

Girlguiding's response to the Comprehensive Spending Review representation 2021

1. Overview

- 1.1 As the leading charity for girls and young women in the UK, our representation to this consultation is focused on UK Government spending we recommend to improve the lives of girls and young women.
- 1.2 In this submission, we recommend that HM Treasury prioritise the urgent need for investment in the youth sector including uniformed youth organisations such as Girlguiding through the Youth Investment Fund; and in areas that will enable girls and young women to thrive.
- 1.3 Girls' safety, wellbeing and confidence impacts on their future, which has been disrupted by the pandemic. In light of the upcoming Comprehensive Spending Review, Girlguiding believes more must be done to ensure the barriers girls and young women face to living full, equal and safe lives is addressed through the prioritisation of effective resource that would mean they could reach their full potential.
- 1.4 In particular we believe this could be enabled through the release of the Youth Investment Fund that will support the youth sector to meet the needs of young people at this crucial time. We believe youth offers, such as ours, are more important than ever for young people's wellbeing and life chances during recovery from the pandemic.
- 1.5 Girlguiding has a clear role to play in supporting recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic for girls and young women. Our youth and volunteering offer can contribute to reducing loneliness, improving wellbeing and boosting employability skills. We believe girls and young women should have their voices heard in recovery so they can inform decisions that will shape their futures. And we hold a unique position in civil society in supporting girls and young women to thrive, speak out, and participate.
- 1.6 We also believe work to address the unfair and limiting pressures girls and young women face must be supported through investment in initiatives that support their wellbeing and tackle issues including sexual harassment; online harms including around appearance pressures that significantly impact girls and young women's wellbeing; and a balanced and effective curriculum that helps children and young people to navigate the challenges they face today from online safety to healthy relationships.
- 1.7 This submission builds on our response to the Department for Media Culture and Sport Youth Sector Review in Spring 2021, which we understand will help to inform HM decision-making to secure young people's futures. In this submission we also recommended that children and young people's concerns should be at the heart of government decision-making and for their voices to be heard on the issues that affect them including around recovery from Covid-19.

2 Our recommendations

2.1 Youth provision

- 2.1.1 Covid-19 has exacerbated the challenges faced by girls and young women and the impact of the pandemic will have consequences for their future opportunities and happiness.
- 2.1.2 Investment in youth provision is essential to mitigate the impact of the pandemic and increase children and young people's confidence, wellbeing, skills and opportunities. It is a key part of the Government's levelling up agenda.

- 2.1.3 As part of the Back Youth Alliance¹, Girlguiding support #BackYouth's calls for a bold plan to help build back better a sustainable recovery and cohesive society, where young people feel valued and see the difference in their communities and their lives: levelling up economic opportunity, improving their health and wellbeing.
- 2.1.4 Girlguiding believes the Government's role in supporting organisations that deliver youth services should be to invest in and support the infrastructure and framework that enables the youth sector to collaborate, innovate, and thrive.
- 2.1.5 Our work shows the huge value of youth provision for girls and young women. We want to see the Youth Investment Fund support this work and that of our partners in the youth sector.
- 2.1.6 The youth investment fund announced in 2019 is £500m over five years and can act as a catalyst for change, in particular for capital funding in local communities and activities for young people at the grassroots. However spending on youth services in England and Wales has been cut by 70% in real terms in less than a decade, which represents a loss of over £1 billion of annual expenditure.
- 2.1.7 Like many other youth sector charities, the pandemic has had a significant impact on Girlguiding, both regionally and nationally. It's affected our financial position - our regular income fell by over £5m in 2020 at the UK level. In addition, we've seen a 30% membership decline since 2020, especially in communities disproportionately affected by the pandemic such as Wales, North West, South West and Northern Ireland. Investment would enable us to prioritise supporting our volunteers and recruitment new volunteers to enable more girls and young women to benefit from our offer including around wellbeing and skills for their futures.
- 2.1.8 We are calling therefore for a **realignment of £1.2bn annual funding across departments** and ring-fenced in local areas to invest in upstream services and create opportunities across a diverse range of providers for an eco-system of community-based youth and community work to flourish.
- 2.1.9 We want to see Government prioritise spending over the following in the next 3 years:
- 2.1.9.1 Support for high quality youth work to reach the young people most in need of urgent support to prevent harm.
 - 2.1.9.2 Prioritising inclusion and increasing access to youth provision for young people who can benefit most.
 - 2.1.9.3 Rebuild formal volunteering capacity, recognising the value of volunteer delivered youth work as well as professional youth workers.
 - 2.1.9.4 Support for positive activities that help young people to bounce back from the impact of the pandemic, supporting wellbeing and developing essential skills for the future through informal education, and recognising what different groups of young people need and the range of environments that help them to thrive through long term engagement for young people.

Why do this now?

- 2.1.10 We know that investment in youth provision is a smart move which would support the Government's ambitions to level up across the UK, support children and young people to catch up on missed educational opportunities by collaborating across formal and informal education setting, taking financial pressure off local authorities, education, health and criminal justice systems.

¹ BYA members include Girlguiding, UK Youth, The Scouts, The National Youth Agency, NCS Trust, Youth United Foundation, Step up to Serve, The Prince's Trust, Duke of Edinburgh's Award, Onside Youth Zones and the British Youth Council

- 2.1.11 It is not just girls and young women who benefit from youth provision: the adult members who volunteer with Girlguiding also report feeling more connected, confident and have the chance to develop new skills, aiding their contribution to society at large.
- 2.1.12 In addition, our research ² shows that 58% of girls and young women aged 11-21 say being part of a youth group helps them to develop new skills, showing the impact youth provision can have on informal education and future employment opportunities.
- 2.1.13 Girlguiding also believes that funding the youth sector is an essential way to improve the mental health of all young people, including girls and young women.
- 2.1.14 Research from the University of Edinburgh and Glasgow in 2016 showed that children who participate in Guiding or Scouting are likely to have better mental health in later life. Researchers found:
- 2.1.15 Former Guides/Scouts tended to have better mental health at age 50
 - 2.1.16 Former Guides/Scouts were around 15% less likely to experience anxiety/ mood disorders
 - 2.1.17 The activities in Guiding and Scouting seem to remove the relatively higher likelihood of mental illness in those from poorer backgrounds
 - 2.1.18 Programmes that help children develop skills such as self-reliance and teamwork, and encourage being active outdoors, may have lifelong benefits.
- 2.1.14 Research on the impact of time spent in guiding on girls' wellbeing by Jump Research for Girlguiding in 2019 found a positive relationship between time in guiding and positive outcome related to girls' confidence and resilience. Girls who have been members of Girlguiding for 3-5 years had more positive outcomes than girls who had been in guiding less than a year. The relationship was even stronger for girls living in areas of deprivations compared those not living in areas of deprivation.
- 2.1.15 Girlguiding has a commitment to a society where girls can go about in the world freely, feeling safe and equal. We are committed to playing our part in supporting girls and young women and call on everyone to do their part to make this a reality. We recommend the Government use the Spending Review and Autumn Budget to invest in action to end sexual harassment and promote girls' safety. The below recommendations outline key areas where investment could contribute to significant improvement in girls' and young women's ability to thrive. They represent important opportunities for HMT and across Government to reverse downward trends in wellbeing and skills gaps as a result of the pandemic.
- 2.2 Sexual harassment and safety**
- 2.2.14 Girlguiding believes sexual harassment is unacceptable. From unwanted attention and comments to physical harassment and abuse, our research shows harassment is widespread in all parts of the country, in all areas of girls' lives, including in schools, public places and online.
- 2.2.15 Sexual harassment is detrimental to girls' wellbeing, and it negatively affects their freedom and opportunities. And girls often feel they must change their own behaviour to avoid it. We think more needs to be done to urgently tackle sexual harassment at school, in public and online.

² Girlguiding (September 2020) Girls' Attitudes Survey <https://www.girlguiding.org.uk/globalassets/docs-and-resources/research-and-campaigns/girls-attitudes-survey-2020.pdf>

- 2.2.16 We believe the key to preventing all forms of violence against women and girls is educating all children and young people about respect, gender equality, consent and healthy relationships. We want to see the UK Government use the CSR and Autumn Budget to invest in:
- 2.2.16.1 A change in the law to make public sexual harassment a crime.
 - 2.2.16.2 Schools to take a zero-tolerance approach to sexual harassment.
 - 2.2.16.3 Schools to effectively implement the new Health, Relationship and Sex Education
 - 2.2.16.4 Consequences for online platforms that fail to tackle this issue as part of the Online Safety Bill
 - 2.2.16.5 Media to improve how women are represented.
 - 2.2.16.6 Girls' and young women's voices and ideas are listened to and implemented in the designing and creation of safe public places and streets.
 - 2.2.16.7 Reporting sexual harassment is made easier, and that girls' and young women's reports are taken seriously.

2.3 Skills, education and sport

- 2.3.14 Girlguiding recognise the huge role formal education has on girls' lives. At the Comprehensive Spending Review 2021, we call on the Treasury to ensure schools:
- 2.3.14.1 take action to tackle gender stereotypes including providing equal opportunities for girls and boys at school when it comes to subject choice, opportunities in sport and activities, careers advice and work experience.
 - 2.3.14.2 Support children and young people's wellbeing as a priority, including as part of the 'catch up' programme following the pandemic and through Ofsted inspection frameworks.
 - 2.3.14.3 Invest in the youth sector to help provide programmes like Girlguiding's structured programme which seeks to support girls to have fun, develop essential skills for the future, supports their wellbeing and builds their resilience through a structured programme, weekly unit meetings and opportunities to have adventures outdoors and connect to communities.

2.4 Online harms, body image and appearance pressures

- 2.4.14 We believe more should be done to tackle the relentless appearance pressures, and the unrealistic ideals that girls are often bombarded with online.
- 2.4.15 We also recognise online harms to be one of the most significant challenges facing girls and young women and our research confirms this. Ours and others³ research shows there has been a steady decline in girls and young women's happiness for over a decade, with one contributing factor being appearance pressures and poor body image.
- 2.4.16 From a young age, girls say they don't feel happy with how they look and can feel embarrassed and ashamed of their appearance. They experience intense appearance pressures and tell us that fear people will criticise their bodies holds them back from doing everyday things they'd like to do. They're made to feel that how they look is the most important thing about them, and that their appearance matters when it comes to being successful in life.
- 2.4.17 These stereotypes reinforce the idea that girls' and women's value lie in their appearance. Whereas boys value lies in their actions. Combined with reduced women's representation in other fields such as science, sport and media, girls see these messages repeated day after day from a young age. And it takes its toll. The Government should invest in efforts to change this to help girls and young women

³ The Children's Society (2015-2021) The Good Childhood Report

fulfil their potential and ensure society and the economy can fully benefit from all that girls and young women have to offer.

- 2.4.18 To do this, Girlguiding want to see the Government invest in efforts to ensure social media companies: label digitally altered images, ban cosmetic procedure ads for under 18s, guarantee influencers advertisements are consistent and clear, include appearance-related harms in duties of care and, ensure RSHE is fit for purpose and tackling body image related harms.
- 2.4.19 Girlguiding also want to see Treasury invest and support the following action to reduce online harms and appearance pressures for girls and young women:
 - 2.4.19.1 Equal representation and celebration of women and men in sport.
 - 2.4.19.2 Online harms legislation to include the damaging and widespread harms girls face online when it comes to pressures around their appearance, which have a huge impact on their confident, self-esteem and ability to freely use online spaces. It must also include the sexist harassment and abuse they can face.
 - 2.4.19.3 Action to protect children from adverts on social media for weight-loss and 'appearance-enhancing' products.
 - 2.4.19.4 Clear labelling of digitally altered images on social media and online adverts.
 - 2.4.19.5 Improved representation of women in the media to reflect women's achievements than just their appearance and the diversity of society.

2.5 Mental Health and wellbeing

- 2.5.14 Girlguiding believes that more must be done to support girls with their mental health and wellbeing. Our research shows that girls and young women face particular pressures that impact on their wellbeing, and that girls' and young women's wellbeing has declined consistently for over a decade, but that this trend has accelerated in the past 3 years. It also shows that girls' wellbeing decreases as they get older. Worryingly, many girls do not feel able to talk about their feelings or ask for help.
 - 2.5.14.1 We want children's and young people's mental health to be a priority in recovery
 - 2.5.14.2 We want policy around children's and young people's mental health to include a gendered lens and understanding of the particular pressure faced by girls and young women to ensure initiatives are effective in improving wellbeing.
 - 2.5.14.3 Girlguiding is a supporting member of the Children and Young People's Mental Health Coalition. We support the aims and priorities of the coalition.

2 Relevant evidence

2.1 As the leading charity for girls and young women in the UK, Girlguiding are experts in girls and young women's lives. The following evidence demonstrates why we want to see the Government, and especially HM Treasury, invest and support in the areas outlined above at the CSR and Autumn Budget 2021.

2.1.1 As we emerge from a pandemic which has had difficult consequences for all children and young people, now is the time for the Government to invest in children and young people's skills, wellbeing and opportunities. This is the right thing to do for girls and young women and the right thing to do for the public purse: the pandemic has caused a loss of education, skills and an increase in mental health issues for children and young people, which are costly and impact the opportunities for the next generation.

2.2 Girlguiding's Girls Attitude Survey 2021 found that:

2.2.1 Online harms: 62% of girls and young women aged 7-21 have felt lonelier this past year

2.2.2 71% of girls and young women aged 7-21 have experienced online harms, with over one quarter (28%) of girls and young women aged 11-21 having faced harassment online, including unwanted or hateful messages and threats, and half of girls receiving sexist comments

2.2.3 26% of girls and young women aged 11-21 have received unwanted sexual images online and 14% aged 13-21 had experienced pressure to share images.

2.2 Mental health and wellbeing

2.2.1 63% aged 7-21 say they're happy most of time compared to 81% in 2018

2.2.2 67% aged 7-21 feel more sad, anxious or worried than before the pandemic

2.2.3 62% aged 7-21 say they're more lonely now than before the pandemic

2.3 Appearance pressures and body image

2.3.1 45% have experienced appearance pressures online in the last year

2.3.2 Appearance pressure harms that make girls insecure are caused by images that have the same 'perfected look' (78%) and where they feel a pressure to look that way themselves (66%)

2.3.3 51% aged 11-21 felt self-conscious on video calls

2.3.4 94% aged 11-21 think more should be done to protect young people from body image harms online

2.3.5 90% aged 11-21 believe there should be stricter rules to stop advertisers bombarding girls and young women with weight loss or 'appearance-improving' adverts online

2.4 Safety and harassment

Our research with girls and young women aged 13-18⁴ shows the scale of this issue and how their freedoms are limited:

2.4.1 80% don't feel safe when they're outdoors on their own

2.4.2 67% have experienced sexual harassment at school from another student

2.4.3 60% have experienced unwanted attention on the street such as 'wolf whistling'

2.4.4 40% avoid going out on their own to avoid sexual harassment

2.4.5 38% say fear of sexual harassment makes them feel anxious, worried and scared

2.4.6 27% say they'd feel comfortable to report sexual harassment

2.5 Skills and education

2.5.1 53% aged 11-21 missed out on opportunities to develop skills for their future

2.5.2 64% aged 7-21 are worried they've fallen behind at school

2.5.3 59% aged 7-21 found it difficult to participate in classes online

2.5.4 73% aged 11-21 think women have to work much harder than men to succeed

2.5.5 52% aged 11-21 think STEM is 'more for boys'

2.6 Adventure and outdoors

We want the barriers that stop girls and young women accessing adventures and outdoor spaces to be addressed, such as providing safer areas and addressing gender stereotypes that puts girls off adventure and sport.

⁴ Girlguiding (June 2021) 'It happens all the time: Girls' and young women's experiences of sexual harassment

- 2.6.1 Girls enjoy physical activity less as they get older (88% aged 7-10 down to 59% aged 11-16 and 46% aged 17-21) (GAS 2020)
- 2.6.2 32% aged 7-21 are put off sport because of the way media shows women athletes (such as focusing on their looks instead of talents) (GAS 2020)
- 2.6.3 71% aged 7-21 say being outdoor in nature has helped them to feel better during the past year
- 2.6.4 48% aged 11-21 are hopeful there will be more appreciation for nature following the pandemic

2.7 The pandemic

Our [research](#)⁵ found the pandemic has negatively impacted girls' and young women's wellbeing but that investment in Girlguiding means we can support girls' and young women's wellbeing and skills for their futures through our programme of activities.

- 2.5.15 Being part of guiding over the past year has helped girls in guiding to feel more connected to others and less lonely (65%); learn new things and develop their skills (57%); get support for their mental health and wellbeing (47%) (lockdown research)
- 2.5.16 61% aged 7-21 missed taking part in face-to-face activities and clubs (GAS 2021)
- 2.5.17 85% aged 11-21 want children and young people's concerns to be at the centre of government decisions about the future (GAS 2021).

3 Girlguiding activity

- 3.7 The Girlguiding programme gives girls and young women a space where they can be themselves, gain valuable skills, discover their full potential and have fun. The activities and badges are organised under six themes in every section, from Rainbows to Rangers. These are: Know Myself, Express Myself, Be Well, Have Adventures, Take Action and Skills For My Future.
- 3.8 Future Girl is our girl-led manifesto created with 76,000 girls and young women. They told us what they care about most and how we can create a more equal society. The topics within Future Girl are: wellbeing and mental health (self believers), healthy relationships (respect makers), equal opportunities (barrier breakers), sport and activity (Adventurers) and, environmental protection (Plant Protectors.)
- 3.9 In March 2020 we launched [Adventures at home](#), a range of activities online to help children, parents and carers find simple ways to create fun, adventure and boost wellbeing during the pandemic.
- 3.10 Our [Advocate panel](#) gives girls a platform to use their voices and seek change at the highest levels. Advocates are a group of 18 Girlguiding members aged 14 to 25 who lead the direction of Girlguiding's advocacy and research. They act as media spokespeople for Girlguiding and speak at events.
- 3.11 Our annual [Girls' Attitudes Survey](#) asks over 2,000 girls and young women aged 7 to 21, both inside and outside of guiding, how they feel about the specific and emerging pressures facing them today, and what these mean for their happiness, wellbeing and opportunities in life.

4. About us

- 4.1 Girlguiding is the leading charity for girls and young women in the UK, with nearly a third of a million members. We're active in every part of the UK with more than 25,000 groups meeting weekly, powered by over 80,000 volunteers. We offer girls and young women a space where they can be themselves, have fun, build brilliant friendships, gain valuable life skills and make a positive difference in their

⁵ Girlguiding (2021) 'Back in lockdown: Girls and young women's hopes and fears for the future'



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communities. We build girls' confidence and raise their aspirations. We give them the chance to discover their full potential and encourage them to be a powerful force for good. We run Rainbows (4-7 years), Brownies (7-10 years), Guides (10-14 years) and Rangers (14-18 years). Registered Charity No. 306016.

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