practice?**

- 1 - not at all
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5 – a great extent

**19. To what extent does your organisation involve young people in evaluating your listening practice?**

- 1 - not at all
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5 – a great extent

**20. To what extent do you undertake the following elements of communication around your listening? Please select one for each row**

	1 – not at all	2	3	4	5 – a great extent
Communicate what you have heard to people who have engaged in your listening processes	<input type="radio"/>				
Communicate what you have heard to people who have not engaged in your listening processes	<input type="radio"/>				
Communicate your actions to people who have engaged in your listening processes	<input type="radio"/>				
Communicate your actions to people who have not engaged in your listening processes	<input type="radio"/>				
Include an explanation of why you have not acted on some of what you have heard	<input type="radio"/>				

**21. To what extent do you use listening for the following?**

	1 – not at all	2	3	4	5 – a great extent
To give young people an opportunity to express themselves	<input type="radio"/>				
To evaluate your services	<input type="radio"/>				
To influence how you develop your services	<input type="radio"/>				
To influence the fundamental strategic direction of your organisation	<input type="radio"/>				
Because it is young people’s democratic right to shape the services they receive	<input type="radio"/>				

**22. To what extent do you engage young people within your listening in the following ways? Please select one for each row**

	1 – not at all	2	3	4	5 – a great extent
Discuss responses of your listening with young people	<input type="radio"/>				
Analyse the responses of your listening with young people	<input type="radio"/>				
Create actionable recommendations with young people	<input type="radio"/>				

**23. To what extent does listening practice vary across your organisation?**

- 1 - not at all     
  2     
  3     
  4     
  5 – a great extent

**24. Overall, where on Hart’s ladder of participation would you rate your organisation overall? Please select one**

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="radio"/> 1. Young people are manipulated            | <input type="radio"/> 6. Adult-initiated, shared decisions with young people |
| <input type="radio"/> 2. Young people are decoration             | <input type="radio"/> 7. Young people lead and initiate action               |
| <input type="radio"/> 3. Young people are tokenised              | <input type="radio"/> 8. Young people and adults share decision-making       |
| <input type="radio"/> 4. Young people are assigned and informed  |  |
| <input type="radio"/> 5. Young people are consulted and informed |  |

## Appendix D: Interview guides to explore the additional research question (March 2020)

**Funder interview guide** – the below questions are indicative of questions asked to funders after the development phase in order to evaluate the 5<sup>th</sup> research question

Topic area	Questions
<b>Motivations and process</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How and why was the decision made to add the 5<sup>th</sup> research question?</li> <li>• How were young people recruited? Pros/cons of this process?</li> <li>• What was the format of the two workshops?</li> <li>• How was agreement reached on which of young people's recommendations were included?</li> <li>• How was this feedback to young people?</li> </ul>
<b>Successes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reflections on success</li> <li>• Did the process genuinely allow young people to shape the Fund?</li> <li>• Were there any surprises?</li> </ul>
<b>Challenges</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reflections on challenges</li> <li>• Is there more you could do/have done to involve young people in fund design?</li> <li>• Would you do anything differently?</li> <li>• Could young people have inputted into decisions around amount awarded?</li> </ul>
<b>Reflections</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Were any assumptions/ideas challenged?</li> <li>• Do you think the Fund was unique in the way it was designed? Are you aware of funds that have gone through a similar process?</li> <li>• Would you recommend this process to other funders?</li> </ul>

**Young person interview guide** – the below questions are indicative of questions asked to young people after the development phase in order to evaluate the 5<sup>th</sup> research question

Topic area	Questions
<b>Process</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Which workshop(s) were you involved in?</li> <li>• What did you do and how did you find it?</li> <li>• Can you remember why you were asked to take part?</li> <li>• Can you remember the purpose of the Listening Fund?</li> </ul>

Topic area	Questions
<b>Experience</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Did you have enough time to fully understand what you were being asked to do?</li> <li>• Did you have any particular views about what you were being asked to do (e.g. when assessing applications – was it easy to decide? Did you agree with the group?)</li> <li>• Was it possible/easy to express your views in the workshop format?</li> <li>• Did you feel comfortable taking part?</li> <li>• What did you get out of the workshop?</li> </ul>
<b>Feedback</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Did you find out which views of young people were taken on board by the funding panel? How?</li> <li>• Does this matter to you? Why?</li> </ul>

## Appendix E: Interview guide to explore the ‘three areas of interest’ (March 2021)

**Funder interview guide** – the below questions are indicative of questions posed to funders to explore the three areas of interest towards to end of the Fund

Topic area	Questions
<b>Introductions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Main role in the Fund</li> <li>• Overall highlights and challenges</li> </ul>
<b>Maintaining lines of communication between partners</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How has this been done?</li> <li>• How has this developed/changed over the life of the Fund?</li> <li>• What difference would maintaining the old ‘convening day’ model have made to partners’ experiences?</li> <li>• Major challenges/successes</li> <li>• Impact on partner progress?</li> <li>• Impact of relationship with other partners/fund manager?</li> <li>• Key learning – would you do anything differently?</li> <li>• How does this learning feed into your wider perspective on fund management?</li> </ul>
<b>Impact of engagement with listening on organisational strategy</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do you see as the value of engaging with listening practices at a strategic level?</li> <li>• Any observed barriers/particular challenges for partners?</li> <li>• Did you observe this process to be intentional or organic as the Fund progressed?</li> <li>• Benefits of being part of the cohort</li> </ul>
<b>Engaging young people in the Fund</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What were your overall ambitions?</li> <li>• How have young people been engaged (beyond fund design stage)?</li> <li>• Was the development phase successful in terms of projects funded?</li> <li>• Has there been a genuine engagement of young people?</li> <li>• Has there been a shaping of funders? i.e. challenged ideas/shaped decisions</li> <li>• Have you focused on closing the feedback loop?</li> <li>• Challenges – specific experience and wider challenges of engaging young people strategically</li> <li>• Key learning and what would you do differently?</li> <li>• Recommendations for other funders/future funds</li> </ul>

## Appendix F: Listening feedback survey

The table shows the survey questions used to gather feedback from young people directly on their experiences of organisational listening.

Question	Response Options
1. A) Do you feel like [organisation] listens to what you think? (Just tick one)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Definitely: I always feel my opinion is valued</li> <li>• A bit: I sometimes feel my opinion is valued</li> <li>• I'm not sure</li> <li>• Not really: I often don't feel my opinion is valued</li> <li>• Definitely not: I never feel my opinion is valued</li> </ul>
1. B) If you have an idea about how to improve [organisation], do you know how to tell them? (Just tick one)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yes, and there are <b>lots of ways</b> for me to suggest ideas</li> <li>• Yes, and I know <b>one way</b> for me to suggest ideas</li> <li>• No, I do not know <b>how</b> to suggest an idea</li> <li>• I do not <b>want</b> to suggest any ideas</li> </ul>
2. A) Have you ever seen [organisation] change something in response to your feedback?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yes</li> <li>• No</li> <li>• I'm not sure</li> </ul>
2. B) If you have seen a change, what was it?	Open question
3. What do you think [organisation] could do to make them better listeners? (Tick as many as you like)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Talk to me face-to-face more often</li> <li>• Let me give them feedback using a computer or my phone</li> <li>• Explain what changes they have made because of what they've heard from me and other young people</li> <li>• Something else (please tell us here):</li> </ul>

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The Centre for Youth Impact is a community of organisations that work together to progress thinking and practice around impact measurement in youth work and services for young people. Our vision is for all young people to have access to high quality programmes and services that improve their life chances, by enabling embedded approaches to impact measurement that directly inform practice. Our work, therefore, is dedicated to three objectives, together with our expanded networks and other organisations from across the youth sector: curating the debate, building the movement and shaping the future.

**Find out more about the Centre for Youth Impact at [www.youthimpact.uk](http://www.youthimpact.uk) and follow us on twitter [@YouthImpactUK](https://twitter.com/YouthImpactUK).**

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