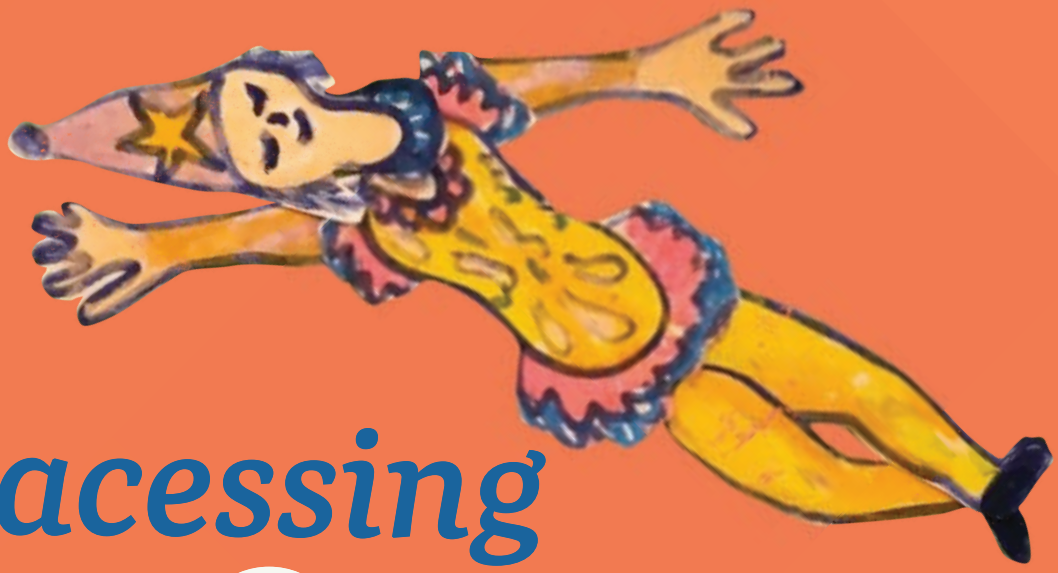

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Digital and Cultural Access for Children and Young People in the North West of Ireland

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RTÉ DOES COMIC RELIEF
The Community Foundation for Ireland
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arts council an chomhairle ealaíon funding the arts artscouncil.ie

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GLOSSARY

Committee on the Rights of the Child	A panel of 18 experts who monitor the implementation of the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* by *States Parties*.
Convention on the Rights of the Child	The Convention is a treaty: a statement of human rights that each country who *ratifies* the Convention promises to each child.
Duty bearer	A person who has a particular responsibility or obligation to promote and protect human rights. This person is often understood as the government of the country that *ratifies* the Convention, but it also includes anyone who works for the government, for example, teachers, doctors, social workers etc.
General Comment	A written interpretation, by the Committee, of the rights promises in the Convention, or on children's rights themes. The most recent General Comment was on children's rights in the digital environment.
Ratify	If a country has ratified the Convention, it means it has agreed to be legally bound by the Convention.
States Parties	States Parties are countries that have *ratified* the Convention.

INTRODUCTION

We are living in a time when children have been removed from public space. As leisure and recreational activities have moved online, it is crucial to observe young people's participation rights, particularly young people who are marginalised and disadvantaged, in the online forum, particularly for those who may not have access to activities that take place in the digital environment. One of the main challenges to children's rights is the rapidly growing role of digital media and technology; children and young people spend increasing periods of time on digital platforms, and information and communication technologies form an essential dimension of children's lived experiences. Accessibility to online and digital spaces is therefore crucial to the realisation and implementation of children and young people's rights (UN, 2013).

This report presents the findings of a scoping study undertaken on behalf of Kids' Own Publishing Partnership (Kids' Own) to identify children and young people's needs and experiences of accessing cultural and arts programmes online. The purpose of carrying out this scoping study was to build an initial picture of access to the arts sector for marginalised young people in particular, to identify what we know, and what we do not know, in order to bring clarity to the challenges and opportunities that constitute the sector currently. It is anticipated that this scoping study will form the basis of further research on a larger scale to capture a fuller picture of young people's experiences. This report details a range of experiences by 11 children and young people aged between 10-15 years old in the North West of Ireland, in the digital environment. In line with the stated aims and objectives of the scoping study, marginalised young people's views were especially sought such as young people living in direct provision, the Home Youth Liaison Service, and children with mental health challenges, for example. Children's views were central in the development of the scoping study, and so it employs a unique children's rights based methodology developed at the Centre for Children's Rights, Queen's University Belfast. The researcher and representative from Kids' Own worked with a young people's advisory group (YPAG) to design the study including: developing the qualitative methods, deciding on questions to ask young participants, interpreting the data and making final recommendations for Kids' Own to take forward in designing an online programme for young people to access cultural life and the arts.

What emerged from the scoping study was a broader account of children and young people's access to the arts online: the arts are persistently understood as the domain of the affluent and wealthy, and access to cultural and arts programmes remains frustrated by social barriers that are not only material and financial, but based on perceptions that reveal deep inequalities in society. Moreover, the Covid-19 pandemic threw into sharp contrast the value with which the arts are viewed in society broadly, in contrast to the academic attainment and employment prospects of young people. This served to underline the prevailing outlook on the arts as privileges, not as rights entitlements of children under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

CHILDREN'S RIGHT TO CULTURAL LIFE AND THE ARTS

Under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (the Convention), children have the right to participate freely in cultural life and the arts. Article 31 reads:

1. States Parties recognize the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.
2. States Parties shall respect and promote the right of the child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life and shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activity.

In its General Comment (No. 17) the Committee on the Rights of the Child sought to enhance understanding of the importance of article 31 and to strengthen the application of rights under this article. The Committee expressed concern at the poor recognition by States parties to article 31 rights, warning that this lack of recognition results in the invisibility of children in national and local planning (UN, 2013). Of particular concern are barriers to the realisation of article 31 rights faced by girls, children from low socio-economic backgrounds, and children belonging to minorities.

Under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, article 12 imposes a state obligation to facilitate young people's voices, and article 13 presents an obligation to refrain from interference in the children's freedom of expression, which includes their right to seek, receive and impart ideas, regardless of frontiers, in the form of art or any other media of the child's choice. The transportation of children into the digital environment demands challenging our assumptions about expression: it is a right that is still evolving. This is evident in the General Comment published by the Committee on the Rights of the Child this year (2021), who outlined how States Parties (of which Ireland is one) should implement the Convention in relation to the digital environment to ensure full compliance with their obligations under the Convention (UN, 2021, para. 7). The Committee in particular notes that:

> The digital environment is becoming increasingly important across most aspects of children's lives, including during times of crisis, as societal functions, including education, government services and commerce, progressively come to rely upon digital technologies. It affords new opportunities for the realisation of children's rights... (UN, 2021, para. 3)

Indeed, this is especially the case in the midst of a global pandemic, as the Committee urges States Parties to be creative in seeking solutions for children and young people to exercise their rights to recreational activities, culture and the arts (UN, 2020). Moreover, children's rights in the digital environment have become particularly salient as online platforms have been a crucial medium through which services can be provided. The use of digital technology can assist in realising young people's right to participation at all levels of society, and State parties should therefore promote awareness or, and access to, digital mediums for children to exercise their right to freedom of expression (UN, 2021, para. 16). Indeed, the Committee asserts that meaningful access to digital technologies can support children to exercise the full range of their civil, political, cultural, economic and social rights, but warns that 'if digital inclusion

is not achieved, existing inequalities are likely to increase, and new ones may arise' (UN, 2021, para. 4). Crucially for this scoping study, the Committee is adamant that 'consultative processes are inclusive of children who lack access to technology or the skills to use it' (UN, 2021, para. 18) and underlines the importance of providing opportunities for children to design services in order to ensure the realisation of rights under article 31 (UN, 2013); that is the basis on which this scoping study has progressed.

Of course, all rights under the Convention are indivisible and interdependent, and children's rights under article 31 to recreational activities, cultural life and the arts are inseparable from their right to participation and to education, for example. The Committee explicitly states the importance of article 31 being 'understood holistically, both in terms of its constituent parts and also in its relationship with the Convention in its entirety' and observes the capacity of article 31 to protect the 'unique and evolving nature of childhood' (UN, 2013, Part III). Furthermore, in its most recent General Comment (UN, 2021), the Committee observes the importance of the digital environment in children's lives, particularly during times of crisis, of which the Covid-19 pandemic is a stark example. Whilst it 'affords new opportunities for the realization of children's rights', it also 'poses risks of their violation or abuse' (UN, 2021, para. 3). This report will discuss General Comments no. 17 on children's right to cultural life and the arts, and General Comment no. 25 on children's rights in the digital environment, as the findings of the scoping study are presented.

> *What are children and young people's needs and experiences of accessing cultural and Arts programmes online?*

Accessing the Arts presents the findings of the scoping study under four themes: opportunities and challenges; learning and development; information and resources; and accessibility and communication. In each of the themes that follow, the pertinence of each theme to international children's rights under the Convention on the Rights of the Child is discussed at the outset and findings interpreted through this lens. Young people's needs and experiences of accessing online cultural and arts programmes are presented in their own words, indicated using italics. These themes are interspersed with Young Person Advisory Group (YPAG) perspectives which includes their response to the findings, how they may have resonated with them, and what they recommended for an online arts programme delivered by Kids' Own.

1. The aim of the scoping study was to identify children and young people's (particularly those who are marginalised) needs and experiences of accessing cultural and Arts programmes online. To meet this aim, two research questions were identified:
2. What challenges do young people face that might stop them from taking part in online arts activities?
3. Why might young people face these challenges?

Whilst the focus of the scoping study was initially on barriers to accessing cultural arts programmes online, we quickly realised that young people's experiences and voices spoke to a much bigger question about the role of the arts in children and young people's lives more broadly, and how this was influenced by how the arts, as a whole, are perceived. Access to the Arts is presented under four key themes that capture the key aspects of 11 children and young people's experiences of arts activities online. The report highlights who would most benefit from online creative programmes, what young people's access needs are for these programmes, and where future research in this area would be pertinent.

METHODOLOGY: HOW WE CARRIED OUT THE SCOPING STUDY

The study was carried out by Dr Amy Hanna, the independent researcher for Kids' Own Publishing Partnership during this scoping study. Amy applied a children's rights-based approach to the research; one developed by the Centre for Children's Rights (Lundy & McEvoy 2012a and 2012b) at Queen's University Belfast. This means that the research process complied with United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child standards, and built in young people's capacity to claim their rights. This research approach is based on the Lundy model of youth participation (Lundy, 2007) where young people are afforded a safe space in which to voice their views and experiences, which are in turn employed to develop and enhance the capacity of the audience of duty bearers, and to influence decision making. Notably, in the arts sector, young people are traditionally understood as the target audience for arts programmes and interventions, but not as co-creators, and so this approach is both innovative and crucial to a child-led approach in the arts sector.

Lundy and McEvoy's (2012a) rights-based methodology positions children and young people as co-researchers. One way this can be done is by consulting a Young Person Advisory Group (YPAG). The YPAG advises the research team what to ask in order to answer the research questions, and how to ask it. When the data is collected, the YPAG help to interpret the data and advise on next steps; what impact the research should have. As part of the child-rights based approach of this study, a YPAG was recruited from the outset that represented as diverse a range of different groups of young people as possible. This YPAG helped us to plan, design and carry out the study. Owing to Covid-19 restrictions in place at the time of the scoping study, all YPAG meetings took place online over Zoom, accompanied by a representative from Kids' Own Publishing Partnership, Dr Ciara Gallagher.

All children and young people involved in the study were selected and recruited by Kids' Own to represent a diverse group of children who would traditionally be understood to face barriers to accessing cultural and arts activities and programmes, particularly in the digital environment. The Project Manager at Kids' Own, Dr Ciara Gallagher, liaised with Kids' Own contacts in the North West to communicate the opportunity with organisations, children and young people, and parents. Partner organisations such as Sligo Family Resource Centre, Foróige and Comhairle na nÓg communicated the opportunity to take part in the YPAG with children and young people and their parent/guardian in their respective organisations, and forwarded the project information leaflets and consents forms to them. Sligo Family Resource Centre, Diversity Sligo and Sligo Leitrim Home Youth Liaison Service were approached to recruit young participants for the scoping study; these organisations also forwarded project information leaflets and consents forms to young participants (that is, focus group and interviews) and their parents/guardians.

Stringent ethical procedures were in place for recruitment of the YPAG and young participants: information sheets and consent forms were distributed to partners of Kids' Own, who forwarded these to young people, and young people's parents. The information sheets contained information about Amy, the researcher, and the title and purpose of the study, detailing the right to withdraw participation at any point during the data collection process, and stipulating that all data would

be confidential and anonymised. The rights-based methodological framework emphasises participants' entitlement to information under Article 13 of the Convention about the study, and opportunity to form their own views before giving consent (Alderson and Morrow, 2011). This was also explained verbally at the beginning of Zoom sessions to ensure informed consent and to create space for the withdrawal of consent. Participants in the study were assured that all names would be anonymised in reporting in order to preserve their identities, and that, subject to safeguarding policy (of which they were made aware), their discussions and expressions were confidential.

Young Persons Advisory Group (YPAG)

As part of the children's rights-based methodology (Lundy and McEvoy, 2012a, 2012b), a YPAG was recruited at the beginning of the scoping study. The recruitment was carried out by Dr Ciara Gallagher of Kids' Own, availing of Kids' Own's networks in the region to ensure representation from different groups of children and young people. Partner organisations (schools and other youth services) were invited to nominate young people to join the YPAG. This was so that our advisory group would be as diverse a group of young advisors as possible. Kids' Own's partner organisations shared the opportunity to participate in the YPAG with young people and their parent/guardian and gave the project information leaflets and consents forms to them. The YPAG was made up of three young people who met over Zoom on three separate occasions between May and August 2021. A trusted adult from Kids' Own, Dr Ciara Gallagher, project manager, assisted during these meetings. The YPAG panel had three members:

1. Alex, aged 15.
2. Marwa, aged 15.
3. Khitam, aged 14.

The first session took place on Thursday 6th May, and focused on presenting to the YPAG (Alex, Marwa and Khitam) the aim of the scoping study, and what questions we should ask young people in order to meet the aim. This meeting incorporated capacity building: designing the qualitative research methods. We shared with Alex, Marwa and Khitam what we wanted to find out and asked what methods we should employ to meet our research aim. Our advisors agreed that using a focus group and one-to-one conversations was an appropriate way to approach the scoping study.

For the focus group, Khitam and Marwa suggested that two or three questions was enough, and agreed that any question should be one that enables young people to consider their own experiences. Directed by our advisors, we decided on the question for the focus group:

> *Tell us about your experiences of art online during the pandemic. Did you find it easy or hard?*

For one-to-one conversations, we presented the YPAG with our proposed questions. Their feedback was that the opening question was too direct. It should put young people at ease. The YPAG advised that the opening question should put young people at ease, and all questions should be respectful. The group suggested the following questions, which 'move upwards' as they go:

i. What kind of art makes you feel good? What kind of art do you (not) like to do?
ii. Have you tried any digital types of art? Are there any types of digital art you would like to try?
iii. Do you find art easy online?
iv. Do you face any issues getting online for art? (If a young person isn't sure we should use an example to help them: for example, there might be family at home which could be distracting, or the internet connection might be bad)

When asked about probing the question of why some young people might face such challenges, the group was varied in opinion: one thought we should not ask this question because it was sensitive and personal; another young person thought we should ask the question but phrase it in a way was not too direct and that ensured respect for young people. Working together, they suggested a fifth question:

v. [Reminder that this question, as with all questions, is optional and young people do not have to answer this question if they do not wish to]

   Do you think there might be reasons why some young people face difficulties accessing arts online?

The second YPAG meeting took place on Wednesday 14th July. The purpose of this meeting was to present some quotes from young people who participated in the scoping study, and to ask the YPAG to comment on what stood out to them. This would guide how we should interpret the meaning of these quotes. The YPAG discussed 'challenges', such as connectivity problems, 'feeling happy/not stressed' and exploring 'what you can do' with art. They also commented on 'lack of equipment', and buying arts supplies, suggesting that some parents may not have time to do this. 'Explaining' also featured in their discussion, including the importance of asking young people if they wanted anything repeated, and going 'step-by-step'.

In our third meeting, we presented the YPAG with the themes and key quotes we had included in the draft report, asking if anything surprised them, or if there was anything they thought would be included but wasn't. The YPAG was not surprised that many young people did not have art lessons during the Covid-19 pandemic, and expressed empathy with young people's views around arts supplies, explaining that they had run out of art supplies for art lessons and had had to buy more – a source of stress. The YPAG particularly liked the finding in the education and development theme that young people could use art to explore different ways of being creative as an opportunity to do something creative they had not done before. The YPAG then made a number of recommendations which are included in the main body of this report.

Focus Group and Interviews

Focus groups forefront group interactions and yield a collective view rather than an individual one (Cohen et al, 2018). This method was chosen because it provides space for young people's views and experiences to emerge through interaction with one another. As the research was 'scoping' in nature, one focus group was deemed sufficient for data collection, particularly for the small sample. In total, 11 young people participated in the focus group which took place on Zoom. The focus group was

accompanied by a trusted adult from Kids' Own for safeguarding, Dr Ciara Gallagher. Data was audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim.
James (1993: 85) suggests that 'semi-structured interviews offer people time to have second thoughts'. Therefore, interviewing young people offered a forum in which to continue conversations that occurred in the focus group where they might have had further thoughts or dissenting opinions. The semi-structured style of interviews created an increased possibility for the young people, to direct the conversation (James, 2001). Group interviewing was chosen with young people because it may be less intimidating for young people (Cohen et al, 2011), particularly children. Group interviewing was also chosen to temper what might be construed as an oppositional 'adult interviewer' versus 'child interviewee' model of dialogue by trying to help young people feel at ease.

In total, eight young people participated in semi-structured interviews; two interviews took place in pairs, and four interviews were conducted with individual young people. All interviews took place over Zoom, and were accompanied by a trusted adult from Kids' Own, Dr Ciara Gallagher. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim by the researcher, Dr Amy Hanna.

Qualitative Data Analysis

The focus group and interviews were audio recorded and then transcribed orthographically as a verbatim record of what took place. Data was analysed using Thematic Analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006, 2012) as a systematic way of approaching qualitative data as a whole, and because the data collection methods were experiential and exploratory (Braun and Clark, 2012). Braun and Clark (2006; 2012) define it as a method for 'systematically identifying, organizing, and offering insight into patterns of meaning (themes) across a data set' (p57). This data analysis stage followed the six stage process advocated by Braun and Clark (2012), beginning with data familiarisation (reading the transcripts), followed by generating a coding framework. This stage ended when the data set was fully coded, including any recoding or modification to codes that was necessary. These codes were then collapsed or clustered into categories in accordance with unifying features in order to capture coherent and meaningful patterns in the data – what Braun and Clark (2012) call the searching for themes stage, or stage three. In order to code the data and to subsequently select themes, NVivo software was employed to methodically organise codes, and from these codes to identify categories.

Categories into which these codes were clustered were used in order to identify themes. Overlaid on these themes was a rights framework because the themes taken from the coding analysis closely resembled the accompanying rights under the Convention on the Rights of the Child. This took place at stage four of Braun and Clark's (2012) of 'reviewing themes', followed by stage five 'naming' of these themes. In defining and naming the themes for reporting findings, it became clear that these themes were interrelated: both to one another, and to children's cultural rights under the Convention. This led to the sixth and final stage of thematic analysis: reporting the findings which can be found in the main body of this report.

Challenges and Limitations of the Scoping Study

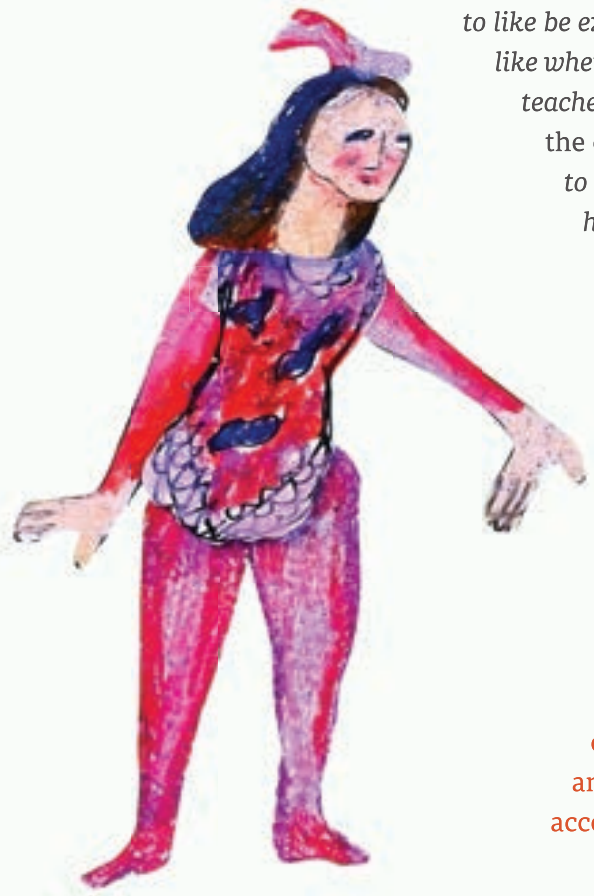
It is important to acknowledge that the scoping study confronted a number of challenges, and consequently incorporates a number of limitations. Of course, as a scoping study, the findings are not intended to be generalisable, but an indication of both what we know or think we know, and what we do not. One key limitation of the scoping study is therefore its small sample, and short duration. All findings require subsequent research on a larger scale to examine the findings in greater depth.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, all YPAG and participant meetings took place online; this proved to be a challenge for recruitment, perhaps because the study had something of an intangible feel to it and traditional in-person incentives were absent. Whilst the project was framed as a 'scoping study' at the outset, and was not intended to recruit a large sample of participants, one of the most challenging aspects of recruitment was attracting young people to participate in the advisory group in particular. Whilst our three young women were astute advisors, we had hoped for a more diverse (including gender diverse), and much larger group, the online nature of the project, coupled with the occurrence of the project in the school summer holidays made for difficulties of recruitment.

The objective of the study was to identify barriers to accessing the arts online by young people who would be considered marginalised. In the planning stages of the project, 'marginalised' included young people who were living with a disability, LGBTQ+ youth, those who were care experienced young people, refugees and asylum seekers, Traveller children and young people of minority race and ethnicity. One prominent challenge was that on being approached for young advisors and participants, the attitude of many adult professionals was one of protection of these young people, and a reluctance to approach them for their participation – it is unknown whether such young people were consulted on their willingness to participate. This focus on protection, of course, obfuscates young people's right to participate and to have their views heard on matters that affect them under article 12 of the Convention. As a right under article 31 of the Convention, participation in cultural life and the Arts is a matter that affects young people, particularly as they are the only group in society who have a right to play under this article. Therefore, a key limitation of the study is that there was no representation of young people who lived with a disability, those who identify as LGBTQ+, young people with experience of state care, or Traveller youth.

DIGITAL AND CULTURAL ACCESS FOR YOUTH IN THE NORTH WEST: SCOPING STUDY FINDINGS

For many young people, experiences of art and the arts online during the Covid-19 pandemic were framed by, and often synonymous with, their school experiences. As lessons and extra-curricular activities moved online, it is consequently imperative to implement young people's participation rights, particularly disadvantaged young people, who may not have access to activities that take place in the digital environment. Resoundingly, young people told us that art was not prioritised as an activity or an education subject during the pandemic. Their responses included *we didn't do art in the lockdown* (Aaron, 10), and *for school, we didn't really do that much art things* (Ella, 12). Benjamin's experience of *never [having] a teacher send me art to do online* (aged 10, interview) was a common experience amongst young people who participated in the scoping study. Aaron, aged 10, *was waiting for an art [lesson] but there was no art. I was waiting all the lockdown like in a day who comes we do art, but we didn't*. Young people expressed disappointment that schools *really prioritised other things* (Caroline, 14) namely academic subjects. This prioritisation *definitely like pushes... other subjects that focus more on creativity and design like art back a bit* (Bronagh, 15).



Contextually, these education experiences were often accompanied by difficulty: *It was really hard when like your teacher's not next to you to like be explaining the stuff*; and *face to face is really better cause like when you're in a classroom you can put up your hand and the teacher comes up to you and help us* (Francesca, 10). Online, on the other hand, *he would take a while to like say something to us* (Caleb, 13). Ultimately, it was *harder online to ask for help* (Caroline, 14). For art classes, a crucial difficulty for children was that in person, *you can just ask her where you're stuck and like she'll help you, she'll do some stuff in the artwork* (Francesca, 10,). Older young people who had taken art for GCSE expressed frustration with not having *regular updates like you [have] in your other classes* and *not talking to your teacher personally, he's not messaging back to you and you can't get in contact with him* (Bronagh, 15).

It is in this context that the findings of the scoping study are presented under four themes which emerged from the data: opportunities and challenges of accessing the arts sector online; learning and development; information and resources; and accessibility and communication.

Opportunities and Challenges

Article 31

1. States Parties recognize the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.
2.
3. States Parties shall respect and promote the right of the child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life and shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activity.

The Committee's General Comment 25 (UN, 2021) presented and discussed opportunities, risks and challenges to children's rights in the digital environment. Similarly, in this scoping study, whilst Covid-19 has presented unique challenges, young people spoke often about the opportunities they had encountered to practise art and the Arts more broadly. Art mediums enjoyed ranged from *painting* (Daisy, 10; Ella, 12; Aine, 15), including different painting genres such as *pointillism* (Daisy, 10) and *landscape painting* (Aine, 15), crafts such as *weaving* (Aaron, 10) or *origami and paper crafts* (Daisy, 10) and genres including *realistic pictures* and drawing activities such as *drawing animals* (Caleb, 13) or *copying the cover off the puzzle* (Ella, 12). Opportunities included activities that inspired inventiveness *during the lockdown... like out on the street and stuff... we actually said most of the time we didn't have the materials so we had to... use what we had I guess... We had to use our imagination* (Daisy, 10 and Ella, 12). Bronagh, aged 15, made a similar observation when she commented that *when you're not getting like access to all the top tier quality art things... I do think you get a bit more creative with the materials and mediums you use*. Other opportunities associated with art were an alternative to other forms of entertainment; Ella, aged 12, suggested that *it keeps me off my device*. Similarly, another young person described how when she was doing art over lockdown, *most of the time I would be like drawing, but I would be looking at the TV. But during lockdown I would turn off the TV and turn off my phone and... just do the art by myself, and it was really fun just doing it by myself...* (Daisy, 10).

Ella, aged 12, spoke about *realistic pictures* as her choice of medium, yet some were more sceptical of realism, like Benjamin, aged 10, who preferred *abstract art,* and Bronagh, aged 15, who told us:

> *[A]rt that I personally... really dislike is realism, which is unfortunate because, especially in schools, it's very focused on that there, where you need to have it as realistic as possible, and if it's not then you're crap, which I don't like.*

While the place of realism was acknowledged, Bronagh went on to elaborate on the opportunity presented by art to *think outside the box.* For her, motivation to participate in art was implicitly related to audience. When she *[did] art for me, I tend to go a bit wilder... because I'm not showing it to anyone*. In contrast, abstract art was explained by Benjamin, aged 10, as *when you draw stuff like you can draw whatever on it, and when someone sees it he doesn't know what it is. Like you can draw like shapes, like lines and circles and triangles and stuff like that*. This, perhaps, took the pressure off art being 'realistic', and provided a space for young people to *draw whatever you want* (Benjamin, aged 10). Notably, on probing Benjamin's

experience and knowledge of abstract art, he was not sure about its popularity in youth arts activities, saying *I don't really know, because I don't hear it a lot. I don't hear anyone talking about it*. Perhaps, in this vein, the pandemic presented opportunities to experiment with art mediums not conventionally included in art lessons in the education system.The challenges of art included how young people viewed making mistakes. Caleb, aged 13, broke down his experience of art into two categories: *interesting art is the easy art, and boring art is the hard one*. The problem for Caleb was that with 'hard art', *you'll be too confident when you do it, you just will give up because it's way too hard.* Consequently, he enjoyed *simple art*. Caleb further highlighted that *in drawings, I can rub it out if I miss... but in painting I can't... It will turn into a whole mess*. In other mediums, this appeared to be less problematic for some young people. One such example was digital art, where *it's not like if you make a mistake, you have to go back, you don't have to redo the whole piece. I like that idea of it* (Aine, 15). Aaron, aged 10, told us about his experience of an art activity where *we read a story* about *animals that's rare*, and used clay to *do the shapes... [of] the animals we don't see so much... we did it out of clay and we will paint it.* For this young person, his original choice of animal evolved as his clay model took shape: *I wanted to do a cobra, but I didn't know, but then I made a slug*.

Whilst workshops and arts activities *were on before the pandemic... because people have been bored... they've been looking more into arts and stuff where they can be creative* (Caroline, 14), Benjamin, aged 10, suggested that *sometimes I would just make up like an idea and I would draw it*, but at other times, *sometimes I go to YouTube because sometimes I just can't think of anything*. Ella, aged 12, suggested that *it was so like boring over the lockdown*, that her mum had signed her and her sister up for online arts programmes as an antidote to boredom. On one such occasion, *I was really bored and I asked my mam what would I do and she said she had stuff saved for me on Pinterest. It was decoupage* (Daisy, 10). Again, online spaces provided ideas, particularly those with a creative focus: *I would use Pinterest a lot* (Bronagh, 15). Online accessibility was therefore important in not only resolving 'boredom', but in accessing ideas for creative activities. Yet, one of the corresponding challenges accessing online arts programmes for Caroline was the change of medium; she found her online arts programme harder because her device's camera didn't work and this inhibited her ability to *engage properly online*. Similarly for Caroline, the virtual space was a great challenge for drama activities because *being on the stage is like bouncing off the other person*, and online platforms could not recreate this.

Others spoke about digital mediums of art they had tried such as digital drawing using apps on their devices, but these presented challenges as they were often an expense that had to be saved for: *I'd have to get an Apple to get the app... I'm saving up to get that* (Aine, 15). Another young person spoke about being lucky to have supportive parents who had bought her a *drawing tablet which means I can draw digitally* (Bronagh, 15). Whilst the functions on these apps could provide more accessibility to *different lightings, you can rub out complete areas, and you can duplicate things way easier...* (Bronagh, 15), an added benefit for another young person was that it avoided *waste paper* and addressed the challenge of not having *enough room to draw* (Caroline, 14) at home. Younger children found digital art difficult, however, and struggled to ascertain *what do we press*, couldn't *get the colours we want* (Caleb, 13), or found colouring apps *too fast and thick* (Aaron, 10).

The Committee asserts that spaces in which recreational opportunities are available to children provide conditions for creativity, and enhance motivation and skill development (UN, 2013). A key challenge of art that was highlighted in particular by the pandemic was motivation, and the role of social interactions

in motivating young people. Aine, aged 15, *like[d] to see how it goes*, and was motivated by not having *an idea of what I'm going to do. It's just we'll start somewhere and if it works it works, and if it doesn't we can always, you know, go with the flow*. The lack of online art lessons motivated Aine to practise at home, where she would *always try to expand, say, try new paintings and try new drawings*. Without teacher direction, and *with no contact with my teacher over the lockdown*, she found this to be an opportunity that motivated her and her art activity was *very much self-directed*.

The social aspect of participating in arts activities emerged as an equally important aspect of young people's motivation. Bronagh, aged 15, highlighted this aspect:

> *When it comes to drawing on my own, I'm not drawing in an environment with other people who are doing the same thing... even if I'm not chatting to them, if I'm just sort of in the presence of other people, I can sort of... when I'm not in that there social aspect of it, I can sometimes lack motivation...*

Motivation, according to Bronagh, did not have to be negative motivators like being grounded or having privileges withdrawn, but because *I'm very much a social person, and if there's not a social aspect to something I'm doing, I tend to lose interest which I think is not great. So I think a social aspect to things would definitely be beneficial.* Caroline, aged 14, described how an online creative writing space *motivates me to write as well*, but the difficulty of not being able to *talk with like, the other students and stuff* in online mediums was a challenge. For Caroline, it was in the sharing of, and feedback on, creative material that *you get to express yourself and you become more confident in what you're doing*.

YPAG Recommendation

Create a space where young people can be happy talking about their feelings and making new friends. Maybe young people don't have any friends, or their parents are working. Maybe they are stressed out and feel like they don't have anyone to talk to.

"Art is important but their feelings are more important".

Emerging from these discussions about motivation during the pandemic, was the difficulty of *finding stuff online to try and inspire me* because *I was just going through a funk where I was... I couldn't see the point of anything and I would do art to try and escape from that there, but then even drawing became 'well, why draw this here, you're crap enough as it is, like why even pretend that you're good at it?'* (Bronagh, 15). Perhaps such experience speaks to the centrality of recreation and the arts as essential resources to the mental health and wellbeing of children, and facilitation of the development of creativity, imagination and confidence (UN, 2013).

LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

Education Rights

Article 29 of the Convention states the aims of education, and stipulates States' obligations:

1. States Parties agree that the education of the child shall be directed to:

a. The development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential;
b. The development of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and for the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations;
c. The development of respect for the child's parents, his or her own cultural identity, language and values, for the national values of the country in which the child is living, the country from which he or she may originate, and for civilisations different from his or her own;
d. The preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups, and persons of indigenous origin;

Play and recreation contribute to all learning: they are a form of participation in everyday life and are of 'intrinsic value to the child' (UN, 2013, para. 9); herein children and young people's rights to participation, arts and culture, and education are drawn together. Children learn by doing: exploring their surroundings; experimenting with ideas and roles; and understanding and constructing their social position in society (UN, 2013, para. 9). In the digital environment, this is particularly resonant in the exploration of children's identities:

> Digital forms of culture, recreation and play should support and benefit children and reflect and promote children's differing identities, in particular, their cultural identities, language and heritage. They can facilitate children's social skills, learning, expression, creative activities, such as music and art, and sense of belonging and a shared culture. Participation in cultural life online contributes to creativity, identity, social cohesiveness and cultural diversity. States parties should ensure that children have the opportunity to use their free time to experiment with information and communications technologies, express themselves, and participate in cultural life online. (UN, 2021, para. 107)

Under article 29 of the Convention, known as the 'aims of education', education must be directed to the development of children and young people's personalities, talents and mental and physical abilities, to their fullest potential. The Committee asserts that implementation of the rights under article 31 are crucial to compliance under article 29; children require opportunities for artistic and cultural development. In this scoping study, an interesting paradox emerged: despite the majority of children not having online art lessons through school during the pandemic, art was widely linked with education, and young people often referred to learning in their discussions. Simultaneously, however, art was

often not perceived as an activity in which learning took place. One young person described how *all the lockdown we didn't do art. We just did work* (Aaron, 10), suggesting that 'work', or learning, and arts enjoyment were viewed as mutually exclusive. Indeed, the concept of 'fun' was often raised with regard to arts activities because *we need a time for fun*. Aaron expanded on his experience, describing how *we just do work and we don't do, even like, a break. And online. So I said it will be better if they give us time for art. Like how to do art* (Aaron, 10). There was an implicit allusion to monotony of art in school: one young person referred to *normal stuff that we do every single year... the only two things we usually do are like painting and drawing* (Ella, 12). Similarly, as painting featured frequently as a medium of art that appeared to be relatively standard, some young people expressed a desire *to do something that I haven't done before* (Daisy, 10); learning and trying new things. Ella, aged 12, expressed how she *got to learn a bunch more stuff online than I did like when I was in school cause in school we only did art like a couple of times in a year*. This demonstrates the educational value of the arts sector in providing recreational activities that implement not only the right to cultural life and the Arts under article 31, but also education rights under article 29.

The medium and method of instruction for arts activities was crucial in young people's enjoyment. Aaron, aged 10, *didn't understand* online lessons, and consequently *I wasn't talking for two weeks or three weeks*; another young person conveyed how *you feel a bit nervous because you don't know the instruction and you don't know how to do it*. For Francesca, aged 10, the medium of instruction was *more easy... when she sends a video*. For another, online art programmes that were the most instructive were those that used *simple language... and went through it so simply and slowly* (Aine, 15). For those who might have additional needs in the classroom, this was imperative. Aine went on to describe how, having dyslexia, *when something goes too fast I always, you know, I just can't understand it sometimes.* She exited these online tutorial sessions, and *found some slower ones, it was [then] very easy for me to actually then learn how to do it with my own mind and get my mind around setting what I had to do.*

YPAG Recommendation

The YPAG's recommendation suggested that this exploration should extend to arts activities, such as "draw a picture that represents you"

Art activities were also educational in that, in many cases, without direction from teachers, young people had the opportunity to learn both about themselves and their motivation, and also about new mediums they may not have explored otherwise: *I got to explore mediums by myself, and then I didn't have anyone to tell me to do it* (Aine, 15). For Aine, the lessons that art had to teach were *a different type of learning*.

Aine framed these lessons in terms of dealing with and managing stress: *art can teach you just an escape from like stress and everything, or you can just calm down by doing art*. This was echoed by Benjamin who described his feelings when doing art: *I feel calm* (Benjamin, 10). This applied to the arts more broadly, including *theatre and performing arts*, which could teach young people about the world outside of themselves:

> *a release of stress because you can pretend you're someone else for a moment, and then you get to deal with your own things, and you can say if you're a brave character, you can add that bravery into your own characteristics... with performing music you are then part of something... bigger than just yourself* (Aine, 15).

The arts sector, therefore has a prominent role to play in dealing with stress and anxiety; Bronagh's friends also experienced *stress quite frequently and… they also think that like drawing… for like ten minutes does make them feel better because when you're drawing… it's just a good thing to sort of disassociate, and you can just sort of slow your brain I guess, and you can listen to music…* (Bronagh, 15). The value of art in comparison to other subjects in the curriculum seemed for some to challenge the academic focus of many schools: a key challenge as many young people are denied their rights under article 31 as a consequence of pressure to achieve academically, and consequent focus on formal academic success (UN, 2013, para. 41). Ella, aged 12, suggested that it was *important… to have like something fun to do as well as all the tough subjects*. Whilst maths was needed for getting a job, *you need like social skills to talk to people, creativity to like… think of stuff as well… The schools I feel really shut down creative people if they're not good at say maths and stuff* (Caroline, 14). In contrast to academic accolades, art has the capacity to teach endurance, persistence and self-motivation:

> *[Y]ou don't have to remember a formula to pick up a pencil and draw something, you don't need to spend hours revising to pass the exam, you just need to practise and draw more which is something very simple and something everyone's capable of doing… but it tends to be about the motivation to do it. Cause it doesn't test your memory I think you get a better grasp about people's motivation and… whether someone can be motivated to do something…* (Bronagh, 15)

Other educational value of art lay in the capacity to use art across the curriculum. Caleb explained how in school his class would draw their responses to the teacher's questions or maths problems on whiteboards: *we have to draw… to explain ourselves* (Caleb, 13). Similarly, Caleb pointed out that drawings and photography – a key art form – were used regularly in history lessons to depict life through the ages: *airplanes, helicopters they used and how does the army look like. Soldiers. There were loads of pictures in World War 2 when we learned about it*. This was educational because the drawings *explain how does like the airplane looks like, no one would imagine it, but in the pictures you will see it* (Caleb, 13).

INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

Right to Information

The right to information is incontrovertibly connected to children's right to freedom of expression. The right to information is enshrined in Article 13 freedom of expression and Article 17 of the Convention:

Article 13

- The child shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child's choice.

Article 17

States Parties recognize the important function performed by the mass media and shall ensure that the child has access to information and material from a diversity of national and international sources, especially those aimed at the promotion of his or her social, spiritual and moral well-being and physical and mental health.

Whilst the Covid-19 pandemic did present opportunities in the arts sector, such as the opportunity for *more people [to] do it now from the comfort of their own home* (Aine, 15), the aim of the research was to identify the barriers faced by children and young people in engaging with the arts online. In this scoping study, these barriers are encapsulated by shortcomings in information available to young people, and a lack of resources, despite children's right to information under articles 13 and 17 of the Convention. Of course, the digital environment presents an opportunity to realise this right to access to information, and performs an important function in the lives of young people in this respect (UN, 2021, para. 50).

This information should include information about 'culture, sports and the arts' (UN, 2021, para. 51); relevant information that goes to the heart of equality (ibid, para. 52). Yet, one of the barriers to participating in arts activities online was availability: Aine told us that *the opportunity to get online classes were very slim* (Aine, 15) over the course of the pandemic. Where there were online opportunities, a further barrier was knowledge of, and appropriate information about, these opportunities because *I know not a lot of people would be on Facebook where most of the opportunity is, so not a lot of people would actually get the opportunity to see oh this class is on at this time. You wouldn't actually see it unless someone actually mentioned it to you* (Aine, 15). Despite the prevalence of social media as a medium of communication, Aine reminded us that target audiences may not have social media: *your audience is always going to be 'we might have it, we might not'*. This was reflected in Daisy and Ella's account of their art programmes as their mum found a programme on social media *like once for one of the art things that we did, but some of the things she just found out from her friends... so she signed us up for it* (Daisy, 10; Ella, 12).

Notably, younger children highlighted that some children do not actually use the internet that much and therefore a barrier to online participation was knowing how to work the online platforms. Caleb, aged 13, suggested that *some children doesn't use online that much… they have to call their parents every day for… online schools, I think some people found it difficult. They have to call their parents every day to set the online thing up*. Some young people *don't really go on the computers* (Benjamin, 10). Benjamin later clarified that these young people were aged between *nine to eleven* years of age. Caleb, aged 13, experienced trouble connecting to the Zoom call, and maintaining connection. When probed about why he did not go online much, Caleb's response was that he was *outside with my friends. All the day* (Caleb, 13). Both Benjamin and Caleb were refugees settled in Ireland, and so their accounts may reflect a lack of accessibility to internet or digital device; more research is required in order to fully understand the reasons for this.

Of course, one obvious barrier to online arts participation was connectivity, which took two forms: access to wifi; and inadequate wifi capacity. Many young people identified this in their discussions of barriers to participation: *Wifi can be one. Broadband* (Aine, 15). One young person acknowledged that some youth do not *have access to online stuff* (Bronagh, 15). Others highlighted how online platforms could be *glitchy* or would *cut off for like a minute and then you'd go back on and you wouldn't know where he is* (Ella, 12). This particular barrier included other family demands on connectivity where *there's loads of people on devices in my house at the same time that I'm doing my Zoom call at* (Daisy, 10 and Ella, 12). They experienced wifi demand in their own home whilst attempting to access an online arts programme:

> *[T]he internet was really bad because everyone else was on their devices. Like the TV and play station and phones and stuff. We couldn't really log in. So we had to go around and ask people could they turn off their stuff to let us go onto it.*

Other barriers took the form of resources: equipment; financial; and time barriers. One young person described how *obviously poverty's really bad… you can't afford a phone or a device to participate* (Caroline, 14) which was exacerbated by, for example, *being a young carer, or having a lot of siblings that you have to look after as well… my friend's experienced that, where they couldn't get on like school because of that* (Caroline, 14). Caroline highlighted that in some homes, there might be *only one laptop in the house and their sibling had to go on it*.

YPAG Recommendation

Send some resources to those who want to take part. E.g. scissors, glue, sheets

The financial challenges of online arts programmes also extended to the cost of programmes themselves, as highlighted by Ella who explained that *some of them you had to pay for them and they might not have that much money so… they might not be able to pay for it and get on to it* (Ella, 12). This included arts equipment and supplies, where some young people *might not have as much supplies as us* (Ella, 12).

Two young people had experience of this directly. Caleb, aged 13, explained how *in school, if you don't have, like, for example, green colour, you can ask your friend to share. In home, it's like, more different*. One suggestion for overcoming such a barrier was *if like they give us the materials for doing the art and put things in the post so like we could do them in our house…* (Aaron, 10). Notably, Bronagh, aged 15, made

connections between resources and information; whilst she was of the view that not having 'high end' equipment made for greater creativity with materials and mediums, she also remarked that *there also is a benefit from getting the high end sort of things cause you do get a bit more information with it, instead of when you have to be a bit more resourceful and take in from your surroundings*.

Space was also a resource in family homes that could be a barrier, as explained by Caleb who suggested it was important to *find a place for it. You can do art on the floor*. For this young person, it was important to find a place where *there is no noise*, and where his creations would be safe from younger siblings: *my sister, she will destroy the art* (Caleb, 13). Aaron, aged 10, similarly observed that *you can't concentrate if someone [is] crying or talking over you or messing with you* (Aaron, 10). Time was also a resource that could act as a barrier to arts participation. One young person explained that as the pandemic has altered family time, this had an effect on whether or not times suited how families might be using devices for different activities at different times: *timing... we're all stuck at home so you might not actually have the devices to do it. So it might just be there's... other things, say family and just where you are, or what you are doing at that time* (Aine, 15). Similarly, not all children follow the same routines, as Caroline highlighted how timing could be a barrier:

> *Like when times are set to do stuff... some people don't get out of school, don't get home to like five, whereas another gets home about three. So like a flexible like thing like 'oh, we have the meeting then, but you can still send in work to show us stuff or whatever at any time'* (Caroline, 14)

Barriers to participation in cultural life and the arts were not only functional, but also part of a perception of the arts community more generally, according to Bronagh, who observed that:

> *it's definitely for rich people, like rich rich people that can do it as a hobby, or can buy pieces... I think there definitely is a barrier unfortunately, especially with how a lot of people see art as if you're not using high end equipment, if you're not using top of the line brushes and paints, and you don't have this specific brand of canvas, or this- don't use gold leaf in all your pieces then you're not a real artist. If you use Crayola markers you can't call yourself an artist, you're just someone colouring in, and I think that's sort of a problem. You need to change the outlook on it, and on the supplies, before you can change the actual problems within it.* (Bronagh, 15)

This perception was one that had crept into education, where art was viewed as being antithetical with intelligence. Bronagh explicitly challenged this impression, arguing that *being intelligent cannot be defined by your knowledge of one field, especially in schools where you don't really test your knowledge, you test your memory... that's something that needs to be changed*. One of the most profound barriers to participating in the arts (online or otherwise) may therefore be impressions of value held in the education system, and society broadly.

This may account partially for some discussion about young people being a barrier to themselves regarding online arts participation. Caroline, aged 14, explained that she gets *really scared starting stuff,* and so did not start anything new over the pandemic. This was a challenge she believed faced many young people owing to *anxieties kids have starting stuff and being judged now*. This was echoed by Bronagh who suggested that:

> *I think the only real barriers would be themselves maybe. Like if they're worried their friends find out and all of a sudden they're the end of a joke and their friends start making memes of them like... 'this person going to a writers group, being a dork', or em, them worrying 'if I go to this group, what if I'm the only one who dresses like me or talks like me? What if everyone else is like really... sophisticated and fancy?' or 'what if I'm too different from everyone else?'* (Bronagh, 15)

Interestingly, however, this also formed a central aspect of the value of online arts programmes:

> *I think a value can be found in small things like if someone just smiled, or if someone laughed and came out of their shell a bit, and got a bit more confidence in themselves, cause it is, right now I'd say, it is really difficult to feel confident in yourself, to feel assertive, to feel powerful in everyday things and I think something like drama and drawing and talking to other people and socialising in an aspect away from school...* (Bronagh, 15)

Perhaps the thread that emerges here is the unifying power of the arts sector; in Aaron's words: *anyone can do it* (Aaron, 10). When asked about the value of art, Bronagh similarly captured the capacity of art to bring different people, different art forms and different creations together:

> *I think that what's incredible about art and what's incredible about the human mind is because you could have a blank page and a pen, and then the teacher could say 'I want you to draw something about the... ocean' and every single person in that class would have something different.* (Bronagh, 15)

ACCESSIBILITY AND COMMUNICATIONS

Despite the Committee's (UN, 2021, para. 102) assertion that States parties should ensure proper infrastructure for accessing basic utilities necessary for distance learning (such as devices, electricity and connectivity), young people spoke at length about barriers to participation in the arts sector online, and issues of accessibility and suitability of online programmes for different young people with different backgrounds. Young people suggested that both online programmes delivered by pre-recorded video or live online platform had value because with a video, *you can skip* (Daisy, 10) parts that were not of interest, but live online platforms, for example, Zoom, were *good in case you like didn't understand anything and you could ask a question* (Ella, 12).

The central premise of accessibility is the suitability of online programmes to young people's age, resources, skill, and communication needs. Young people suggested that more varied art mediums was necessary and of course this has implications for the accessibility of the arts more generally. Young people suggested the necessity for activities such as *making something*, and mediums that were *something that's not just 'do drawing'* (Daisy, 10). Indeed, as discussed above, it was important for many participants to *have a mixture of different things*, that contrasted the *normal stuff of like painting and drawing* (Ella, 12). Programmes should therefore offer an opportunity to *do everything so [participants] know... different mediums, so they're not just stuck in one, they have a bit of everything* (Aine, 15).

YPAG Recommendation

Rather than telling young people what to do, give them an idea and let them decide what to create around that idea. Give them some time to develop their ideas.

A good way to do this would be to use 'breakout rooms' on Teams.

Gender stereotyping also emerged as an important consideration, and is recognised by the Committee (UN, 2021, para. 54) as a possibility online. Ella described the importance of an online arts programme being gender-neutral:

> *I just think that the gender neutral thing is like very important. Like, cause, most of the things that I went on... you'd either join one for the girls, or for the boys. And the girls one was always about fairies and unicorns and the boys' was all about farming and tractors.* (Ella, 12)

There is a skill requirement for joining and participating in any online programme, and this is no different for the arts; communication with young people about this skill, and not assuming such skills were important. The Committee recognises the importance of digital technologies in improving access to both education and participating in extracurricular activities (UN, 2021, para. 99), and also observes that:

> *States parties should ensure digital literacy is taught in schools as part of basic education curricula. Curricula should include knowledge and skills to safely handle a wide range of digital tools and resources, including those relating to content, creation, collaboration, participation, socialisation and civic engagement (UN, 2021, para. 104).*

In the scoping study, this need for digital literacy was not isolated to joining online platforms, but extended to explaining in child friendly language features that were essential for privacy and online safety, such as *how to press on mute, how to like cover up your camera* (Francesca, 10). Aaron, aged 10, suggested that adults should *make like explains for kids to like know how to join in Zooms, to join like classes or something like that*, and Benjamin suggested an online person *who will help them if they don't know what to do* (Benjamin, 10).

Skill level emerged as an important feature of arts activities, both regarding the pitch of the programme, but also what young participants want to get out of the programme. Benjamin, aged 10, explained his experience of trying an online art activity video, but giving up because it was too difficult: *Because like hard art, sometimes you will have like- you'll be too confident that when you do it, you just, eh, will give up because it's way too hard.* The type of art Benjamin enjoyed was *simple art*, like that available on Art Hub (a YouTube channel for art shown sometimes in his school art lessons) because it was *simple to follow and you can see like the man that's drawing and he will like tell you where to draw and tell you like what to draw and how to do it... He would explain it* (Benjamin, 10). Caroline, aged 14, was one of the few young people who did have online art lessons during the pandemic. At the beginning of each new topic, her class had a Teams meeting with their teacher *so she could explain what we were doing*. Caroline appreciated the capacity of art as a subject to *be creative*, and enjoyed her art lessons *especially during the pandemic*.

Whilst content labelling on the age-appropriateness of online content is encouraged of digital service providers by the Committee (UN, 2021, para. 55), Daisy and Ella, who had experience of a number of online programmes, expressed their frustration at having to sit through Zoom sessions tailored for young children before their own age-appropriate activities were available:

> *So, there was really stuff for like the five year olds, and six year olds and sevens. And then for the like tens and thirteens... if you're thirteen you won't really want to do... like fairy and magic and fairy tale stuff that they're doing for the five year olds and stuff* (Daisy, 10).

Caroline advised that the target age group should be explicit in advertisement and information about online arts programmes because the absence of such information made her conclude that she could not participate at all: *[if] there's like no age on it, I'm panicking like 'what age is it then?' I'd say...'oh well I can't participate in this'* (Caroline, 14). This was echoed by Ella who stipulated that information about the programme was crucial:

> *I'm not gonna... join a Zoom call that I don't really know anything about... if you did have like a video describing it, you can put in the different stuff like if there is going to be like art and dancing and stuff like that. You can put that into the video and then people would know what it's about. And probably more people would join it* (Ella, 12).

YPAG Recommendation

Young people should also be able to talk about how they feel so create a space to talk if they're scared because "some young people might be scared to let their voice out".

This communication with young people regarding the art mediums they engaged in whilst participating in online activities was also crucial in practise. Aine, aged 15, suggested that it was important to get to know, like, if they know what they're doing. And to see can they actually want to learn about it, so, do they want *to learn about sculpting or are they pretty happy in their little bubble of landscape?* This was a crucial part of communicating with young people throughout the programme about their needs and *what they wanted to get out of the activity:*

> *I'd say ask them how far they know on what they're doing. Like, can they, I guess, do a tree, can they do like a river if they're doing landscape. Are they able to do all this in one painting and if they're doing anatomy, can they get the shading, can they get all the features in? So you just ask them, you know, can they get some features in or are they a little behind and they don't know exactly what they're doing* (Aine, 15).

YPAG Recommendation

*The teacher should **show** them how to do the crafts*

Aine summed this up beautifully when she quipped: *I would feel it's important to talk to them*, which of course represents one of the guiding principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child: seeking the views of children and young people. When asked how she would design an online programme to incorporate these aspects, she advised how she would conduct a live online arts programme:

I would change my camera so I wasn't looking at them, but they were looking at my piece instead so they could actually see what I was doing instead of looking at me while I try to explain it to them. So they could see first hand my hands trying to get the piece around it. So I would do it with them, and I would ask every single one… how they're getting on and to show me their piece. So they understand and I can see if they are understanding what I'm telling them (Aine, 15).

SCOPING STUDY RECOMMENDATIONS

The research aim was to identify children and young people's (particularly those who are marginalised) needs and experiences of accessing cultural and arts programmes online. This section presents recommendations arising from the study. These recommendations take two forms: recommendations for an online arts programme provided by Kids' Own; and recommendations for future research in this area to examine in greater depth the findings of this scoping study.

Recommendations for an online arts programme

Before an Online Arts Programme

- Awareness and advertisement of sessions should use a range of avenues (e.g. social media, billboards, schools, parent groups, community centres and youth clubs) in order to reach as many young people from as diverse a range of backgrounds as possible.
- Young people should have adequate information about the programme to enable them to make informed decisions about their participation. For example, the target age group, planned arts mediums/genres/activities, what young people will create or make, expectations (e.g. not having to speak aloud unless they are comfortable).
- Programme sessions should be delivered for free, where possible, for inclusion and accessibility: this should be included in information about the programme.

Using an Online Platform

- Use a range of online mediums: live and interactive, and videos that can be paused, rewinded or fast forwarded.
- Provide clear instructions in child-friendly language on how to operate the digital platform chosen for the programme.
- A trusted adult who is present in online sessions to assist with connectivity problems, or accessibility challenges would be beneficial.
- Live sessions should focus the camera on the professional artist and what they are doing; the facilitator should also participate in the creative medium (i.e. show young people how to complete the activities). Young people should have space to ask questions if they wish to do so.

The Creative Space

- All sessions should provide a safe space where young participants feel respected and valued.
- Activities and online sessions should be gender neutral.
- Programme sessions should be delivered by age. All age groups should not be delivered in the same session.
- The arts should be used as a medium through which to achieve social contact and address social isolation. Any programme should therefore provide space for young people to socialise with their peers. Utilising group work/break out rooms might be beneficial in actioning this recommendation.

- Sessions should cater for students with communication challenges and additional needs. For example, sessions should not move at a pace where a young person with dyslexia would struggle to process information. This can be monitored by asking young participants for feedback, listening to them and engaging with them directly during the sessions.
- Facilitators should provide constructive feedback on young people's pieces, if they wish to receive it. Sessions should also include space for young people to give peer feedback.

Arts Activities

- Include a range of arts mediums and activities.
- Use a range of genres: realism and abstract art, for example.
- There should be scope to send young participants arts supplies where necessary and appropriate.
- Tasks should be straightforward (subject to age and ability), especially in the beginning of the programme in order that a space is created for young people to participate, and not over-examine their artistic ability. A 'capacity-building' approach to the programme over time may be useful in this respect (subject to duration of the programme will last and assuming it is not a single session).

After Live Sessions

- Live sessions should be recorded and posted online afterwards so young people who cannot participate in the live session can participate at a later stage. If arts pieces are being 'submitted', there should be ongoing allowance for young people who participate at a later time to submit and receive feedback on their pieces.

Recommendations for future research

The scoping study has several limitations which are stipulated in the methodology. As this project was an overview of barriers to accessing the arts sector, a number of recommendations highlight the need for further research:

- Whether, and to what extent, the challenges and barriers to participation in the arts online is specific to young people's demographic. E.g. refugee or disability status.
- Further research should include a larger and more diverse sample of young participants, including in particular, those with disabilities, those who are in the care of the state, young people who identify as LGBTQ+, and a more diverse range of ethnic backgrounds, for example, Traveller children.
- Further research may address questions about how perceptions of the arts influence young people's participation in cultural life and the arts sector as a whole.
- Arts-based methods could be explored in research about supporting dialogue about mental health, wellbeing and mindfulness.
- Further research on the relationship between cultural life and the arts, and children's rights to, in and through education, and research on the arts sector and children's participation rights more generally would also be beneficial.

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