Youth Voice Census 2025 Report

Results are in
YOUTH VOICE CENSUS

YOUTH EMPLOYMENT UK

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CEO Foreword

Nearly a million young people in the UK are not in education, employment or training. At the same time, our economy is crying out for skills, productivity and growth. That gap between young people without opportunity and an economy without the talent it needs is the defining challenge of our time.

This is why the Youth Voice Census matters more than ever. In a moment of economic strain, political change and social division, more than 8,000 young people have taken the time to tell us what life feels like. Their voices cut through the noise of policy debates with a clear, urgent message: they are not thriving. They are surviving, drifting, "stuck in the middle."
Behind the averages, we see extremes: young people proud of their education but unable to access work experience; more confident in their resilience, yet unsure if employers want them; valuing their communities but fearful about the future of work. Neutral answers dominate the data, masking disengagement, fatigue and deep divides.

This is not just about statistics. It is about real lives, lives that are being wasted at the very moment our economy and society need them most. And it is about what we choose to do next.

As the **national body for youth employment**, Youth Employment UK has a rare perspective. We bring together the authentic voices of young people through the Census; deep knowledge of education, employment and skills systems; expertise in employer practice through our Good Youth Employment Standards; and partnerships that span national and regional government, youth services, educators and business. No other organisation has this vantage point.

Our **Strategy to 2030** sets out the vision: all young people equipped with the skills, experiences and opportunities to progress; employers confident and supported to hire young talent; and a system that works consistently and fairly across the UK. These recommendations are the next step on that journey.

This report lays out five urgent, practical actions:

1. **Secure a Young Person's Entitlement** — a broad, inclusive curriculum with core skills, enrichment, wellbeing and careers woven through.
2. **Support Employers to Deliver** — simple, quality and incentivised routes for employers to open doors for young people.
3. **Close the Support Gap** — a national digital hub, local youth hubs, and integrated diagnostics so no young person falls through the net.
4. **Guarantee Consistency Everywhere** — a national systems approach, building on Trailblazers, so delivery is fair and not a postcode lottery.
5. **Lead a National Culture Shift** — a visible Campaign of Opportunity that restores hope, celebrates young people, and mobilises employers.

Taken together, these actions would guarantee every young person broad foundations and fair pathways; unlock more quality opportunities with employers; prevent NEETs through early, personalised support; close postcode gaps; and shift the story we tell young people — from fatigue to hope.

But we must also remember this: our children deserve **happy, enriched lives.** They deserve fun, safe spaces and the chance to be children, while adults take responsibility for building systems that work. Too much joy has been stripped out of childhood. Reintroducing enrichment, safety, belonging and fun is as vital to their development as exams or qualifications.

For employers, this is your call to arms too. The country's productivity, resilience and growth depend on a confident pipeline of young talent. Supporting young people is not charity — it is investment in your future workforce and your communities.

This is not just policy. It is leadership. And it is urgent. The government, employers, educators and communities must now dig in — with us — to deliver the change young people are asking for, and the future our country needs.

LJ Rawlings MBE DL
CEO of Youth Employment UK

bacp Foreword

In a time of significant rising concerns about the mental health of children and young people, the Youth Voice Census stands as a vital instrument for understanding the lived experiences of those aged 11 to 30. It provides a unique opportunity to hear directly from young people themselves

For organisations like the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP), this is essential. While practitioners offer valuable insights into rising demand and the nature of presenting issues, the voices of children and young people are often underrepresented in policy and service design.

The Youth Voice Census fills this gap, enabling a fuller, more authentic picture of what young people need and how they experience support. This collaboration with Youth Employment UK ensures that the survey reflects the nuanced realities of young people's mental health journeys.

BACP is proud to be a sponsor of the Census, contributing expertise to the development of questions around mental health, transitions (such as moving schools or entering university), and assessment-related stress and anxiety.

The findings will inform BACP's campaigning work, support the development of timely and accessible counselling and psychotherapy services, and strengthen the case for early intervention. By triangulating Census data with practitioner insights, BACP aims to advocate for a mental health system that is responsive, inclusive, and shaped by those it serves.

Ultimately, the Youth Voice Census is so much more than a survey-it is a platform for empowerment. It invites young people to speak, and it challenges us to listen. In doing so, it helps build a future where mental health support is not only available but also meaningful and effective.

Lisa Morrison (Dr) CPsychol AFBPsS
Director of Professional Standards,
Policy and Research at BACP

Foreword

Education and employment policy has long been shaped by those least directly affected by it. Policymakers, researchers and industry leaders are in a privileged position in that we get to make critical decisions for others while largely remaining untouched by them ourselves. Undoubtedly, this distance allows us to make tough choices. But there is increasing awareness that we must balance these decisions with the realities faced by the young people whose futures are shaped by them.

The Edge Foundation has long argued that education and employment policy must be developed with, not simply for, young people. Our work has repeatedly shown that when youth voice is at the table, their lived experience offers texture and insights that adults in boardrooms – focused on systems, processes, and delivery – cannot achieve alone.

Now in its eighth year, Youth Employment UK's annual Youth Voice Census provides one of the UK's most comprehensive longitudinal accounts of young people's experiences and aspirations, combining hard evidence with human stories. Edge regularly spotlights its findings in our skills shortage bulletins, helping to show policymakers, educators, and employers the real-world impact of their decisions.

We are proud to champion this work, even if it makes challenging reading at times. Despite positives in this year's census – young people's perceptions of education and mental and physical health support are improving, for example – levels of youth disengagement are clear. Behind the seemingly benign neutrality in some of this year's responses, there are hints of a worrying trend – namely, the acceptance from many young people that low levels of life satisfaction are simply the norm. To any professional in the sector, this will ring major alarm bells that the system is failing the most disadvantaged.

Education policy is inherently complex. When it works, young people benefit. But when it fails, they pay the price. The census demonstrates that blanket policies cannot sufficiently remedy the challenges young people face. It also tells us that data is more than numbers – youth voice captures perspectives no spreadsheet can. It is incumbent on us, then, to listen and act, ensuring that this generation's experiences of education, wellbeing, and employment help make things better for the next.

Olly Newton
Executive Director at the
Edge Foundation

Foreword

Haven is proud to stand behind this year's Youth Voice Census as a main sponsor, a powerful platform that shines a light on the realities, ambitions, and challenges facing young people today.

What emerges in these pages is both a wake-up call and a source of optimism. On one hand, too many young people feel adrift, struggling to connect with the pathways that should guide them toward fulfilling work, wellbeing, and independence. On the other hand, their voices ring with clarity and purpose. They are telling us what works, what doesn't, and what must change. And in doing so, they are giving us an invaluable chance to act with intent.

The findings call for bold responses. Stronger careers guidance. Better mental health support. Richer opportunities for work experience. And above all, a focus on resilience, the capacity to adapt, recover, and thrive when faced with the unexpected.

These are the very qualities we nurture within Haven, and the ones we believe every young person should have the chance to build.

As an employer, we witness daily the power of soft skills, confidence, and inclusion. That's why we are committed to creating workplaces where all young people, including those who are neurodiverse, feel supported, valued, and able to contribute their very best.

This Census is more than a report. It is a call to action. If we listen with intent and collaborate with purpose, we can ensure the next generation doesn't just "get by", they flourish, and at Haven, we are determined to play our part in building that future.

Dean Giles
Head of Talent at Haven

Executive Summary

In a world of change, the Youth Voice Census remains a platform where young people feel empowered to share their views and experiences. Taken as a whole, it offers a comprehensive picture of life for 11–30-year-olds across the UK today. It is a privilege to bring these shared experiences to life, but the true beauty of the Census lies in the 8,278 individual voices behind the data. Voices of young people whose last 12 months have been anything but average.

In 2025, a picture of contradiction emerges. Many young people value their schools, colleges and local communities, and support is improving in some areas. But wellbeing remains fragile, preparation for work is patchy, and opportunities to build skills and confidence are shrinking. Neutral, "meh in the middle" responses dominate - hiding deep divides between groups who are best supported and those consistently left behind.

A world of extremes is driving young people into the "meh in the middle." Young people report higher anxiety alongside middling life satisfaction, safety and opportunity. Many opt for neutral responses rather than extremes, a sign of fatigue, not contentment. This neutrality is particularly dangerous, as it masks disengagement and disparity, especially among NEET young people.

Throughout the Census and our in-person sessions, young people described a pressure to be "hustling" and "doing it all well." For many, this felt claustrophobic and debilitating. The reality was that most felt able to focus on just one thing, whether that be education, work, looking for work, or their health, as they were "just getting by", adding more extracurricular, work or wider activities just wasn't an option.

Wellbeing is stagnating whilst support improves, for most. Support for mental and physical health is improving (41% and 54%, both up on last year). But wellbeing remains fragile: illness and poor health continue to keep young people out of classrooms and workplaces.

Nearly a quarter (22%) of students missed more than 10 days of education last year, and 55% said their learning had been disrupted. At work, 1 in 5 missed 5+ days due to ill health. Those in education or work benefit most, while NEET young people and disadvantaged groups fall furthest behind.

Young people's view of education is improving, but career experiences and opportunities are narrowing. Two-thirds (67%) feel supported starting school or college, and most (62%) believe they can access good-quality education locally. Yet careers advice, work experience, volunteering and employer engagement have all declined again this year. Just 26% accessed work experience in the past 12 months, and a third (33%) took part in none of these wider opportunities. One bright spot: more young people this year reported access to youth clubs.

Young people doubt they'll have what employers want. Confidence in teamwork (64%), creativity (60%) and resilience is rising, and more young people feel able to complete practical tasks like writing a CV. But this is not translating into confidence about employment. Only 49% feel they know what employers want - dropping to 26% for NEET young people. Just 60% think they have the qualifications to get a job, 55% the skills, and 50% the work experience. Many simply do not believe employers are willing to hire them.

The future of work feels conflicted. For those in work, stress and workload are rising (42% and 47%), only half feel fairly paid, and most lack the confidence to challenge employers. Young people are clear about what they want: fair pay (60%), flexible hours (71%) and autonomy (59%). But more than half (53%) fear AI will take jobs. Their hopes for balance and innovation are tempered by fears of insecurity and exclusion.

Beneath the averages, sharp divides run through every theme. The same groups consistently report lower wellbeing, weaker support, and fewer opportunities, and highlight how access to education, skills and work is still determined by background.

These divides are not marginal. They are systematic. The very young people who most need opportunity and support are the least likely to access it. Every average in this report hides sharper inequalities that demand attention if the "meh in the middle" is to be lifted for all.

The Youth Voice Census 2025 calls for urgent, collective action to turn neutrality into opportunity. We recommend that the government, employers, and the wider sector work together to put wellbeing first, ensuring every young person has access to early and preventative support. Clear, fair routes into work must be guaranteed through high-quality guidance, inclusive recruitment, and opportunities that start early. Finally, young people must be reconnected and re-engaged through co-designed services, investment in youth spaces, and targeted action to close inequality gaps.

Together, these steps will ensure young people move from "meh in the middle" to a future where they feel confident, supported, and optimistic.

Introduction

8 years ago, we created the Youth Voice Census, a space and place for young people to share their experiences from the last 12 months. Today, it is the most comprehensive data set of youth voices in the UK.

This year, we hit a milestone: our survey captured the views and experiences of more than **8,200 young people aged 11-30** from across the UK.

We supplemented this quantitative data set with a series of Youth Voice Sessions online and in person, exploring how these national findings play out for young people where they live.

The Youth Voice Census results provides key insight into what young people have to say about: where they live, where they study or work, the wider experiences they have of support and opportunities and the biggest issues they are facing in 2025.

Methodology

The 2025 Youth Voice Census ran from 31 March to 7 June 2025.

In collaboration with a wide range of organisations, it was shared through social media, email networks, schools, colleges, universities, employers, and youth organisations. A snowball sampling approach encouraged respondents to share the Census with their peers, helping to secure 8,278 responses from young people aged 11-30.

For the first time, **we introduced an accessible version of the Census**, containing 146 questions drawn from the full survey of 324. This version used simplified navigation and design to make it easier for young people who find engaging with surveys difficult to take part.

The survey structure included a core set of questions for all respondents, plus tailored pathways based on a young person's current status (for example, in education, in work). This ensured the survey felt relevant to individuals while still capturing a broad range of experiences.

Where possible, results from the core question set have been weighted to reflect the 11–30 population in England.

As with any long survey, not all respondents answered every question. Supplementary sections, including open-ended questions, were optional and had lower response rates. The data from these supplementary questions, though unweighted, has been included in the report. This is to ensure that the voices of young people, especially those from harder-to-reach groups with protected characteristics, are represented. To maintain transparency, the number of respondents for each question is indicated in the report, contextualising the percentage data.

All percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

Alongside the survey, we held **11 focus groups with 72 young people**, each lasting around 90 minutes and involving 2–17 participants. Groups included young carers, care leavers, young people with SEND, supported interns, apprentices, university students and postgraduates. These groups were intentionally chosen to fill gaps in the survey sample and to provide a platform for those less likely to complete an online survey.

Most focus groups drew participants from across the UK, with some regional sessions in the West Midlands, Greater Manchester, and Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. This allowed us to explore how national findings play out in local contexts.

> In total, this report reflects the perspectives of **8,350 young people**, combining survey responses and qualitative insights from focus group discussions.

Demographics

Demographic questions were optional, but provide vital context for understanding how experiences differ, and where additional support may be needed.

They help us explore intersectionality, recognising how overlapping factors such as ethnicity, gender and socio-economic background shape young people's journeys from education to employment.

We asked identifying questions relating to age, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, additional needs, free school meal status, experience of the care system, caring responsibilities, English as a second language, experience of exclusion from education and religion.

Where sample sizes allow, findings are broken down by these groups. In cases where numbers are too low for robust quantitative analysis, results are presented with caution.

Key Findings

1. The Rise of "meh". A Generation Stuck Between Extremes

Young people are living in a world of extremes: the last few years have been relentless in challenge and change. Coupled with economic uncertainty, political division and a digital first world, there is a theme of exhaustion and exasperation from young people. There is rising indifference to both the big and small systems set out to support them.

When asked how they feel this year, young people's answers increasingly fall into the middle. Neutral responses are rising across almost every measure from safety to life satisfaction to career preparation. This isn't calm neutrality. It's emotional fatigue. In a relentless world, young people are retreating into the middle ground: flat, cautious, and "meh."

- **40%** say they feel neither safe nor unsafe in their local area.
- **In education**, fewer than half feel (46%) fully prepared or totally unprepared for employment - most hover in the in between.
- **In work**, neutrality is rising: 26% feel neutral about responsibilities, 23% feel neutral about work–life balance, and 21% feel neutral about pay.
- **For jobseekers**, "meh" often masks disengagement: only 26% of NEET young people feel they know what employers want, compared with 49% overall.
- **1 in 10** report maximum anxiety, while many more sit at moderate levels.

> " I don't feel unsafe, but I wouldn't say I feel safe either. I just keep my head down and get on with it. "

For some, neutrality is a form of opting out: withdrawing from systems they don't believe will help. For others, it signals fragile hope: they might be open to engage with support, but only if they believe it will succeed. The line between neutrality is so fine and fragile that we must take it as an opportunity to make change now.

The neutrality stance and the rise of "meh" responses risk obscuring some previous trends in demographics, particularly around gender. Digging deeper shows us clearly that disparities still remain, particularly for those with additional needs, from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, in accessing all support and where race, gender continue to create barriers to opportunity.

Furthermore, female and Black, African, Black British or Caribbean respondents continue to experience the most significant disparities in opportunities.

Half rate their life satisfaction and happiness in the middle ranges, rather than high or low.

2. Wellbeing is Stagnating, and Support Works Best For Those Already Closest

Young people's wellbeing has not collapsed, but nor is it thriving. Life satisfaction and happiness scores remain middling, and anxiety is high.

Support is improving, but it works best for those already in education or work. Those furthest from opportunity, especially NEET young people, those eligible for free school meals, and those with additional needs continue to fall behind.

Young people live in a higher state of anxiety, even as overall life satisfaction edges up.

- **18%** rate their life satisfaction as "8/10" (the most common score).
- **10%** record the maximum anxiety score.
- Young men are more likely to sit at both extremes: **14%** report maximum life satisfaction, but **24%** maximum anxiety.

Access to support has improved, but unevenly.

- Access to mental health support has risen to **41%** (up from 31% in 2024).
- Access to physical health support is now **54%** (up from 48%).
- Improvements are strongest among students, while unemployed young people remain the least likely to feel supported.

Those furthest from education or work are left furthest behind.

NEET young people consistently record the lowest wellbeing scores of all. They are the least likely to feel they can access mental health, physical health or financial support, and most likely to describe feeling isolated and cut off from services.

Anxiety runs higher among this group, and is highlighted in their lack of confidence in employability; only **26%** say they know what employers want, compared with **49%** overall.

For those in education, disruption and missed days take their toll.

55% of students report their education was disrupted in the past 12 months. The main drivers for this are illness (66%) and mental health (36%). For secondary school pupils, 31% said poor behaviour from peers was a cause of disruption.

Nearly a quarter, **1 in 4** (22%), missed more than 10 days of education last year. **78%** attributed ill health to missing days, in addition **15%** said lack of motivation kept them out of education in the past year.

- **55%** say assessments harm their wellbeing - with young women (42% vs 28% of men) and those with additional needs (52% vs 33% of those without additional needs) hardest hit.
- **15%** of students asked for additional exam support this year, of these, two-thirds received the support they requested.

For those in work, fragility is just as visible.

Around half (**49%**) report their work was disrupted in the past 12 months.

The most frequent causes: mental health/stress (40%), illness (26%), and family/personal issues (25%).

- Workers eligible for free school meals in secondary school were **7 ppts** more likely than peers to cite family issues as a disruption.
- Around **1 in 5** (19%) missed 5+ days of work, overwhelmingly due to illness (77%), with stress and mental health also significant (8%).
- Within the last year, **42%** said stress at work had increased, and **47%** said workload had increased.

Support systems are improving, but they are not closing the gaps. Wellbeing remains fragile, disrupted by illness, stress, assessments and behaviour, and support works best for those already closest to opportunity.

Unless access becomes consistent and inclusive, young people furthest from education and work will remain the most exposed

3. Career Experiences and Wider Opportunities are Narrowing

Young people feel more positive about where they are studying than in 2024. Most feel supported when starting school or college, and a majority agree they can access good-quality education opportunities where they live. More report positive experiences of their learning environment, and more are turning to teachers as their first trusted source of support.

This stronger foundation is much needed but it does not extend to careers preparation. Careers education, work experience, extra-curricular and volunteering opportunities have all fallen again this year for those in secondary school. A lack of experience remains the top barrier young people believe will hold them back, alongside a real perception of scarce local jobs. Careers education has the power to close this gap, connecting young people to the information and opportunities they need to succeed.

What support is education providing?

- **67%** of young people say they feel supported when starting school or college.
- **62%** agree they can access good quality education opportunities where they live.
- **4 in 10** say that they go to teachers for careers or employability help, and 28% now rate teachers as 'very useful' (up from 22% in 2024).

Access to career advice is declining.

Overall, access to career support declined in the last year. Only **32%** of students received face-to-face careers advice this year, and just **30%** had careers lessons, and **23%** had received an employer visit.

> " All they talk about is university – no one explained what an apprenticeship actually is. "

Advice remains heavily focused on GCSEs, A Levels and university, while apprenticeships, NVQs and T Levels are rarely discussed.

Those eligible for free school meals are less likely to have university raised with them than their peers. (**45% vs 60%**).

Students with additional needs are less likely to have higher education routes discussed at all.

Work experience is valued, but scarce.

- Young people value work experience; **74%** say it helps them understand work.
- Overall, just 26% of young people currently in education, from secondary school to University, undertook work experience in the past year.
- Access depends heavily on stage and background: nearly half of college and sixth form students (47%) had placements compared to just 19% of school students.
- For those who undertake work experience, **4 in 10** receive preparation support and **3 in 10** receive follow-up support.

Wider opportunities are declining too.

Fewer young people are combining paid work with study compared to previous years. Around a third, **36%**, of all students reported having a part-time job while studying (down from roughly 40–42% in previous years).

- **A third** (33%) of young people shared that they undertook no extracurricular, volunteering or social action opportunities in the last 12 months.
- Only **30%** of young people volunteered,
- **55%** had undertaken extracurricular activities in the last year
- Participation gaps are stark: young women are more likely to volunteer, while those eligible for free school meals and rural students are least likely to access these opportunities.

Careers education, work experience, volunteering, social action and employer engagement are the bridges into work. Each one is in decline. Students eligible for free school meals, those with additional needs, Black, African, Black British or Caribbean students and NEET young people are consistently the least supported, leaving the young people who most need opportunity with the least access to it.

4. Growing Skills, Shrinking Confidence: Young People Doubt They'll Have What Employers Want

Young people are gaining confidence in some skills, and more now feel able to complete practical tasks like writing a CV or preparing for an interview. But these efforts are not translating into confidence about employment. Too many doubt they will leave education with the right mix of skills, qualifications and experience to get a job.

Soft skills are a relative strength.

- Confidence in teamwork (64%), creativity (60%) and resilience has risen since 2024.

These strengths are widely recognised by young people as transferable and valuable.

Core and applied skills remain weaker.

- Fewer than half feel confident in public speaking (**47%**) or leadership (**47%**).
- Literacy and numeracy confidence lags by around **10 ppts** for those eligible for free school meals and those with additional needs.
- Digital skills are slipping. Just **54%** of young people now feel confident in their digital skills, down from **61% in 2024.**
- Confidence in everyday tools like Word, Excel and presentations averages around **72%**, but confidence in workplace digital skills is much lower - only **25–30%** feel able to code, analyse data or use advanced software.
- Disparities cut through: young women, students eligible for free school meals, and those with additional needs score lower across nearly every skill. NEET young people record the lowest confidence overall.

Young people aren't sure what employers want.

- Only **49%** feel they know what employers are looking for, falling to just **26%** among NEET young people.
- Young people identify Teamwork (69%), communication (66%) and problem solving (61%) as valued by employers.
- Fewer believe employers value digital (46%), numeracy (38%) or creativity (34%) are the skills employers are looking for.
- This uncertainty leaves many disengaged: even when they build skills, they are not convinced employers will recognise them.

Doubts about their own readiness are clear.

- **4 in 10** young people don't feel they have the qualifications to get a job.
- Just over half (**55%**) believe they have the skills.
- Only **50%** think they have the work experience employers want.
- These figures lower the older you get, and confidence erodes fast for those as soon as they exit education. They are lower still for NEET young people and those eligible for free school meals

Ambitions and aspirations don't match opportunities.

- Young people aspire to creative, digital, health and public service roles - but say these are often oversubscribed, underfunded or poorly explained.
- Work experience rarely aligns with their interests, especially for students who are eligible for free school meals.

Young people are doing their part, but barriers remain.

- Confidence in application skills is improving, with more young people feeling able to write a CV or prepare for interviews.
- But only **49%** feel they know what employers want, and among NEET young people, this drops to just 26%.
- Only **38%** believe they could find good opportunities where they live.
- The biggest barriers: lack of work experience (47%), travel/location (45%), and not having the right skills (35%).
- Just **25%** believe employers are supportive of hiring young people, down from 31% in 2024.

Skills confidence is improving in some areas, but young people still doubt they will have the right mix of skills, qualifications and experience to get work, especially locally. Weak digital and technical confidence, a lack of relevant opportunities, and persistent barriers reinforce these doubts. Unless skills are linked directly to opportunity, young people will continue to feel underprepared and unconvinced that their futures are within reach.

5. The Future of Work Feels Conflicted

Overall, work is a good place for young people; for those in work, their reported support and overall satisfaction tends to be higher than other groups.

We have seen a trend of rising stress and workload. Young people's experiences are shaping how they anticipate the future, and it is a mix of hope and anxiety.

At work, stress and insecurity are rising.

- **42%** say stress has increased in their job in the past year, and 47% say workload has increased.
- Only half (**50%**) feel fairly paid, down from **58% in 2024**.
- Confidence to challenge employers is low: 63% don't feel able to ask for a pay rise, and **60%** don't feel able to ask for a promotion.
- Blurred boundaries add to pressure, with **49%** contacted outside work hours at least some of the time

> **I'd like to be trusted to manage my own time – that matters more to me than where I work from.**

Young people know what they want from the future.

- **60%** say fair pay is their top demand (rising to 70% among 26–30s).
- **71%** want flexible hours; 59% want autonomy over how they work.
- Only **36%** prioritise home-working; most prefer a balanced hybrid approach.
- Career ambitions are clear: many aspire to creative, digital, health and public service roles, but worry these pathways are either oversubscribed, underfunded or poorly explained.

Hopes are mixed with fears, especially around technology.

- **A third** (35%) are excited about AI, while more than half (**53%**) fear it will take jobs.
- Confidence in the specific digital skills young people expect AI to make essential is low: only **25–30%** feel able to code, analyse data or use advanced software.
- NEET young people are clear that these debates feel distant, their immediate challenge is finding work.
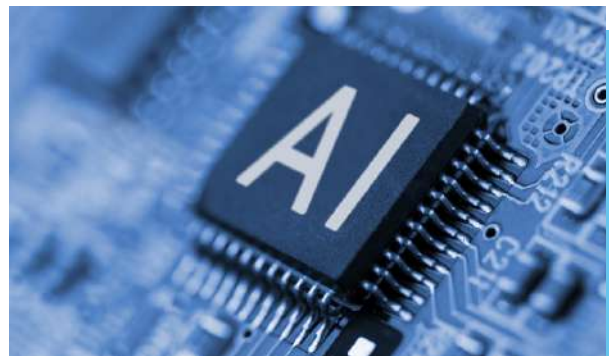
Disparities shape workplace confidence.

- Young women are less likely to feel confident about progression (41% vs 55% of young men).
- NEET young people are the least confident overall: only 26% say they know what employers want, and fewer than **1 in 3** feel confident they could find good local work.
- Young people eligible for free school meals are also less optimistic about progression and fairness, consistently scoring 10–15 ppts lower on workplace confidence measures.

The future of work is defined by contradiction. Young people want fairness, flexibility and autonomy, but experience stress, rising workloads and blurred boundaries.

Their hopes for innovation and balance are tempered by fears of insecurity and exclusion, particularly for those not yet in work.

Unless preparation, pay and progression improve, the future risks feeling more conflicted than confident.

Recommendations

Young people tell us they feel stuck in the middle - neither thriving nor failing - with fragile wellbeing, narrowing experiences and uncertainty about what employers want. The 2025 Youth Voice Census confirms this reality: wellbeing is weak, careers advice and work experience are slipping, and confidence in employers is at a low.

We are setting out five clear, deliverable actions to put **Youth Opportunity at the heart of the government's missions and commitment to full employment.**

1. Secure a Young Person's Entitlement (11–18)

The Youth Voice Census shows young people lack confidence in core skills and face narrowing choices. A **national entitlement, delivered locally**, ensures every young person develops the foundations for life and work.

Aligns with government priorities: Curriculum & Assessment Review, Post-16 Reform, Skills & Growth Levy Transformation, National Youth Strategy.

Role of Youth Employment UK: Our work on developing the Young Persons' Entitlement can act as a further blueprint for this policy development.

What it provides:
Core skills: literacy, numeracy, digital, oracy and citizenship.

Broad pathways: academic, technical and vocational routes from Level 1+, with modular and flexible "ramp-on/off" points so no young person is locked out or set up to fail.

Enrichment & wellbeing: guaranteed activities, volunteering, personal development, joy and pastoral/mental health support.

Careers embedded: every pillar includes careers and real-world learning, with at least two meaningful work experiences for young people by age 18.

2. Support Employers to Deliver for Young People

Young people are unsure of what employers want, and nearly 1 million are NEET. Employers are under pressure, but with the right incentives and a simplified framework, they can be the engine of opportunity. This ensures a pipeline of talent for productivity and growth.

Aligns with government priorities: Get Britain Working White Paper, Growth & Skills Levy Reform, SME productivity agenda.

Role of Youth Employment UK: We set and monitor the Good Youth Employment Standards, convene employer networks, and host Youth Employment Week - the foundation for this campaign.

What it provides:
Flexible and simple employer contribution: Recognise that employers differ in capacity: some may offer one opportunity, others many - from inspiration in schools to work experience, internships, apprenticeships, entry roles or good part-time jobs. Make it easy, high-quality and well-matched to young people's needs.

One coherent framework: reduce competing asks across departments; create a single entry point for employer engagement with youth opportunity.

Employer incentives and recognition:
- Levy flexibility for foundation and pre-apprenticeship pathways.
- Wage subsidies or tax reliefs for SMEs creating youth opportunities.
- Procurement levers (social value, Section 106) to reward employers who hire young people.

Quality Standards: all opportunities meet the Good Youth Employment Standards, ensuring fair pay, development and progression.

National campaign: celebrate youth-friendly employers and promote the business and social value of hiring young people.

3. Close the Support Gap: No Young Person Falling Through the Net

Too many young people, particularly the most disadvantaged, fall through the cracks. A digital-first, locally present and tailored approach ensures early identification, consistent support, and clear progression routes. Employers also benefit from better visibility of young people who might otherwise be invisible.

Aligns with government priorities: Get Britain Working White Paper, Youth Guarantee Trailblazers, Digital Inclusion Strategy, Mental Health Priority.

Role of Youth Employment UK: Our hub already delivers national reach and can scale further as the government's official digital front door.

What it provides:
One-stop digital hub: Youth Employment UK's platform (4m visits annually) as the national entry point for careers, labour market information, wellbeing support, virtual work experiences, and mirrored resources for parents, carers, teachers and EHE.

Youth hubs as physical anchors: safe, local spaces offering advice, mentoring and referrals, with wraparound support (key workers, mental health, transport and financial help).

Integrated diagnostics: combine government's Risk of NEET Indicators (RONI) with NPC's JET framework to give a holistic picture of each young person's skills, wellbeing and aspirations, generating a tailored approach.

4. Guarantee Consistency Everywhere: A National Systems Approach

Trailblazers are proving what works, but without wider rollout, the Youth Guarantee risks becoming a postcode lottery. A national funding and delivery framework would sustain Trailblazers and enable all regions to act now, using existing budgets coherently.

Employers gain clarity and consistency wherever they operate, and young people gain fairness of access.

Aligns with government priorities: Opportunity Mission, Devolution Deals, Skills England, and Get Britain Working White Paper.

Role of Youth Employment UK: Through our Census and national partnerships, we can support local and national delivery, scale up and reach.

What it provides:
Standards, impact and accountability: the Youth Guarantee must operate everywhere to the same core framework, not just in Trailblazer areas. Each region should have clear accountability for youth transitions, data sharing and a coherent local offer.

Scale what works: expand proven Trailblazer approaches - early identification, joined-up referrals, coordinated delivery - to every region.

Fair access: embed travel bursaries, digital inclusion and safety measures so access does not depend on postcode.

Transparency: publish real-time labour market data and outcomes so progress is visible and comparable.

5. Lead a National Culture Shift: A Campaign of Opportunity

The Census shows young people are "stuck in the middle', fragile in wellbeing, and unconvinced about their futures. Changing this is not just about systems - it is about leadership and belief.

A **Campaign of Opportunity** would restore confidence, inspire ambition, and signal the government's commitment to young people's futures.

For employers, it is a call to arms: supporting young people is not charity, it is an investment in productivity and national growth.

Aligns with government priorities: Cross-government comms strategy, Opportunity Mission narrative, productivity and future workforce agenda.

Role of Youth Employment UK: We convene Youth Ambassadors, host Youth Employment Week, and deliver the Youth Voice Census, providing the authentic youth voice and evidence base to track progress.

What it provides:
Positive narrative: a cross-government campaign celebrating young people's potential, using inclusive language and inspiring stories.

Campaign of Opportunity: a sustained, youth-facing effort (anchored in Youth Employment Week) making apprenticeships, FE, T Levels, volunteering and jobs visible and attractive.

Youth-led design: campaigns co-created and fronted by young people to ensure authenticity.

Employer voice: showcase businesses of all sizes investing in young talent.

Tracking impact: use the Youth Voice Census to monitor shifts in young people's confidence and outlook.

Life and Local Areas in 2025

Results are in

YOUTH VOICE CENSUS

Introduction

Young people's lives are shaped most by the places where they live, study, and spend their free time. This chapter explores their everyday realities in 2025, from fears about crime and safety to the availability of community spaces, the cost of living, and how they see the future.

The story is one of tension: young people value community, diversity, and green spaces, but these are increasingly undercut by financial pressures, shrinking amenities, and a fragile sense of safety.

Key Findings

- **Crime and violence dominate concerns.** Young people are more worried about being attacked, robbed, and drinking and drug culture within their local communities. Nearly half of young people (43%) say crime and violence is their top national worry, overtaking leadership (22%) and the economy (38%).

- **Safety and belonging are uncertain and unequal.** Half feel safe where they live, but almost as many (40%) sit on the fence, feeling neither safe nor unsafe. Most young people feel welcome in their area, but inclusion is patchy. Young people with protected characteristics are far less likely to feel supported.

- **Third spaces are disappearing.** Although young people say green spaces and community spirit are what they value most, access to libraries, parks, and leisure centres has fallen (by up to 10 ppts). The only bright spot? Youth clubs are bucking the trend, with visibility surging for young people.

- **Transport is essential, but unreliable.** Over half (56%) of young people use public transport often or always, but a third still rate reliability as poor and say cost is a major barrier to accessing opportunities.

- **Money worries are closing doors.** Over half of young people (56%) can cover their basic living costs, but two in five have cancelled subscriptions, and nearly half (44%) have cut back on cultural activities. For many, especially the oldest and least advantaged, financial stress is shaping daily choices.

- **The future feels conflicted.** Hope and anxiety sit side by side. Just over a third (35%) are excited about AI, but more than half (53%) fear it will take jobs. Younger groups are more hopeful and older groups are more anxious.

Life and local areas in 2025 is defined by contradiction. Young people value their communities, diversity, and green spaces, but crime, disappearing amenities, unreliable transport, and financial strain are compromising their sense of security and opportunity.

They are not asking for sweeping national reform, but for practical improvements in their daily lives: safe streets, reliable buses, affordable opportunities, and spaces to belong.

National and Local Concerns: From Politics to Personal Safety

In 2025, the biggest issue for young people shifted from leadership of the country to whether they feel safe walking home. Crime and violence is now the number one national issue (43%), overtaking leadership (22%) and the economy (38%). Locally, crime (37%) and safety (25%) are also the most common worries.

Locally, the top three concerns young people have are crime and violence (37%), safety (25%) and environmental issues (24%).

1 in 4 young people across all age groups were concerned about their safety in their local areas.

Immigration concerns in their local area nearly doubled from **6% to 11%**.

Thinking about the country, which, if any, of the following issues are you worried about?

Legend: ● 2025 ● 2024

Issue	2025	2024
The economy	38	41
Discrimination	35	35
Leadership of our country	22	33
Crime & violence	43	31
Environment & climate change	24	29
Healthcare	21	27
Education	12	16
None	12	12
Immigration	17	12
Security	9	9
Other - write in	3	4
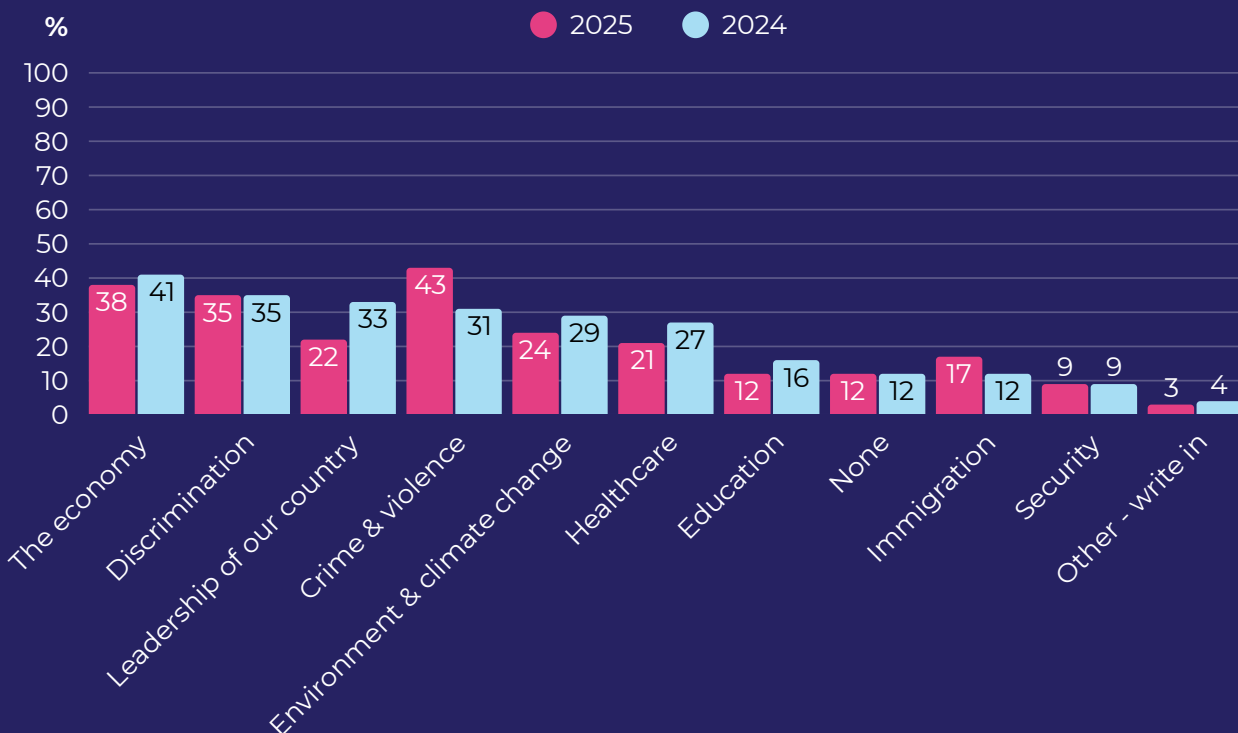
● 2024
● 2025

↑ 12 ppt
Young people's concern about crime and violence saw an increase from last year's results.

↓ 11 ppt
Young people's concern about leadership of the country decreased by 11 ppt.

Thinking about your local area, which, if any, of the following issues are you worried about?

● 2025 ● 2024

Issue	2025	2024
Crime & violence	37	36
Safety	25	25
Jobs	23	23
Funding	19	23
Healthcare	16	23
Environmental issues	24	22
Discrimination & harassment	21	22
Transport	13	16
None	16	16
Education	10	13
Immigration	11	6
Other - write in	2	3

0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100 **%**
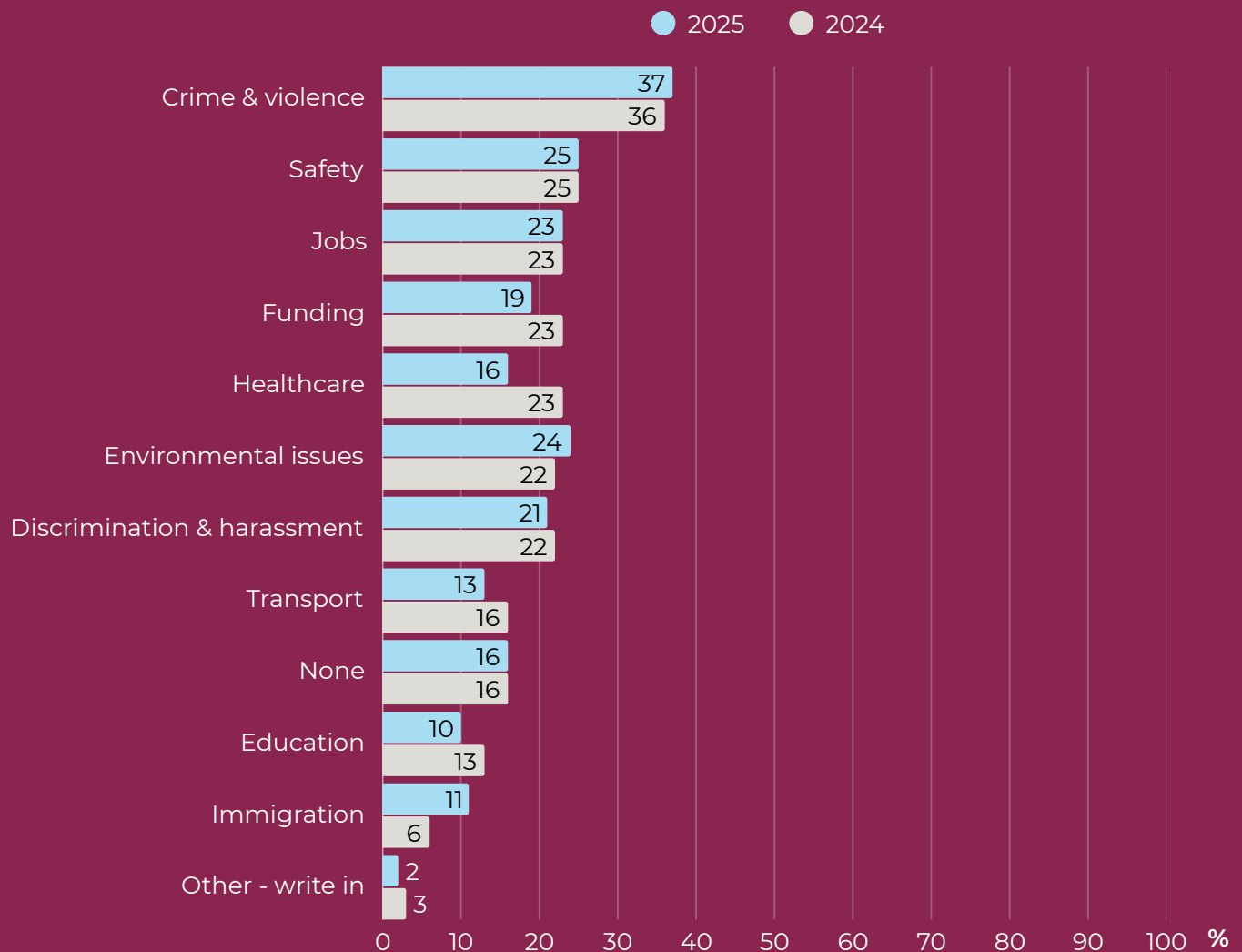
Whose worries differ most?

Whilst fears around crime and violence dominate for everyone, the issues beneath it are shaped by identity.

- Young women are far more likely to worry about discrimination, both nationally (59% vs 33% of young men) and locally (58% vs 33% of young men).

- White young people are twice as concerned about immigration (22%) compared to minority ethnic groups, who are more concerned about discrimination.

- Nationally, young people eligible for free school meals were less concerned about the environment (27% vs 20%). Locally, they were more likely to be concerned about funding, jobs, and crime and violence.

Safety, Belonging and Inclusion

Young people's sense of safety and belonging is fragile. Half of young people (50%) feel safe in their local area, but neutrality has grown, with 40% now sitting in the middle, feeling neither safe nor unsafe.

Beyond safety, most young people say they feel welcome (65%), belong (55%), and can be themselves (57%). Over half (56%) report having a support network, and more say there are role models in their communities (38%, up from 33% in 2024). These suggest a steady, if fragile, sense of inclusion.

But belonging is not equal. Black, African, Black British or Caribbean young people are the least likely to feel welcome (57%) or report having a support network (45%).

Young people eligible for free school meals consistently score lower across all measures, and those with additional needs are less likely to strongly agree.

Qualitative responses put human voices to these numbers.

Many spoke about community spirit, friendly neighbours, and the value of diversity in creating belonging:

> " I like how we are a peaceful neighbourhood of all mixed races, allowing us to enjoy each other's traditions and learning to become tolerant and accepting. "

> " A few minority of the people in my local area are lovely, they could not be more supportive. However, a vast majority are very immature, closed minded and discriminatory. "

Together, the data and voices point to a clear message: safety may be less about crime rates, and more about whether young people feel recognised, included, and connected in the places they live.

How safe do you feel in your local area?

Legend: ● Very Unsafe or Unsafe ● Neutral ● Safe or Very Safe

Year	Very Unsafe or Unsafe	Neutral	Safe or Very Safe
2025	10	40	50
2024	16	33	51

%
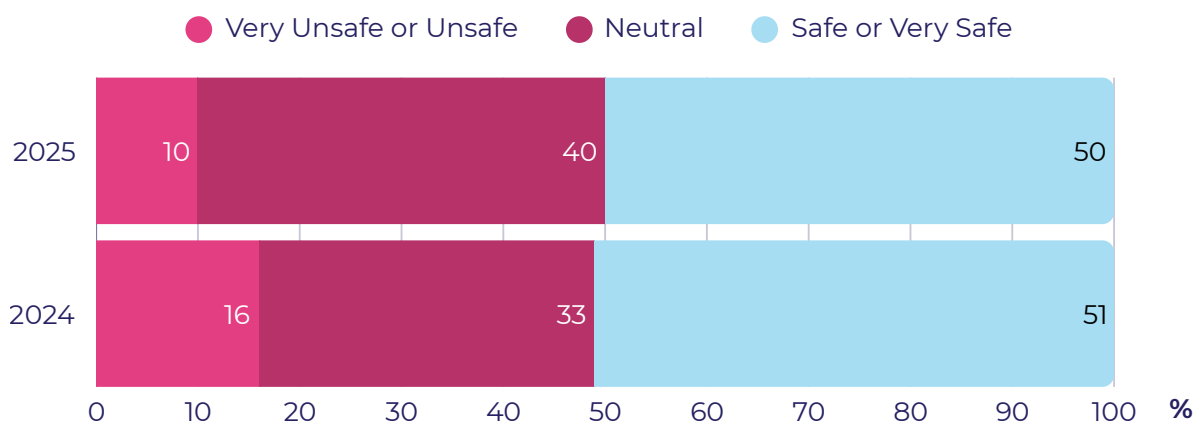
Thinking about **where you live**, how much do you agree with the following?

Statement	Year	Strongly Disagree or Disagree	Neutral	Strongly Agree or Agree	Prefer Not to Say
I have a support network	2024	13%	26%	57%	4%
	2025	11%	29%	56%	4%
I feel welcome	2024	10%	26%	64%	0%
	2025	8%	26%	65%	1%
I feel like I belong	2024	18%	30%	51%	1%
	2025	13%	30%	55%	2%
I feel like I can be myself	2024	20%	25%	54%	1%
	2025	15%	26%	57%	2%
I have role models in my community	2024	33%	31%	33%	3%
	2025	28%	32%	38%	2%

Who feels **left out?**

Marginalised groups feel excluded from the sense of safety and connection most young people experience - belonging is not universal.

- Only 38% of non-binary young people feel welcome in their area, compared with 66% of young people overall.

- Just 45% of Black, African, Black British or Caribbean young people say they have a support network, compared with 57% across all groups.

- Young people eligible for free school meals are consistently less positive across all measures - only 59% feel welcome, compared with 69% of their peers.
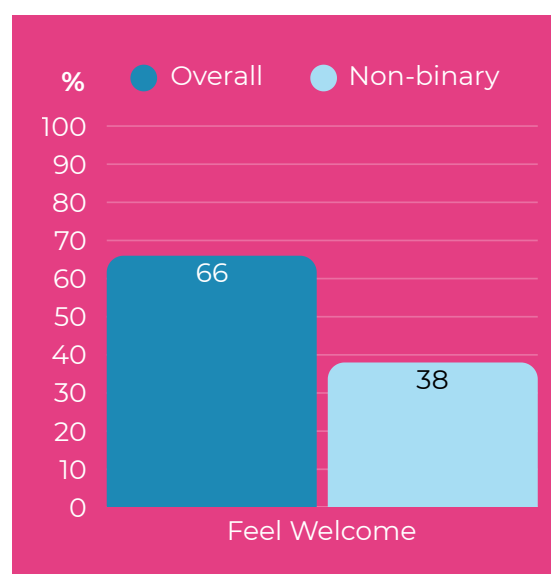
Opportunities and Local Spaces

Local spaces are disappearing - that is certainly the experience of young people in 2025. Access to libraries, leisure centres, and even parks is reported less often this year. Youth clubs are the only bright spot, with access rising sharply, up from 13% to 36%.

For young people, these places are not just facilities. They are where they socialise, find role models, and feel part of a community. Without them, many turn to informal networks, green spaces, or transport links to bigger cities. But these are workarounds, not solutions.
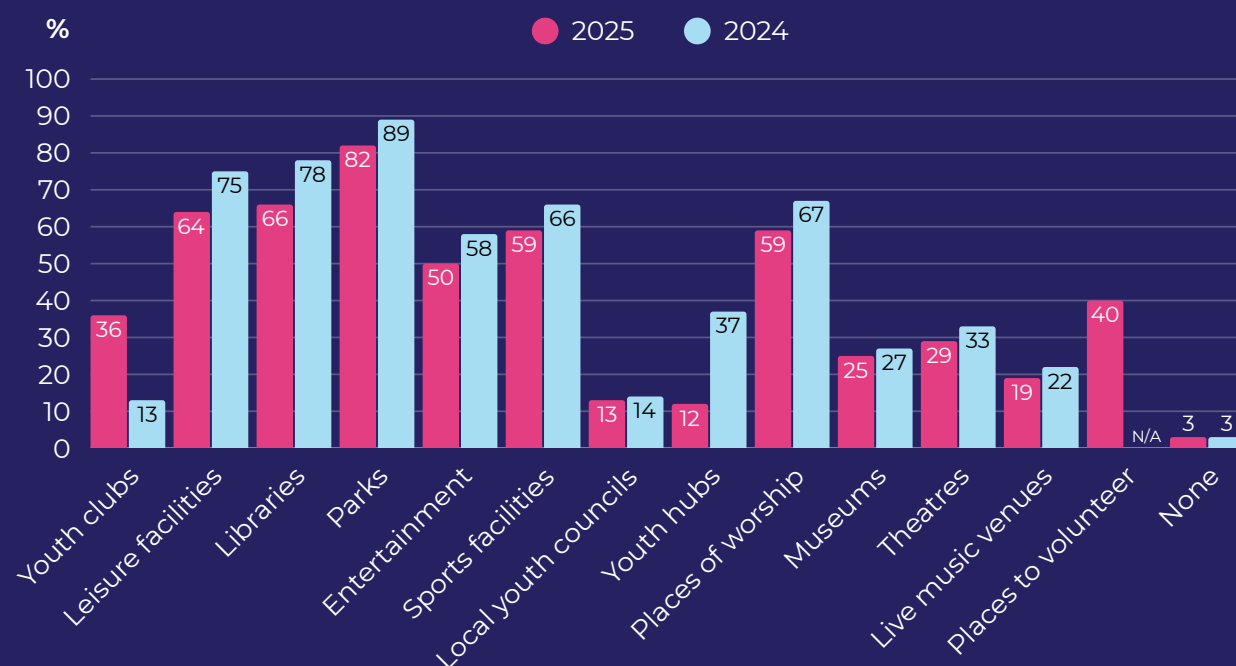
Please select which of these are available in your local area:

Legend: 2025, 2024

Category	2025	2024
Youth clubs	36	13
Leisure facilities	64	75
Libraries	66	78
Parks	82	89
Entertainment	50	58
Sports facilities	59	66
Local youth councils	13	14
Youth hubs	12	37
Places of worship	59	67
Museums	25	27
Theatres	29	33
Live music venues	19	22
Places to volunteer	40	N/A
None	3	3

Awareness of Youth Clubs

2024: 13% → 23 ppt → 2025: 36%

Opportunities & spaces

Opportunities to engage exist - but they're not reaching everyone.

- Respondents eligible for free school meals were typically less likely to report having access to leisure and entertainment facilities (by 9%), libraries (by 7%), and access to sports facilities and places of worship (by 10%).

- Black, African, Black British or Caribbean respondents consistently report lower access to amenities.
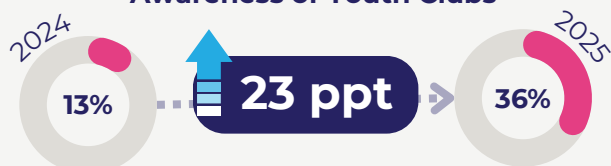
Respondents eligible for free school meals were typically less likely to report having the following available in their local area:

Legend: Eligible, Not Eligible

Category	Eligible	Not Eligible
Leisure facilities	59	68
Libraries	62	69
Entertainment	46	54
Sports facilities	53	63
Places of worship	53	63

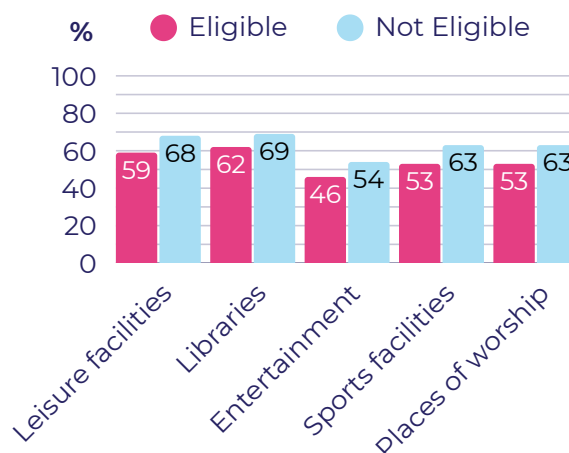## What young people value, and what they miss

When asked what they like most about where they live, young people highlight community spirit, diversity, and green spaces. When asked what could be better, they call for more youth spaces, better infrastructure, and inclusive communities.

What do you like most about where you live?

These quantitative findings are supported by responses to the open-ended questions, where many young people highlighted the people, community, and sense of belonging as what they value most about where they live alongside the amenities available to them.

Belonging

Many young people feel a strong sense of belonging in their local areas, built on community spirit, supportive neighbours, and opportunities to come together.

Diversity is particularly valued, from multi-faith streets to inclusive neighbourhoods where young people feel they don't have to hide who they are.

Yet this is not universal. Some described discrimination and closed-mindedness from neighbours as barriers to feeling supported.

"Brighton is a very diverse place, which is very welcoming for queer people like myself. It's nice to not feel that I have to hide anything about myself when I leave the house."

"It's diverse, so I don't feel as though I am ethnically the odd one out. There's a church, mosque and temple practically on the same street."

"I like that my area has a good community spirit and that there is a great cohesion between the neighbours. Also that there is a very good network and layout to the area".

"It has very beautiful walks and beauty of nature and it is very easy to get places."

"It is an area where I can bike and it is very quiet. No traffic to bug me and I live near school."

Green spaces

Access to green spaces is one of the most valued aspects of local life.

Parks, woodland trails, and beaches are seen as places to socialise, exercise and find calm. Clean, quiet environments are directly linked by young people to mental health and wellbeing.

Amenities

Young people also prize local amenities, from shops and restaurants to healthcare and cultural venues. For some, proximity to transport links and nearby cities balances affordability with access to opportunities. Reliable connections matter: living in one area while working or studying in another is only possible when transport works.

> "Transport links – the Bee Network has been a game changer! I'm close to at least one bus, tram or train station."

> "What I like most about living in Wembley is how everything's kind of right there when you need it. You've got loads of food spots, different cultures everywhere, and the stadium just adds a different vibe; it's like there's always something going on. Plus, it's easy to get into central London if you want a change of scene, but you still get that local, community feel here. "

> "I like the familiarity, I grew up here and know the area."

What are some things you think could be better about where you live?

Infrastructure

Despite these positives, many young people point to missing or crumbling infrastructure: a lack of youth spaces, unreliable bus services, inaccessible healthcare, and few affordable activities.

In rural areas, isolation is compounded by poor transport. For others, the issue is the cost and availability of housing or a lack of investment in their communities.

> "Everything. More jobs. Opportunities for young people outside of school for example youth clubs. Better healthcare and more doctors surgeries."

> "We need a better culture of welcome and acceptance towards minorities, especially LGBTQ+ people. Our public transport needs to improve a lot so people can get around without cars. There need to be lots more jobs, in a greater diversity of sectors, to keep young people in the area and help them succeed."

> "Transport is our biggest issue. If my car were to break down I would have to commute 4 hrs on a bus for a 30min drive and would have to leave stupidly in the morning and I still wouldn't get to work on time. Job opportunities for young people, with an ageing population we cant progress in roles like you can in the cities and that means YP leave."

> "Cleanliness, litter on the floor everywhere. Pot holes need fixing. Council keeps putting rates up but I see no investment in the area. No recreational activities other than gyms. No youth clubs or places for adults aged 24–30 to join."

> "Housing is too expensive. It is very hard to get a dentist appointment or doctor appointment. Not much to do in the local area e.g. only 5 cafes, no cinema, etc Library is very kid focused and quite grimey."

Safety, crime and violence

Concerns about crime and antisocial behaviour are growing. Violent crime, drug use and visible homelessness all contribute to young people feeling unsafe.

They were particularly concerned about violent crime, which was related to drug use and a lack of action by local councils to support people suffering from drug abuse. Young people were worried about walking alone or having to walk through areas where violence and harassment were rife.

> Crime rates and feeling safe. I don't feel comfortable walking or going to certain areas as I know they are unsafe and where crime usually occurs. It'd be great if there was a community centre or youth centre as there isn't a sense of community here.

> "There is noticeable wealth inequality and housing is incredibly expensive, partially due to Cambridge University owning so much housing and high demand driving up prices. There is a lot of homelessness."

> "I mean every so often someone's stabbed or mugged so idk that might be nice to not happen but I don't exactly think we need an increased police presence, probably instead focus on keeping young people out of crime."

> "I don't really feel safe in my area anymore, mainly because of drug and alcohol abuse in the community.
>
> The littering is also starting to become awful in my area, especially dog mess. Nobody seems to care anymore– there are vape stickers all over the bins, shattered bottles on the pavements, sick around the pubs and fast food shops.
>
> There needs to be more bins for dog waste and more regular litter pick ups."

Transport and Mobility

Transport is a lifeline, but not one that young people can always rely on. This year, over half of young people (56%) said they 'often' or 'always' used public transport in the past 12 months, indicating that it plays a significant role in their daily lives. A smaller portion (18%) used it 'sometimes', while around a quarter (26%) said they used it 'rarely' or 'never'. These findings suggest that public transport is a common and important mode of travel for many young people, though accessibility or frequency of use may still be an issue for some.

We will see in the upcoming sections that travel and location have been major obstacles this year, being the second biggest barrier (45%) for young people who recently found work, and a continuing challenge for those still on their journey into employment.

How often in the last 12 months have you used public transport?

Category	%
Always	30
Often	26
Sometimes	18
Rarely	17
Never	9
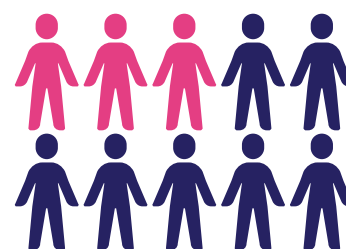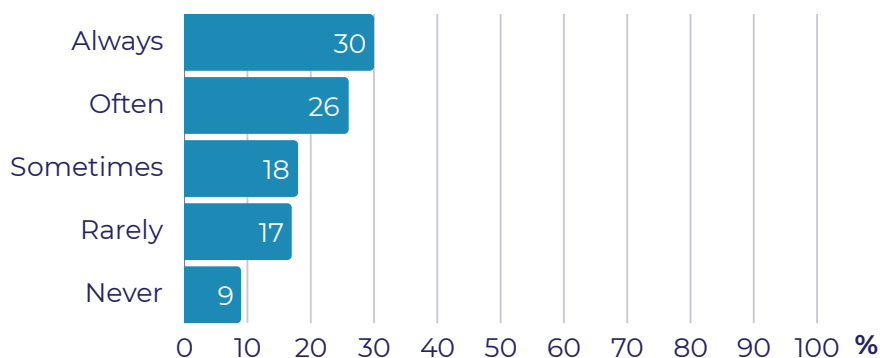
3 in 10 respondents stated they always use public transport

What do you use **public transport** for?

Legend: 2025 · 2024

Category	2025	2024
Getting to work	15	23
Getting to school	52	44
Getting to a training programme	5	5
To access support services	5	6
To see friends/ family	49	53
Childcare reasons	1	1
Other caring responsibilities	3	2
Entertainment	49	50
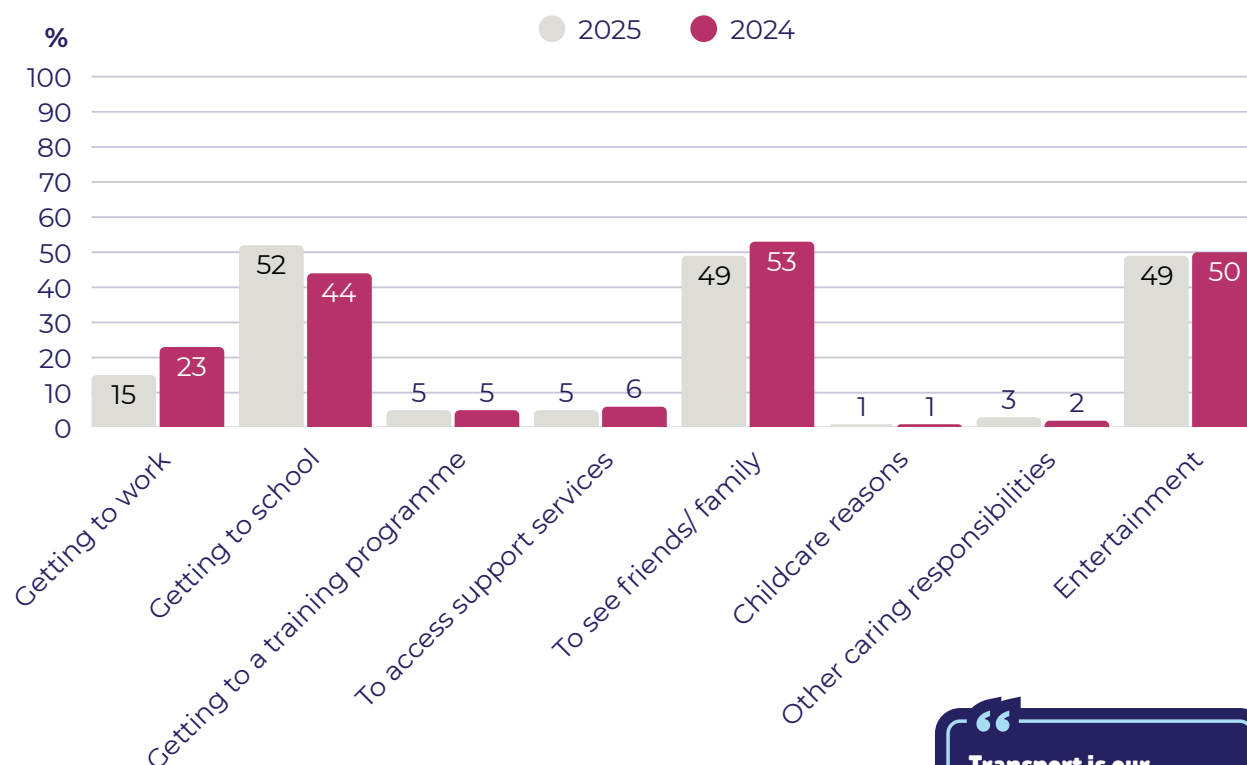
> "Transport is our biggest issue. I'd have to commute four hours on buses for a 30–minute drive."

Thinking about public transport (buses, trains etc.) in your local area, **how would you rate**:

	Year	Poor or Very Poor	Neutral	Good or Excellent	Unsure/Not Applicable
Availability	2024	21%	24%	49%	6%
	2025	17%	24%	54%	5%
Safety	2024	14%	33%	48%	5%
	2025	13%	34%	47%	6%
How often services run	2024	26%	25%	43%	6%
	2025	21%	26%	47%	6%

	Year	Poor or Very Poor	Neutral	Good or Excellent	Unsure/Not Applicable
Cost	**2024**	**26%**	**32%**	**35%**	**7%**
	2025	**27%**	**32%**	**32%**	**9%**
Reliability	**2024**	**36%**	**28%**	**30%**	**6%**
	2025	**30%**	**31%**	**32%**	**7%**
Routes/ coverage	**2024**	**19%**	**29%**	**45%**	**7%**
	2025	**15%**	**27%**	**49%**	**9%**

Overall, while perceptions of public transport have improved across most measures in 2025, reliability and cost remain key areas of concern for young people.

Perceptions of availability and coverage have improved since 2024, with 54% rating availability as 'good or excellent' (up from 49%), and 49% rating routes/coverage positively (up from 45%). Negative ratings also dropped (from 21% to 17% for availability).

- 2024
- 2025

5 ppt

Young people's rating of the availability of public transport being 'good or excellent'.

6 ppt

Young people's rating of the reliability of public transport being 'poor or very poor'.
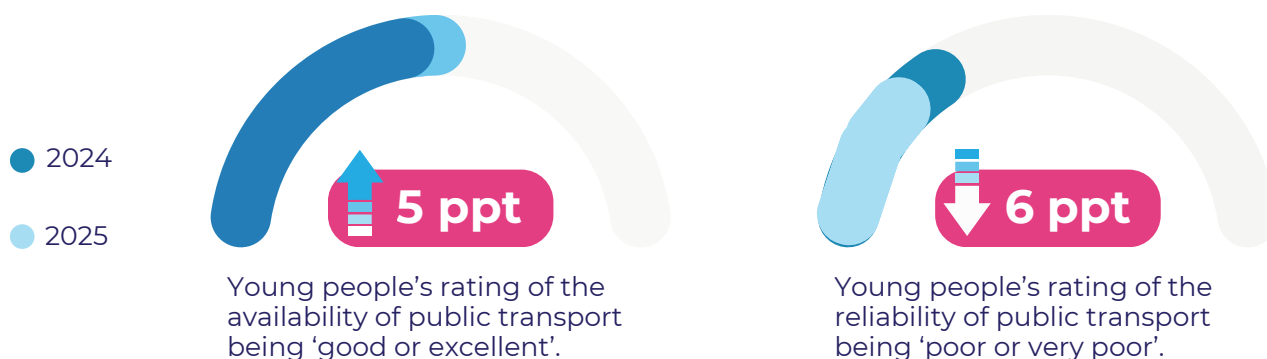
Who relies most on public transport?

Transport is not just about convenience - it's about equity and access to opportunity.

- 35% of young people eligible for free school meals 'always' use public transport, compared with 27% not eligible.

- Those with additional needs and free school meal eligibility feel less safe when travelling.

- Eligible for free school meals
- Not Eligible for free school Meals

%

35

27

Always Use Public Transport
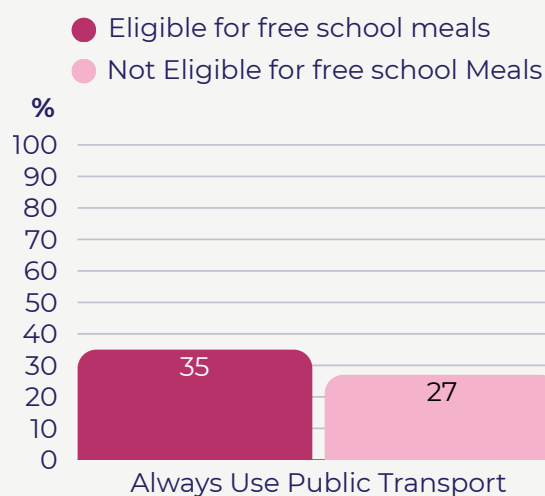
Financial Pressures

Thinking about the last 12 months, please indicate how much you agree with the following statements:

Statement	Year	Strongly Disagree or Disagree	Neither	Strongly Agree or Agree
I have been able to afford my basic living expenses	2024	14%	31%	55%
	2025	15%	29%	56%
I have been able to afford non-essential expenses	2024	22%	31%	47%
	2025	22%	24%	54%
I have had to cancel or reduce some of my subscription services	2024	25%	41%	34%
	2025	31%	27%	42%
I have downgraded or reduced my phone or internet plan to save money	2024	42%	39%	19%
	2025	45%	30%	25%
I have turned down social invitations or events because I couldn't afford them	2024	N/A	N/A	N/A
	2025	36%	27%	37%
I have visited fewer entertainment venues	2024	32%	26%	39%
	2025	30%	26%	44%

Afford Non-Essential Expenses

47% (2024) → 7 ppt → 54% (2025)

Reduce/Cancel Subscription Services

34% (2024) → 8 ppt → 42% (2025)
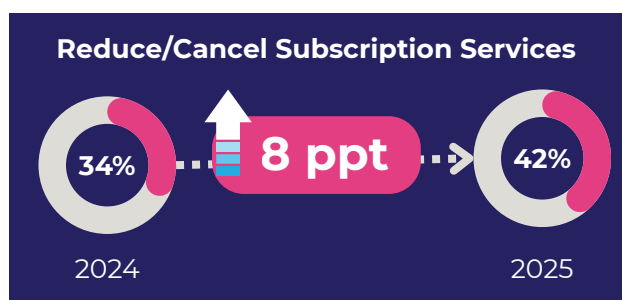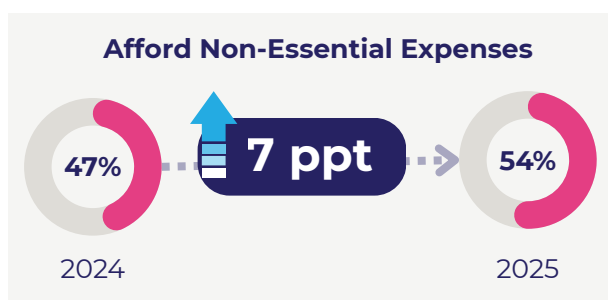
The cost of living continues to create compromise, and those who are already disadvantaged are feeling it most.

While most can cover their basic expenses, the reality is that young people are having to make more trade-offs - choosing whether to keep a phone plan, attend a social event, or pay for a gym membership. These sacrifices cut into the very things that keep young people connected, active, and supported.

Financial pressure is also unequal. Older young people (26-30) face sharper affordability challenges as they become more independent, while those from lower-income households are more likely to seek extra support or cut back on essentials. The result is a generation learning to live with scarcity - budgeting tightly, sacrificing leisure, and often relying on family, government schemes, or credit to get by.

Older young people feel the squeeze hardest: 75% of those aged 26–30 worry about covering basic costs, compared with 50% of teens. Black, African, Black British or Caribbean young people are twice as likely to seek financial support as White peers, and free school meal respondents are consistently less able to afford both essentials and non-essentials.

Young people's financial reality is one of trade-offs.

Most (56%) say they can afford their basic living expenses, but fewer feel able to afford non-essentials. Many are cutting back: cancelling subscriptions (31%), downgrading phone or internet plans (25%), or turning down social invitations (36%). Almost half (44%) say they have reduced visits to entertainment or cultural venues because of cost.

1 in 4 respondents stated they downgraded or reduced their phone or internet plan to save money

Concern about essential costs
(26-30: 75, 14-16: 51)

White / Black
Afford essentials (White 44, Black 44)
Afford non-essentials (White 45, Black 34)

Males / Females / Transgender
Can afford basics (Males 75, Females 51, Transgender 44)
Less entertainment events (Males 24, Females 31, Transgender 28)
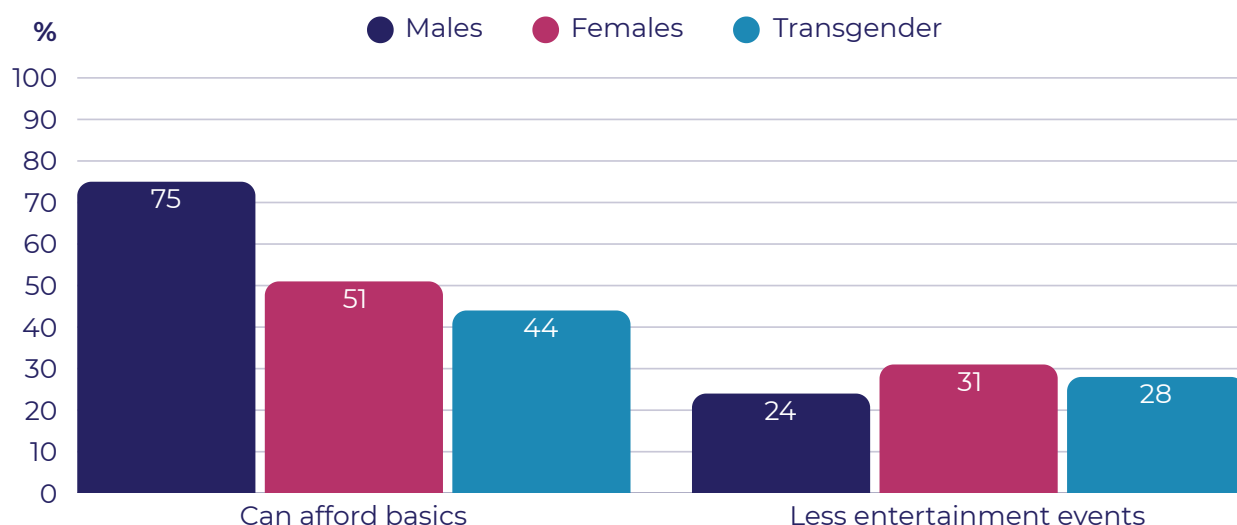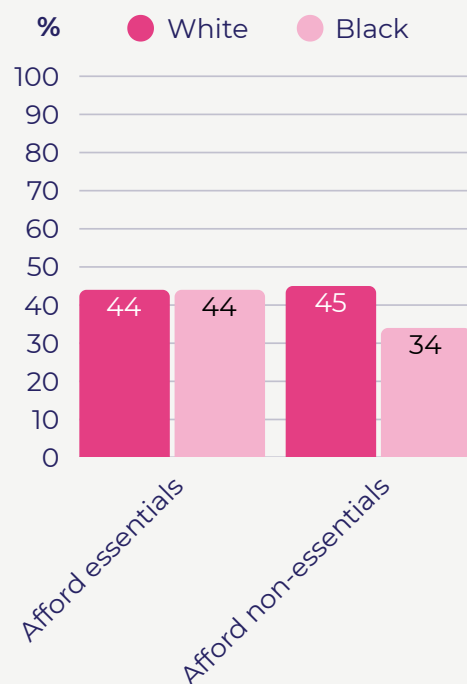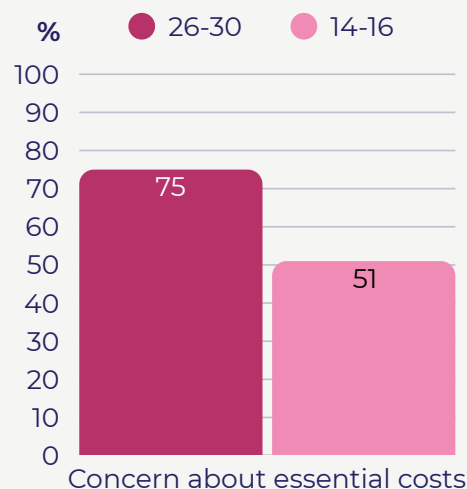
Technology and the Future

Technology excites and unsettles young people in equal measure.

Technology continues to reshape the world young people are growing up in and their feelings about it are split. For some, AI and digital advances represent opportunity; for others, they feel like threats to security and stability. In 2025, just over a third say they are excited about AI, but more than half (53%) say they worry it will take jobs.

Legend: Strongly Disagree or Disagree · Neutral · Strongly Agree or Agree · Unsure/Not Applicable

	I am excited about the future of technology and AI	I am worried that AI will take over jobs	Changes in technology and AI make me more unsure about my future choices	Advances in technology and AI will open up more opportunities for me in the future
Strongly Agree or Agree	35	53	43	29
Neutral	32	26	30	36
Strongly Disagree or Disagree	31	18	23	30

53% respondents are worried that AI will take over jobs.

Coping with uncertainty

Young people are finding ways to process this uncertainty. Younger groups tend to embrace AI more openly, seeing it as a tool for opportunity, while older groups are more cautious, voicing concerns about employment and career security.

Open responses suggest a mixture of curiosity - experimenting with AI tools in school or work - and apprehension about how it will change the job market.

Who's hopeful, who's anxious?

The generational split is clear: optimism at the start of the journey, anxiety as the future looms closer.

- Younger teens are the most optimistic about AI.

- Older 20-somethings are the most anxious about job loss and uncertainty.
- Young women are more likely to be worried about job losses, while young men report higher excitement about AI's potential.

- Asian or Asian British respondents are the most optimistic and most likely to have already used AI, while Black, African, Black British or Caribbean respondents are most worried about job impacts.

- Young people with additional needs are more likely to feel unsure or sceptical about technology creating opportunities for them.

Health and Wellbeing

Results are in

YOUTH VOICE CENSUS

Introduction

Young people's health and wellbeing shape every part of their lives - from how they learn, work and connect with others, to their confidence in building a future. In 2025, the story is one of contradictions. Support for physical and mental health has improved since last year, and many young people say they can turn to teachers, family or friends when they need help. Yet wellbeing remains fragile: anxiety levels are high, illness and stress continue to keep young people out of classrooms and workplaces, and disruptive behaviour in education undermines confidence.

Beneath the averages, sharp inequalities persist. Young people with additional needs, those eligible for free school meals, NEET young people and marginalised groups consistently report lower confidence, more disruption and weaker access to support.

Key Findings

- Wellbeing is fragile and uneven: While most young people are in the middle range for life satisfaction, with nearly one in five rating their life satisfaction as an 8 out of 10, a significant portion is struggling. One in ten reports the highest level of anxiety (10/10).

- Anxiety is particularly acute for young men, who are more likely to report maximum anxiety than young women (24% vs 10%).

- Support is improving, but uneven. 41% feel able to access mental health support (up from 31% in 2024); 54% say the same for physical health (up from 48%). Gains are strongest for those in education, weakest for NEET young people.

- Family, friends and schools are the first line of help. Most young people turn to family and friends for mental health (28%) or financial (18%) support, while the NHS remains central for physical health (32%).

- Time online is intense. Two-thirds (66%) spend three or more hours online each day, and over half (54%) spend three or more hours on social media.

- Social media divides opinion. Most (74%) say it helps them stay connected, but a third (30%) feel it negatively affects their mental health, and nearly two-thirds (63%) want stronger regulation.

- Missed days and disruption are widespread. Nearly a quarter (22%) of students missed more than 10 days of education in the past year; 55% said their education had been disrupted. At work, 1 in 5 missed 5+ days.

- Health drives disruption. Illness and stress are the top causes of missed work (77% and 8%) and education (78% and 22%), highlighting the deep connection between wellbeing and opportunity.

- Safety at work is fragile. Stress and workload are rising, half do not feel fairly paid, and most lack the confidence to challenge employers.

- Assessments drive stress in education. 55% of students say assessments harm their wellbeing, with young women and those with additional needs most affected.

- Disparities persist. Young women, students eligible for free school meals, minority ethnic groups, LGBTQ+ young people, those with additional needs and NEET young people consistently report lower wellbeing and greater disruption.

Life Satisfaction & Anxiety: Flat, Fragile, with Gender and Identity Gaps.

Wellbeing is steady, but fragile. Young people's scores on life satisfaction, happiness and worthwhileness remain in the middle ranges, with "8/10" the most common life satisfaction rating. Yet anxiety continues to weigh heavily: one in ten rate themselves at the maximum "10/10."

Most young people describe their wellbeing in neutral terms, scores on life satisfaction, happiness and worthwhileness remain in the middle ranges, with "8/10" the most common life satisfaction rating.

Yet anxiety continues to weigh heavily: one in ten rate themselves at the maximum "10/10."High anxiety is common, especially among younger teenagers, while only a small portion reports strong life satisfaction. Some groups, such as those in home education or training programmes, are more positive, while NEET young people record the weakest scores.

1 in 10 report maximum anxiety, while many more sit at moderate levels.

> **Most days I'm fine, but exams or money problems push me over the edge.**

Overall, how satisfied are you with your life nowadays?

● 2025

3% 2% 3% 5% 8% 14% 6% 17% 18% 8% 10%
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

● 2024

N/A 3% 3% 6% 7% 11% 12% 19% 20% 10% 8%
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
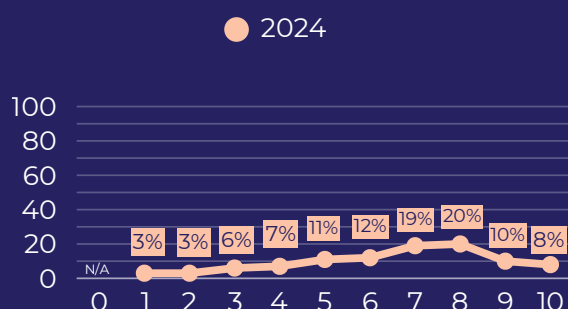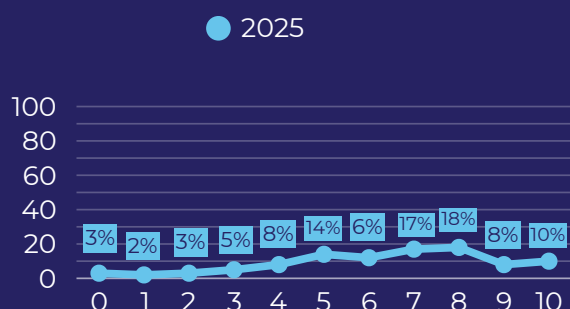
Overall, to what extent do you feel the things you do in your life are worthwhile?

● 2025

3% 2% 4% 5% 7% 15% 12% 15% 15% 10% 12%
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

● 2024

N/A 4% 3% 6% 7% 13% 11% 16% 18% 12% 10%
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
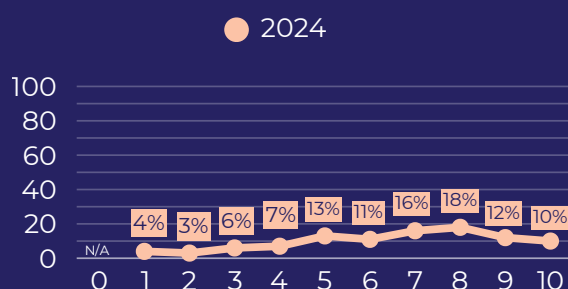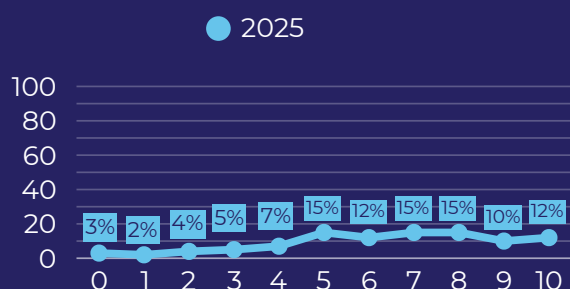
Who is affected most by anxiety

Wellbeing is not improving, only holding steady. For too many, fragility defines their daily lives and anxiety is starting young.

- Young men are more likely to score themselves at both extremes, **14%** at maximum satisfaction, but **24%** at maximum anxiety.

- Black, African, Black British, or Caribbean respondents are most likely to report a '10' for anxiousness (**20%**), a higher percentage than Asian or Asian British (**18%**), Mixed or Multiple ethnicity (**16%**), or White respondents (**15%**).

- The youngest group, 11-13 year olds, also reports a high level of anxiety, with **21%** scoring a '10' for anxiousness, compared to **16%** of 14-16 year olds and 14% of 17-19 year olds.

Access to Support

Support is becoming more visible, with more young people reporting that they can access help with mental and physical health or finances. **4 in 10** (41%) now feel able to access local mental health support, up from 31% in 2024, and more than half (54%) say the same for physical health, up from 48%. Financial support has also improved, from 18% to 26%.

Feel able to access mental health support

31% · 2024 — **10 ppt** → 41% · 2025

While the NHS remains the primary source for physical health issues, young people overwhelmingly turn to their family and friends for mental and financial support. Informal networks are the true first line of defence for young people.

However, Gains are concentrated among students and those in work who are more likely to say they can access support. Young people who are unemployed and not looking for work are least likely to report access to support.
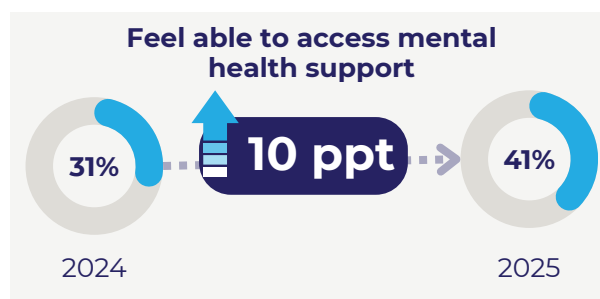
Disparities are evident by background too: those eligible for free school meals and minority ethnic young people report weaker access to local health support, while those with additional needs lean more heavily on family and the NHS.

	Year	Strongly Disagree or Disagree	Neutral	Strongly Agree or Agree	Unsure/Not Applicable
Support for mental health issues	2024	26%	27%	31%	16%
	2025	19%	26%	41%	14%
Support for physical health issues	2024	15%	23%	48%	14%
	2025	12%	23%	54%	11%
Support for financial issues	2024	19%	32%	18%	31%
	2025	19%	32%	26%	23%

If you are accessing mental health support, where are you accessing it?

● 2025   ● 2024

	2025	2024
School/ Education	18	20
Family/ Friends	28	22
Employer	2	2
Jobcentre Plus	2	1
Probation Officer		1
NHS	15	17
Private Provider	4	5
Other	4	7
Unsure/ Not Applicable	23	26

0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100 %
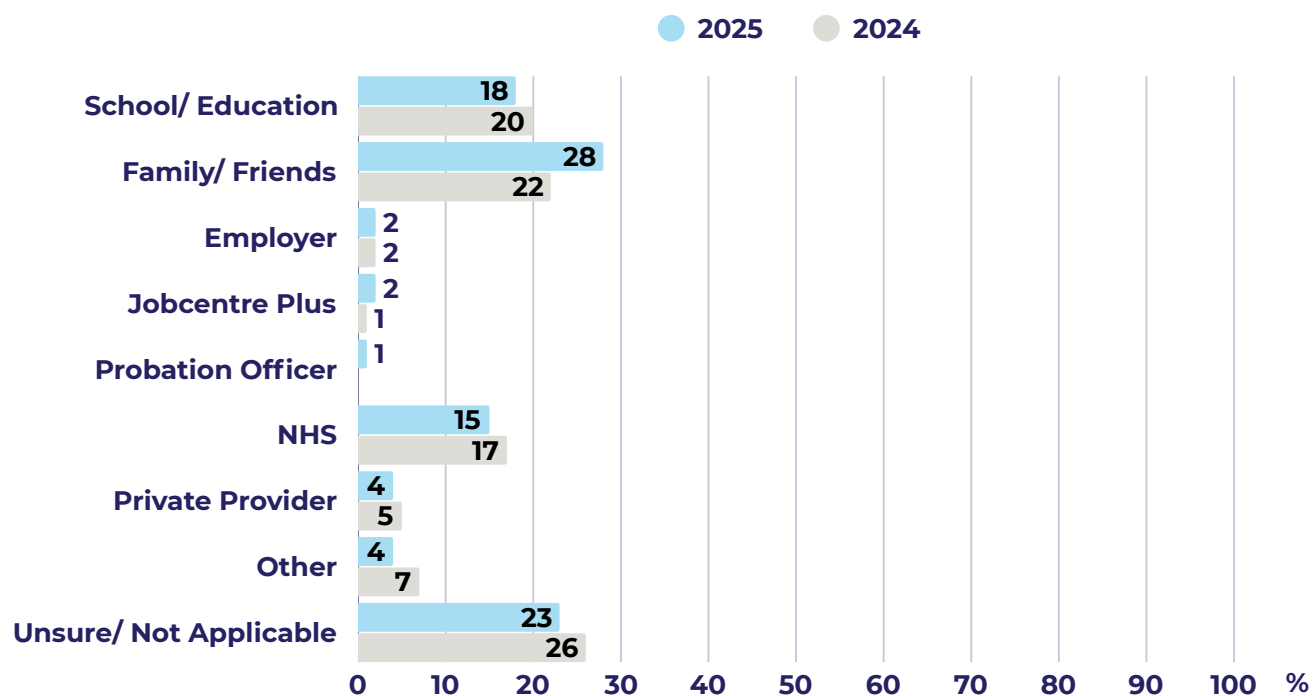
If you are accessing support for physical health, where are you accessing it?

● 2025   ● 2024

	2025	2024
School/ Education	8	7
Family/ Friends	18	
Employer	1	1
Jobcentre Plus	1	
Probation Officer		
NHS	32	37
Private Provider	3	4
Other	3	4
Unsure/ Not Applicable	22	33

0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100 %
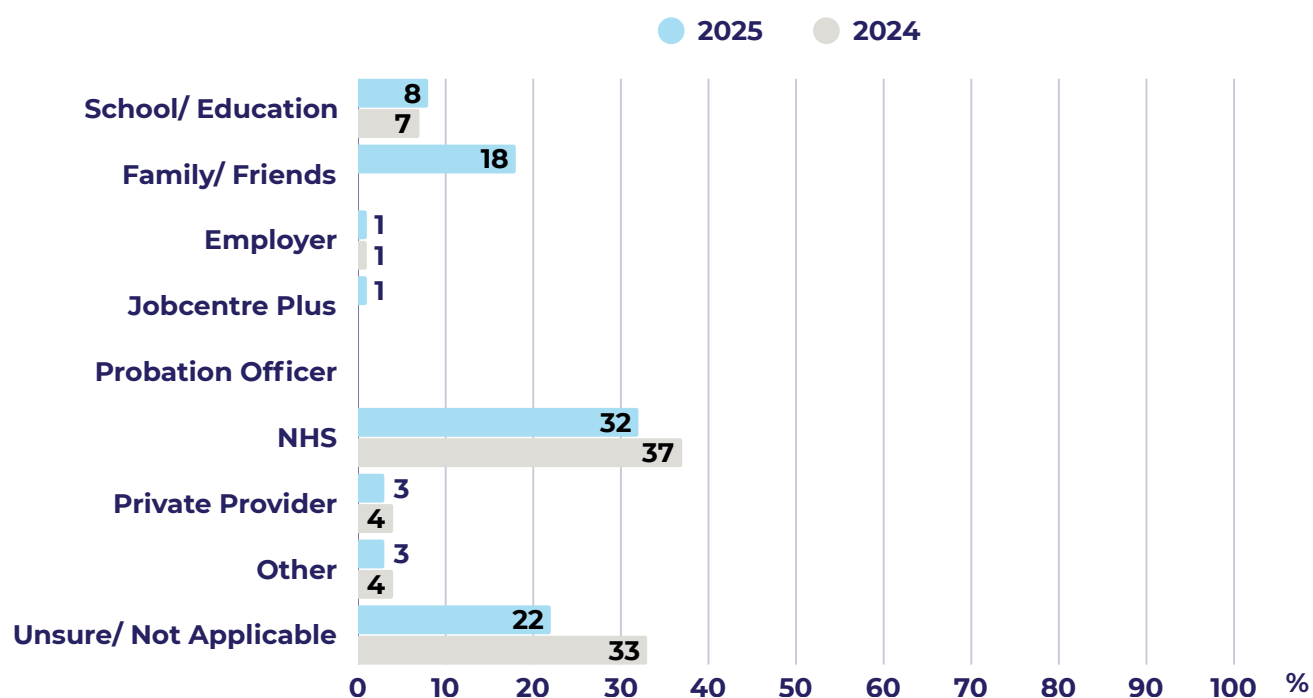
If you are accessing financial support, **where are you accessing it?**

● 2025   ● 2024

Category	2025	2024
School/ Education	6	6
Family/ Friends	18	
Employer	3	2
Jobcentre Plus	6	6
Probation Officer	1	
NHS	2	1
Private Provider	1	1
Other	3	7
Unsure/ Not Applicable	40	60
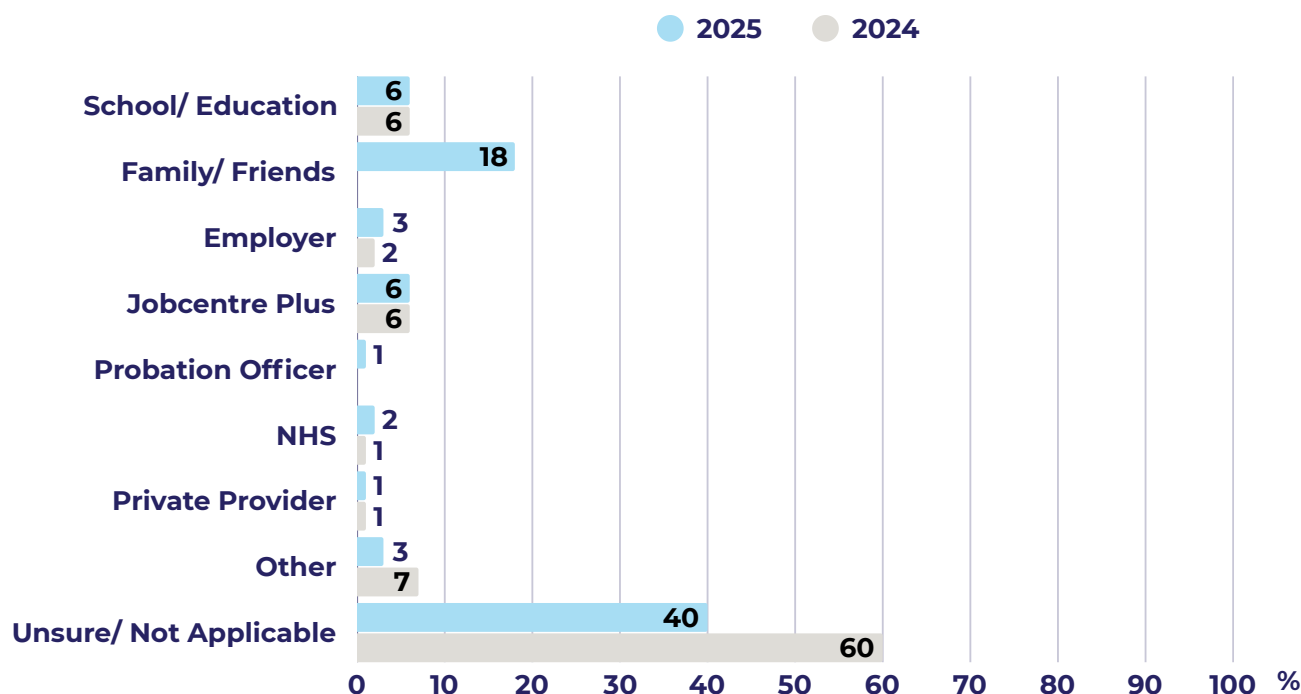
Disparities on **accessing support**

The data reveals sharp differences in how various groups can access and use support, highlighting critical areas for us to focus on:

- A stark contrast exists between young people in school and those who are unemployed and not looking for opportunities. Over a quarter of the latter (29%) "strongly disagreed" that they could access mental health support locally.

- The most significant difference is in access to local physical health support. Two-thirds (64%) of White young people feel they can access this support, compared to just 6% of Black, African, Black British, or Caribbean young people and 5% of those with Mixed or Multiple ethnicity.

- The youngest age group (11-13 year olds) is more likely to turn to family or friends for mental health support, while older young people (26-30 year olds) are four times more likely to seek mental health support from the NHS. This points to a clear need for age-appropriate support pathways.

- Young people with additional needs are notably more likely to seek mental health support from the NHS (23%) compared to those without additional needs (13%)

Support systems are working better, but not for those furthest from education and employment, who are most in need.

> 66
> **If you're in school or college there are people to help, but once you're out, you're on your own.**
> 99

Missing Days in Education and Work

Illness, stress and behaviour are keeping young people out of classrooms and workplaces. In education, more than half reported disruption in the past year, most commonly due to illness, poor behaviour from peers and staff absence.

In work, disruption is also widespread, most often linked to stress, illness or family circumstances.

The relationship between a young person's health and their ability to stay engaged in school and work is undeniable. Illness and health problems are the primary cause of missed days, with a significant portion of young people also citing mental health and stress as a key driver of disruption.

For those in education, disruption and missed days take their toll.

55%

55% of students report their education was disrupted in the past 12 months. **22%** missed more than 10 days.

The main drivers for this are:

1. Illness (**48%**)   **2.** Disruptive Behaviour (**42%**)   **3.** Staff Absence (**38%**)

For those in work, fragility is just as visible.

49%

Around half (49%) of those in work reported their work was disrupted in the past 12 months. **19%** missed 5+ days, mostly due to illness (**77%**).

The main drivers for this are:

1. Stress/Mental Health(**40%**)   **2.** Illness (**26%**)   **3.** Family/Personal Issues (**38%**)

Missed days of education

While many miss just a few days, a significant portion, **22% of young people,** missed more than 10 days of school in the last year. The most common reasons for absence are illness or health problems (**78%**) and mental health or stress (**22%**).

Outside of the usual holidays and school breaks, how many days have you missed school in the last 12 months?

Category	%
None	15
1-2 Days	21
3-4 Days	17
5-6 Days	11
7-8 Days	8
9-10 Days	6
More Than 10 Days	22

Main reasons for absence:

Reason	%
Illness	78
Mental Health/Stress	22
Family Reasons	18
Holidays/Special Events	18
Personal/Emotional	15
Lack of Motivation	13
Transport	9
Education Related	6
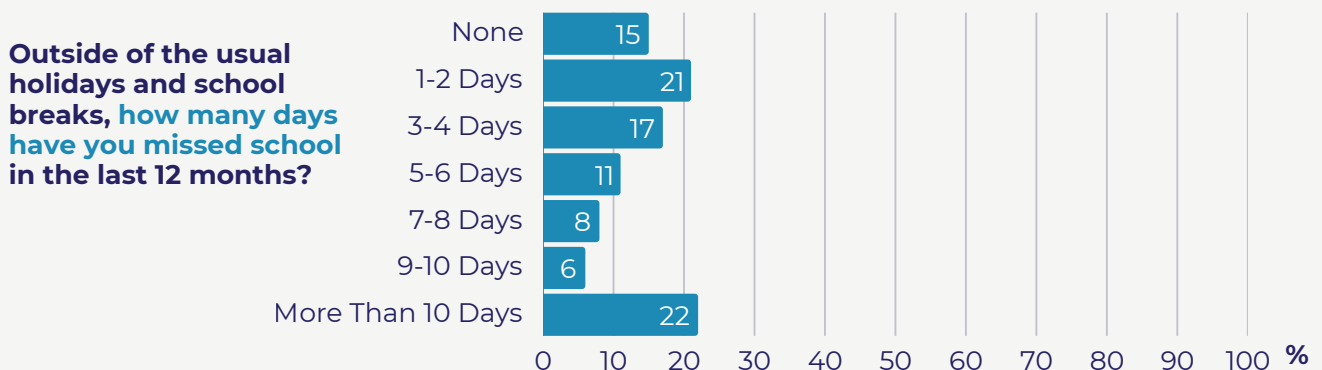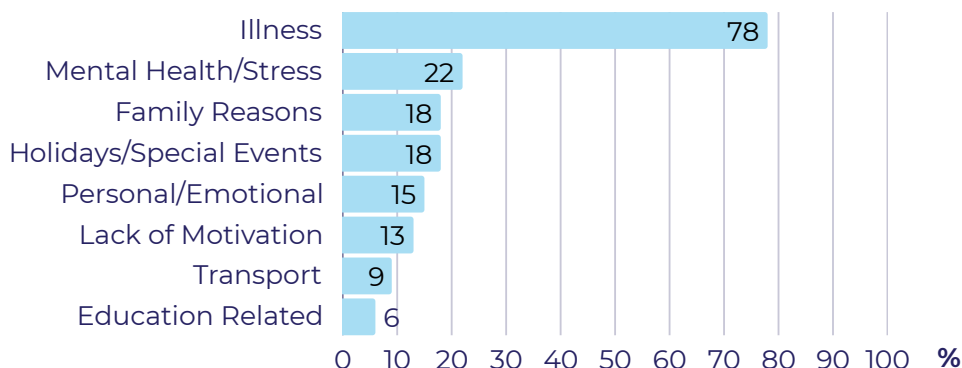
> *I've been off more than 10 days this year, some for being sick, but a lot of it was just feeling too stressed to go in.*

More young people are missing days in school, both the days missed and the reasons why days are missed show where disparity lies.

- **Young people with additional needs** are significantly more likely to miss more than 10 days of education compared to those without additional needs (**31% vs 18%**). They are also much more likely to cite mental health or stress as a reason for missing school (40% vs 15%) and more likely to cite education-related issues like bullying (14% vs 3%).

- **Females** are more than twice as likely to cite mental health or stress as a reason for their absence from school when compared to males (**27% vs 13%**).

- Young people eligible for **free school meals** are more likely to have missed **more than 10 days** of education than their peers.
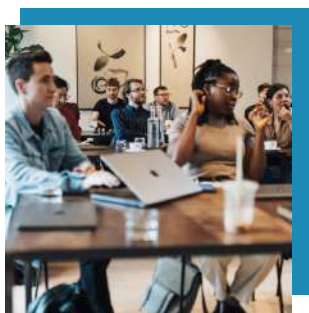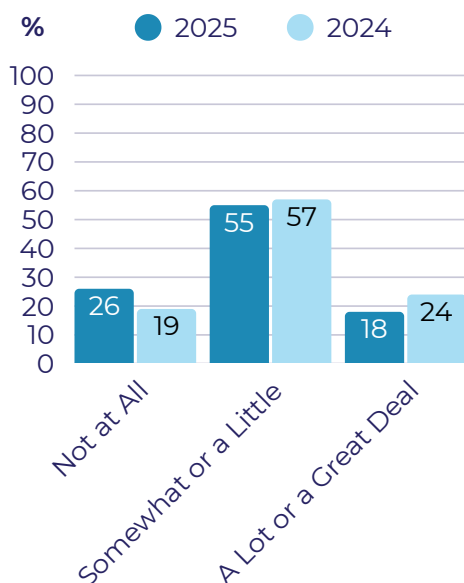
Disruption to education

Over half of young people (55%) report disruption to their education in the past 12 months. This has reduced when compared to last year. We do continue to see that students eligible for free school meals and those with additional needs students were more likely to experience disruption across every category, particularly poor behaviour, bullying and lack of support.

Has your education or study been disrupted in the last year?

	2025	2024
Not at All	26	19
Somewhat or a Little	55	57
A Lot or a Great Deal	18	24

> *Lessons keep getting interrupted by bad behaviour. It's not just the time you lose, it's the stress*

Main causes of disruption (all education stages):

1. Illness - **66%**
2. Mental Health/Stress - **36%**
3. Poor behaviour of other pupils - **25%** (rising to **31%** in secondary school)
4. Family Issues - **16%**
5. Bullying/Harassment - **12%**
6. Difficulties with Learning/Study - **10%**
7. Lack of Support from Teachers/Staff - **9%**
8. Transport - **6%**

Wider wellbeing in school

Over half (55%) of students say assessments harm their wellbeing, with young women (**42% vs 28%** of men) and those with additional needs (**52% vs 33%** of those without) hardest hit.

15% of students asked for additional exam support this year, such as extra time, a smaller room, or adjusted papers. Of these, around **two-thirds received the support they requested, but a third did not.**

Exam support is reaching many, but not all. For a third of students who asked and didn't receive it, the impact was increased stress and reduced confidence, compounding the already heavy toll assessments place on wellbeing.

> I had the confidence to ask for support, but it never materialised. It made exams even harder.

Disruption at work

Disruption is also widespread in the workplace, most often linked to stress, illness or family circumstances. For many, this meant missing several days of work, highlighting the fragility of young people's wellbeing once in employment.

Around **1 in 5** workers (19%) missed 5+ days of work in the past year.

Reasons for absence:

1. Illness (**77%**)
2. Mental Health/Stress (**8%**)
3. Family/Personal Issues (**7%**)

> I want to do well at work, but stress builds up, you end up needing days off just to recover.

Disruption at work is also common:
- **40%** of young workers say stress or mental health disrupted them
- **26%** said illness

Stress and workload are rising:
- **42%** say stress increased
- **47%** say workload increased

For more than half of the participants, work was not disrupted in the last year (51%). This is a small increase when compared to last year (45%).

However, for some participants, their work had been disrupted 'a little' (19%) or 'somewhat' (17%), indicating a negligible increase from last year.

Very few respondents stated that their work had been disrupted 'a lot' (8%) or 'a great deal' (5%).
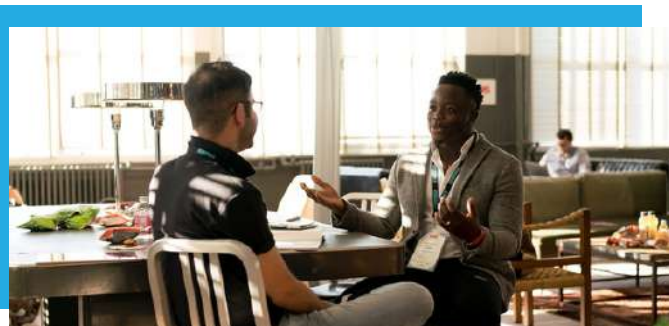
How much has your work been disrupted in the last year?

% ● 2025 ● 2024

	Not at All	A Little	Somewhat	A Lot	A Great Deal
2025	51	19	17	8	5
2024	45	22	16	12	5
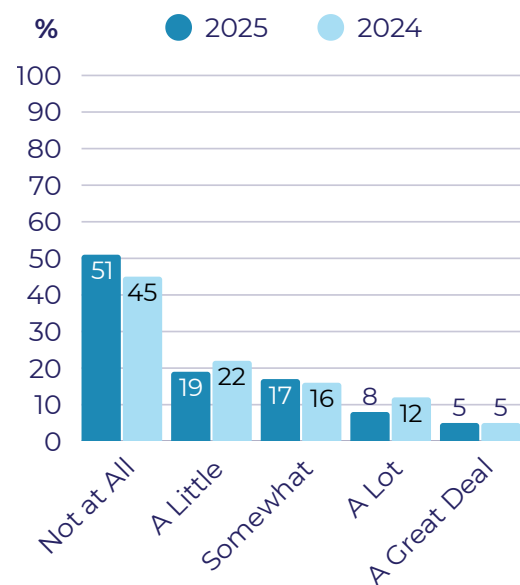
Which of the following has caused the most disruption?

%

Category	Value
Mental Health	40
Illness	26
Personal/Family Issues	25
Difficulties with Colleagues/Management	22
Lack of Motivation	21
Poor Work-Life Balance	18
Redundancies	15
Transport	15
Heavy Workload/Deadlines	12
Other - Write In	11
Lack of Support	10
Financial Difficulties	7
Problems with Work Environment	6
Equipment Failures	4
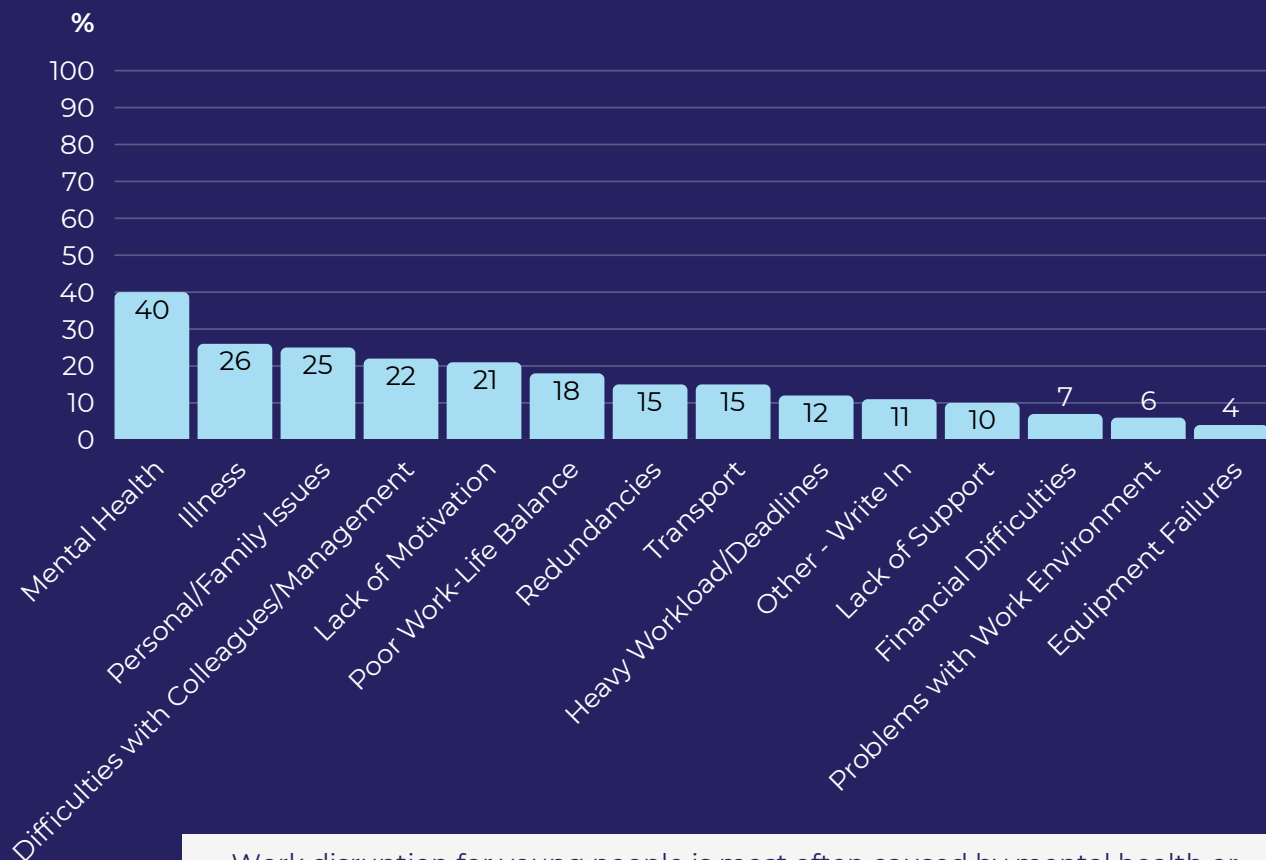
Work disruption for young people is most often caused by mental health or stress. Illness or health problems, and personal or family issues are also common causes of work disruption.

Who is most affected by work disruption?

- Female respondents were more likely to cite mental health issues as a cause of work disruption compared to males (**42% vs 37%**). They were also much more likely to attribute work disruption to difficulties with colleagues or management (**26% vs 12%**).

- In contrast, males were more likely to report work disruption due to heavy workloads or unrealistic deadlines (**14% vs 10%**) and poor work-life balance (**19% vs 18%**).

- Young people eligible for free school meals were more likely to cite personal or family issues as a cause of work disruption (**31%**) compared to those not eligible for free school meals (**23%**). They were also more likely to cite mental health or stress as a cause of work disruption (**44% vs 39%**).

- Transgender respondents most often cited mental health or stress as a cause of work disruption (**40%**).

Missed days at **work**

Aside from your scheduled days off and booked holiday, how many days have you missed at work in the last 12 months?

Days	%
None	30
1-2 Days	29
3-4 Days	19
5-6 Days	8
7-8 Days	4
9-10 Days	2
More Than 10 Days	8
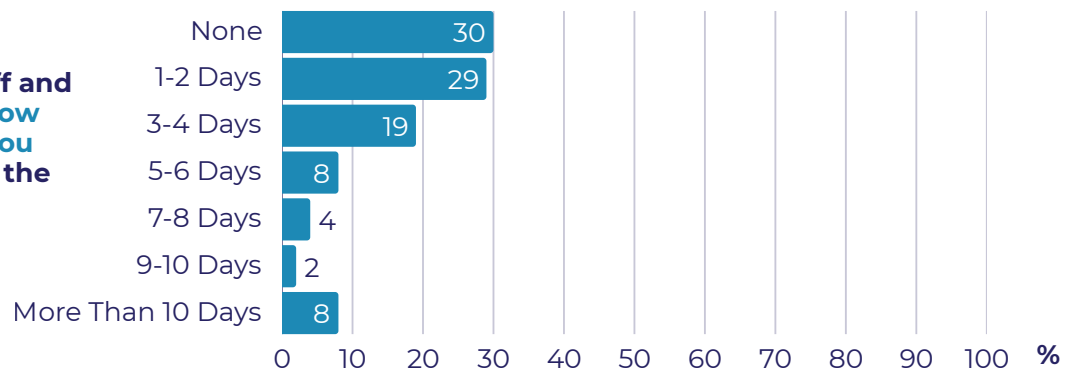
Most young people missed no days of work (30%) or only 1-2 days (29%) in the last 12 months. Very few missed more than 5 days (8%). The most common reason for missing work was illness or health problems (77%).

- Female respondents were more likely to miss more days of work, with 31% missing 1-2 days and 21% missing up to 4 days. Females were also more likely than males to cite illness as a reason for missing work (79% vs 73%).

- On the other hand, males were more likely to cite mental health or stress as a reason for missing work (12% vs 6% of females).

- Young people eligible for free school meals were more likely to miss 7-8 days of work (6%) compared to those not eligible.

How much **do you agree** with these statements?

	Year	Strongly Disagree or Disagree	Neutral	Strongly Agree or Agree
I am happy in my current role	2024	14%	16%	70%
	2025	19%	16%	65%
I am paid fairly for the work that I do	2024	27%	15%	58%
	2025	29%	21%	50%
I am building useful skills in my job	2024	6%	10%	84%
	2025	9%	11%	80%
I am trained and supported to do my job well	2024	6%	16%	68%
	2025	19%	18%	63%

Data continues on the following page →

	Year	Strongly Disagree or Disagree	Neutral	Strongly Agree or Agree
I am overqualified for the job that I do	**2024**	**44%**	**26%**	**30%**
	2025	**40%**	**28%**	**32%**
I am satisfied with the job that I do	**2024**	**16%**	**21%**	**63%**
	2025	**18%**	**19%**	**63%**
I understand my rights and responsibilities at work	**2024**	**7%**	**13%**	**80%**
	2025	**7%**	**15%**	**78%**
My working environment is friendly and supportive	**2024**	**6%**	**11%**	**83%**
	2025	**7%**	**15%**	**78%**
I felt welcome when I started this role	**2024**	**6%**	**7%**	**87%**
	2025	**8%**	**5%**	**87%**
I can be myself at work	**2024**	**14%**	**16%**	**70%**
	2025	**11%**	**18%**	**71%**
I am given opportunities to undertake volunteering and social action	**2024**	**23%**	**24%**	**53%**
	2025	**27%**	**22%**	**51%**

Fair Pay is a Growing Concern: There has been a notable drop in the number of young people who feel they are paid fairly for their work, falling from 58% in 2024 to 50% in 2025. This is a significant decline and a critical indicator of rising financial pressures.

Skills Development is Stalling: The percentage of young people who feel they are building useful skills in their jobs has fallen from 84% to 80%. At the same time, a growing number feel they are overqualified for the work they do, increasing from 30% to 32%.

Satisfaction and Happiness Have Plateaued: While a majority of young people still feel happy (65%) and satisfied (63%) in their roles, both of these figures have seen a slight decrease or stagnation from the previous year.

Workplace Culture is a Bright Spot: A positive trend is that more young people feel they can be themselves at work, with agreement increasing from 70% to 71%. This suggests that while formal aspects of work may be declining, the cultural and social environment is holding steady or even improving slightly.

In the last 12 months, have you worked more than your scheduled hours at work unpaid?

Prefer Not to Say
3%

Yes
47%

No
50%
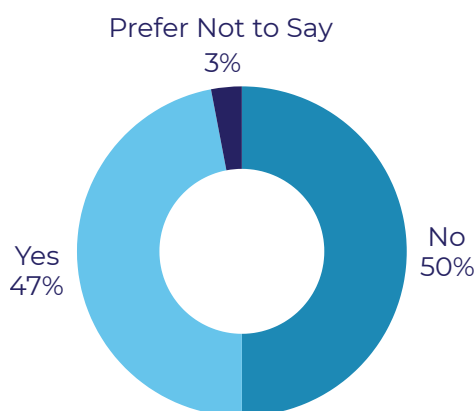
Discrimination, Harassment and Bullying

Bullying and harassment remain a concern across both education and work.

These experiences undermine confidence and wellbeing and are disproportionately reported by minority ethnic young people, LGBT+ youth and those with additional needs.

> **Bullying doesn't stop after school, it just changes shape.**

25%

30%

23%

16%

25% experienced bullying in education; **30%** witnessed it.

23% experienced harassment at work; **16%** witnessed it.

In the last 12 months in education, have you personally experienced:

	Year	Frequently	Sometimes	Once	Never
Bullying or harassment in your education setting	2024	10%	21%	16%	43%
	2025	8%	19%	17%	56%
Bullying or harassment travelling to and/or from where you study	2024	4%	11%	12%	64%
	2025	4%	12%	12%	72%
Discrimination in your education setting	2024	6%	13%	10%	59%
	2025	5%	14%	11%	70%
Discrimination travelling to and from where you study	2024	3%	5%	6%	74%
	2025	2%	8%	8%	82%

In the last 12 months in education, have you seen/witnessed:

	Year	Frequently	Sometimes	Once	Never
Bullying or harassment in your education setting	2024	20%	30%	11%	28%
	2025	15%	31%	15%	39%
Bullying or harassment travelling to and/or from where you study	2024	9%	18%	11%	48%
	2025	8%	20%	13%	59%
Discrimination in your education setting	2024	14%	21%	12%	39%
	2025	11%	22%	13%	54%
Discrimination travelling to and from where you study	2024	7%	11%	8%	57%
	2025	6%	15%	10%	69%

In the last 12 months in work, have you personally experienced:

	Year	Frequently	Sometimes	Once	Never
Bullying or harassment where you work	2024	2%	7%	8%	80%
	2025	4%	10%	9%	77%
Bullying or harassment travelling to and/or from where you work	2024	1%	6%	7%	84%
	2025	1%	6%	7%	86%
Discrimination where you work	2024	3%	8%	7%	77%
	2025	3%	8%	6%	83%
Discrimination travelling to and from where you work	2024	1%	2%	3%	92%
	2025	1%	2%	33%	94%

In the last 12 months in work, have you seen/witnessed:

	Year	Frequently	Sometimes	Once	Never
Bullying or harassment where you work	2024	3%	13%	8%	71%
	2025	4%	16%	8%	72%
Bullying or harassment travelling to and/or from where you work	2024	1%	10%	5%	78%
	2025	2%	10%	6%	82%
Discrimination where you work	2024	2%	12%	6%	74%
	2025	3%	14%	7%	76%
Discrimination travelling to and from where you work	2024	1%	8%	2%	83%
	2025	2%	9%	4%	85%

In education

- Young people with additional needs were three times more likely to have frequently experienced harassment in their educational setting compared to those without additional needs (15% vs 5%). They were also much more likely to have witnessed frequent harassment and bullying at school (24% vs 13%)

- Females were more likely than males to have witnessed bullying and harassment in their educational setting on a frequent basis (17% vs 12%). They were also more likely to have "sometimes" witnessed discrimination at school than males (24% vs 18%)

- Black, African, Black British, or Caribbean young people were more likely to have experienced discrimination in their educational setting "sometimes" compared to Asian or Asian British respondents (20% vs 12%). They were also more likely to have experienced harassment while travelling to or from school (14% vs 10%)

- Young people eligible for free school meals were more likely to have personally experienced harassment in their educational setting (11% vs 7%) compared to those not eligible. They were also more likely to have witnessed harassment while travelling to or from school on a frequent basis (10% vs 6%).
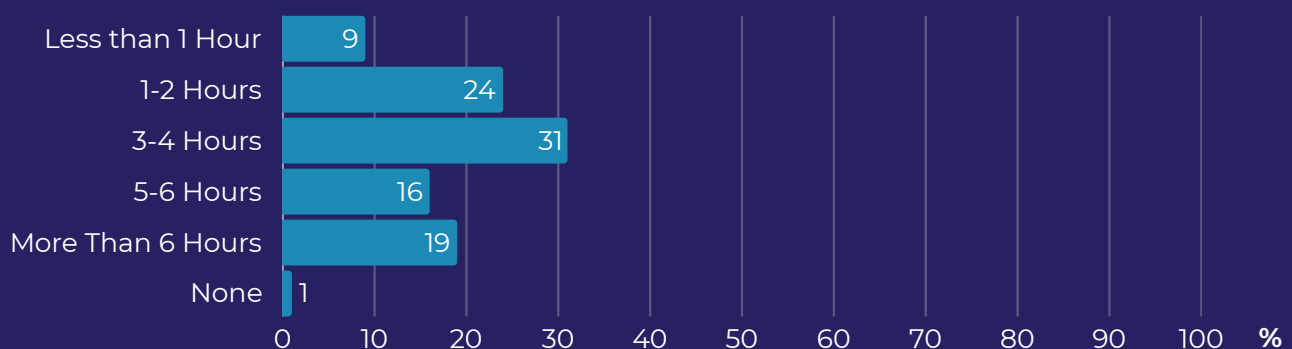
In work

- Female respondents were more likely to have witnessed workplace harassment compared to males (19% vs 8%), and more likely to have witnessed discrimination (16% vs 10%).

- Ethnicity: Asian or Asian British young people reported the highest rates of personally experiencing workplace bullying or harassment at 15%. They were also more likely to have experienced discrimination at work at least once.

- Free school meals: Young people eligible for free school meals were more likely to have "sometimes" experienced workplace harassment or bullying (14% vs 9%) compared to those not eligible for free school meals.

Social Media

The digital world is an inseparable part of young people's lives, but it is a double-edged sword. Two-thirds of young people spend at least three hours online each day, with over half spending that time on social media. While social media is valued for staying connected to family and friends, a third of young people report that it has a negative impact on their mental health. Almost two-thirds want stronger regulation to protect users

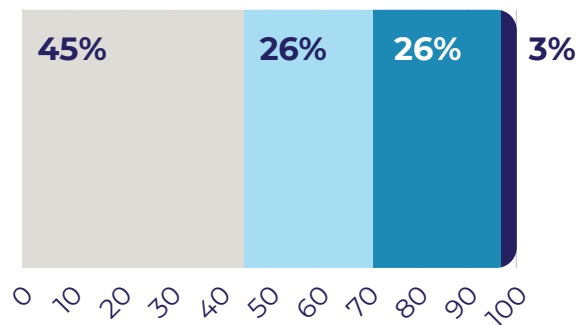### On average, how many hours per day do you spend online?

(for your personal use, i.e. not for school or work)

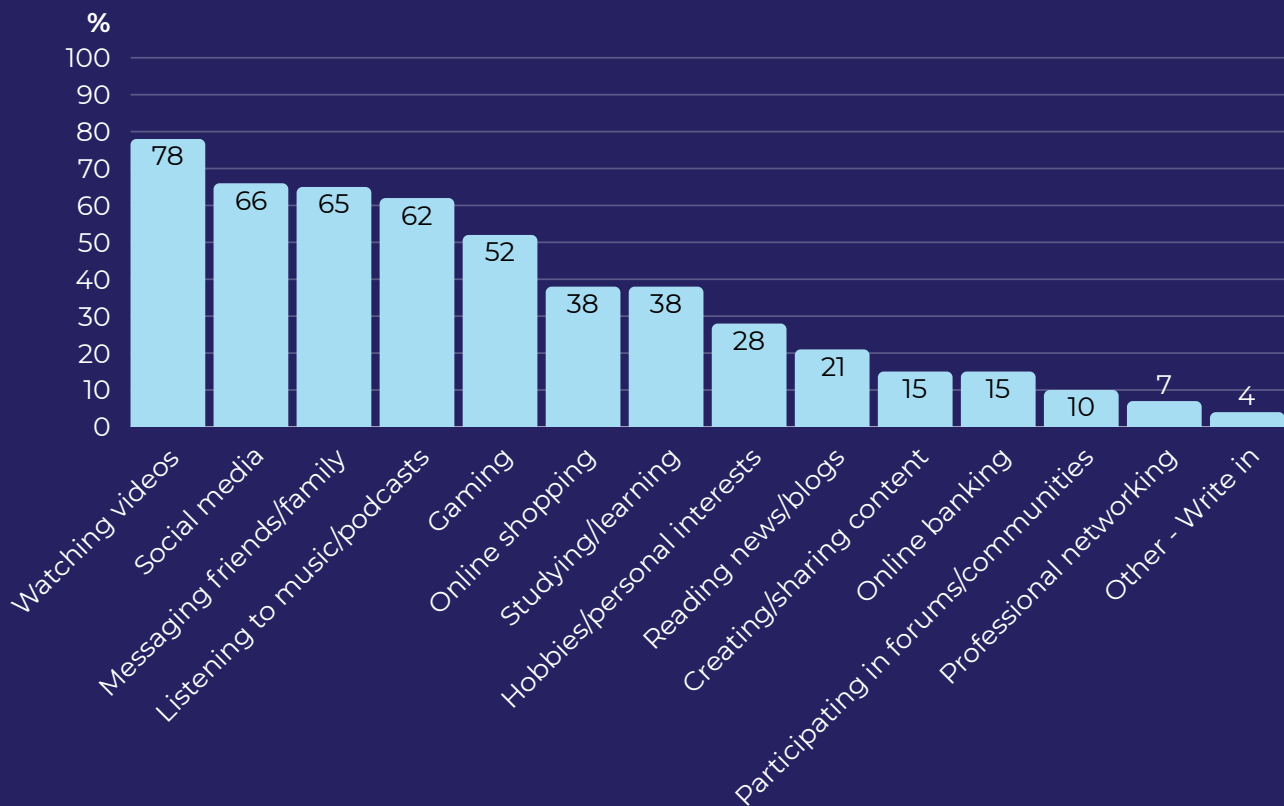| Category	%
Less than 1 Hour	9
1-2 Hours	24
3-4 Hours	31
5-6 Hours	16
More Than 6 Hours	19
None	1

In the last 12 months, how has the amount of time you spend online or on social media changed?

- I spend the same amount of time as before
- I spend less time online or on social media
- I spend more time online or on social media
- I don't use social media or spend time online

| 45% | 26% | 26% | 3% |

0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100

What do you primarily spend your time doing online?

%

Activity	%
Watching videos	78
Social media	66
Messaging friends/family	65
Listening to music/podcasts	62
Gaming	52
Online shopping	38
Studying/learning	38
Hobbies/personal interests	28
Reading news/blogs	21
Creating/sharing content	15
Online banking	15
Participating in forums/communities	10
Professional networking	7
Other - Write in	4

The most popular uses of time online included:

1. Watching video content (**78%**)

2. Scrolling on social media (**66%**)

3. Using messaging apps to talk to family and friends (**65%**)

Other activities young people engaged in online included:

- Coding
- Completing homework
- Drawing
- Calling friends
- Researching
- Creative writing.

How much **do you agree** with these statements?

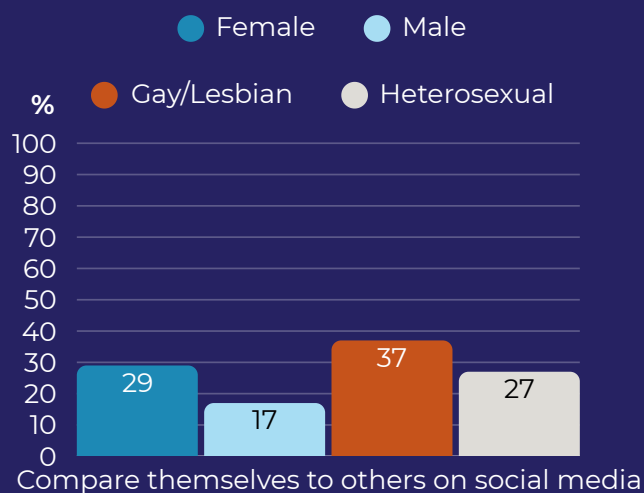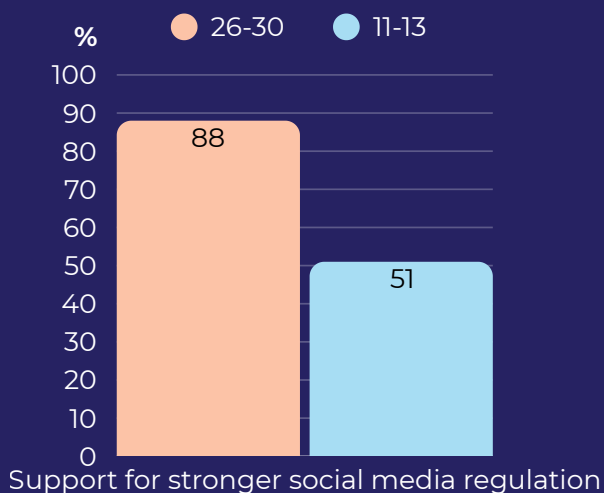| Statement	Strongly Disagree or Disagree	Neutral	Strongly Agree or Agree
Social media helps me stay connected with friends and family	8%	18%	74%
Social media has a negative impact on my mental health	29%	41%	30%
I believe social media platforms should be more regulated to protect users, especially younger people	9%	28%	63%
I feel pressured to engage on social media	55%	26%	19%
I often compare my life to others on social media, which can make me feel dissatisfied	42%	26%	32%
I have a supportive network on social media	16%	46%	38%

While young people largely feel that social media helps them stay connected with friends and family, there's a strong desire for more protection and a growing awareness of its negative impact on mental health. The majority of young people agreed or strongly agreed that social media helps them stay connected, and **63%** believe social media platforms should be more regulated.

Meanwhile, **30%** believe it has a negative impact on their mental health, while **41%** remain neutral on this topic.

Social media & wellbeing

- Females are more likely to agree that social media has a negative effect on their mental health. This is partly due to social comparison, as females were more likely to compare their lives to others on social media than males (**29% vs 17%**).
- Support for stronger social media regulation increases significantly with age. Just over half of **11-13 year olds (51%)** want stronger regulations, but this sentiment jumps to a powerful **88% among 26-30** year olds.
- Gay or Lesbian young people are more likely than their heterosexual peers to agree that social media has negatively impacted their mental health (**36% vs 26%**). They are also more likely to engage in social comparison online (**37% vs 27%**).
- Young people with additional needs were more likely to want tighter social media regulations (**31% vs 26%**) compared to those without.

%

Bar chart (top left):
Legend: 26-30, 11-13
- 88
- 51

Support for stronger social media regulation

%

Bar chart (top right):
Legend: Female, Male, Gay/Lesbian, Heterosexual
- Female: 29
- Male: 17
- Gay/Lesbian: 37
- Heterosexual: 27

Compare themselves to others on social media

How online habits differ

- Time online for 11–13 year olds increased over the last year, with **32%** reporting more time spent online. In contrast, the biggest reduction in online time came from 20–22 year olds, with **34%** reporting they spent less time online.

- Young people eligible for free school meals are more likely to spend more than 6 hours online for personal use (**25%**) compared to those not eligible (**16%**)

%

Bar chart:
Legend: 20-22, 11-13
- More Time Online: 32
- Less Time Online: 34
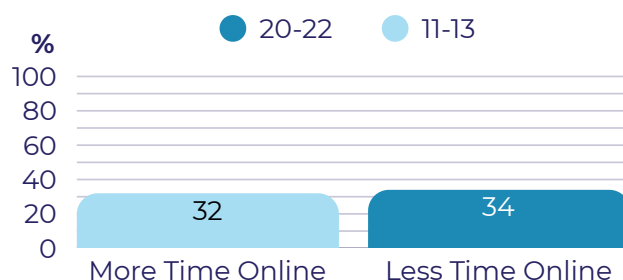
Conclusion

Wellbeing in 2025 is steady but fragile. Most young people sit in the middle ranges for satisfaction and safety, but anxiety is widespread, and disruption to education and work is common. Illness and stress are keeping young people out of classrooms and workplaces, and poor behaviour and harassment compound the impact. Social media offers connection but fuels comparison and anxiety.

Support is improving, particularly for those in education and work, but those furthest from opportunity remain locked out. Assessments in schools, disruption from illness, stress and behaviour, and workload in workplaces all show how fragile wellbeing translates into real absence and interruption.

Sharp divides persist: those furthest from education and work are least supported, least satisfied and most anxious. Unless support is made consistent, inclusive and proactive, wellbeing will continue to mirror inequalities, holding back education outcomes, limiting career progression, and keeping too many young people in the "meh" middle ground.

Preparing for the World of Work

Introduction

Education provides the foundation for young people's futures, shaping not only qualifications, but their confidence, aspirations and access to opportunity. In 2025, young people are more positive about their learning environments than last year. Many feel supported when starting school or college, most agree they can access quality education locally, and more say they can turn to teachers as a trusted source of guidance.

But this stronger foundation does not extend to preparation for work. Fewer are receiving careers advice, fewer are taking part in employer visits, and fewer are accessing work experience placements. At the same time, extracurricular activities, volunteering and social action, once important routes to build confidence and employability, are also in decline. Not only are fewer young people taking part, but those who do are less likely to see the benefits . The result is a generation leaving education with stronger connections in and to their learning environments but weaker exposure to employers and activities that grow skills, build connections, promote cohesion and spark joy.

Key Findings

- **Education foundations are improving.** Two-thirds (67%) feel supported starting school or college, and most (62%) say they can access good-quality education locally. Teachers are more trusted than before: 28% now rate them as "very useful" for career advice (up from 22% in 2024).

- **Careers education is patchy and declining.** Only 32% received face-to-face careers advice this year (down from 40% in 2024), and just 23% had an employer visit. Apprenticeships, T Levels and vocational routes are still rarely discussed.

- **Work experience is valued but scarce.** Just 26% of young people in education had a placement in the past year, even though 74% say it helps them understand work. Preparation and follow-up remain inconsistent, and access gaps persist by background.

- **Opportunities are stronger in college and sixth form.** Nearly half (47%) of post-16 students had a work placement, compared with 19% of those in school. More college and sixth form students feel prepared for the future (51% vs 43%) and are more likely to access extracurriculars and volunteering.

- **Spaces and places to grow skills are also less utilised.** A third (33%) of young people did no extracurricular, volunteering or social action in the past year. Just 30% volunteered, and 55% joined extracurriculars. Those who did were less likely than in previous years to say these opportunities boosted their confidence or employability.

- **Work alongside study is limited.** Just 14% of young people have a part-time job; most (51%) are not working, though one in five are actively looking for opportunities.
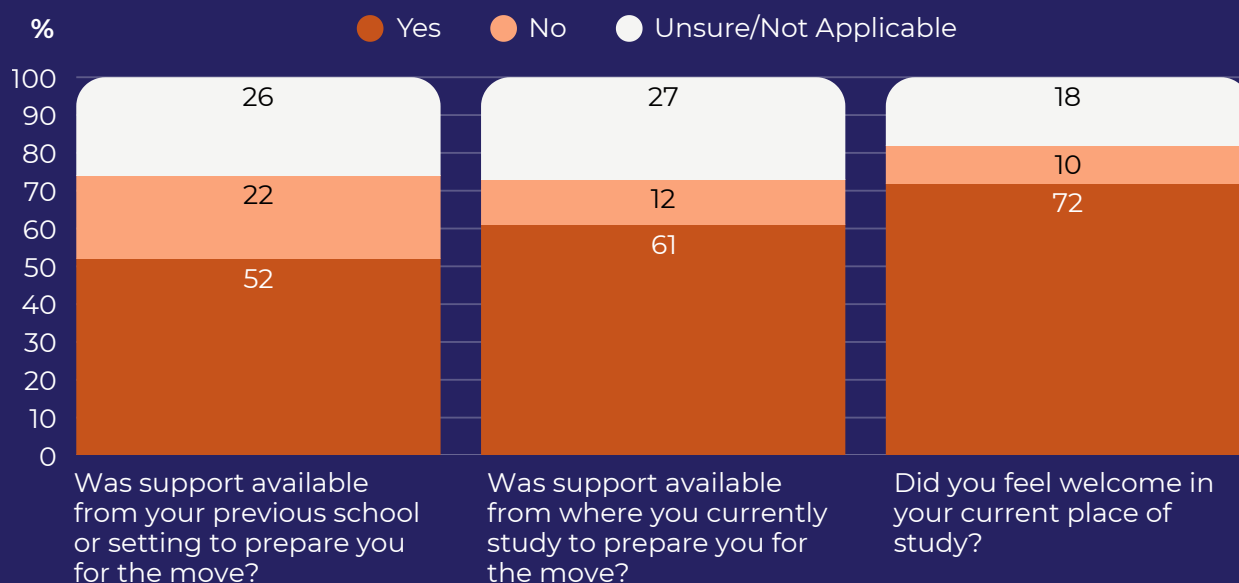
Education and Career Preparation

Experiences of education

Young people are more positive about their educational environments. Many describe smoother transitions into school or college and say they feel supported by staff. A majority believe they can access good quality provision locally, and more young people are turning to teachers for guidance, making them the most trusted source of support after parents.

- **67%** feel supported starting school or college.
- **62%** say they can access good quality education locally.
- **58%** feel their views on learning environments are listened to (up from **48% in 2024**).
- **28%** rate teachers as "very useful" for careers advice (up from 22% last year).
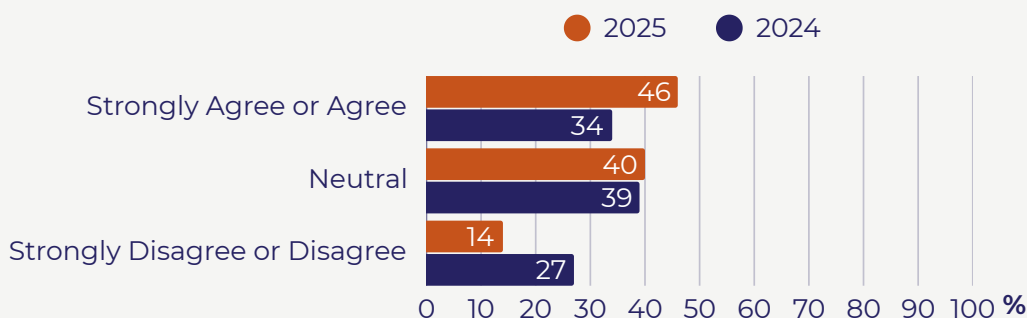
Thinking about when you moved to where you currently study, please answer the following questions:

Legend: ● Yes ● No ○ Unsure/Not Applicable

Was support available from your previous school or setting to prepare you for the move?
- Yes: 52
- No: 22
- Unsure/Not Applicable: 26

Was support available from where you currently study to prepare you for the move?
- Yes: 61
- No: 12
- Unsure/Not Applicable: 27

Did you feel welcome in your current place of study?
- Yes: 72
- No: 10
- Unsure/Not Applicable: 18

Overall, most young people feel they received support when transitioning to a new place of study. Support was slightly more available from their new school or college (**61%**) than from their previous one (**52%**). A large majority of respondents (**72%**) felt welcome in their new educational environment.

To what extent do you agree with this statement:

"Where I study has supported me sufficiently to develop the skills I need for the future"

Legend: ● 2025 ● 2024

	2025	2024
Strongly Agree or Agree	46	34
Neutral	40	39
Strongly Disagree or Disagree	14	27

Almost half of young people (**46%**) feel that their place of study has sufficiently prepared them with the skills needed for the future, an increase of 12 ppts from 2024.

Who feels least supported?

- Only **59%** of students eligible for free school meals feel supported starting school or college (vs 67% overall).
- Students with additional needs are less likely to feel listened to (**48% vs 58%**)
- Young people with additional needs were more likely to disagree that their place of study supported them sufficiently compared to those without additional needs (**19% vs 12%**).

Feel their place of study sufficiently prepared them

34% — 2024

12 ppt

46% — 2025

● 2025   ● 2024

13 ppt

The number of young people who disagree has decreased to **14%**, a decline of 13 ppts.

Don't feel their place of study sufficiently prepared them

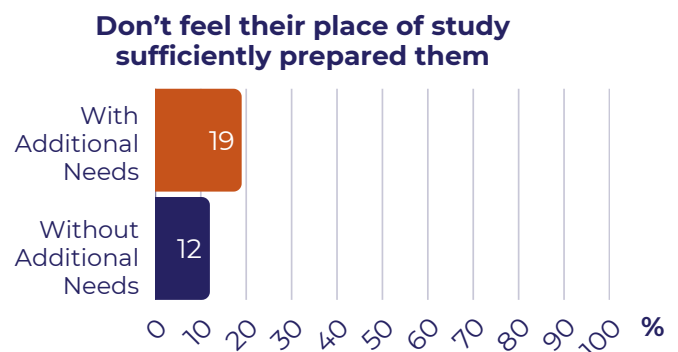|	
With Additional Needs	19
Without Additional Needs	12

0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100 **%**

" I go to a specialist college for the blind. Here we receive support about careers in career development lessons, we also get a careers interview to see what career we want to go into. There is also lots of support in helping us prepare for university and the staff are all very knowledgeable. There are also opportunities to carry out work experience both on campus and in town."

"I think more should be done in the actual curriculum in terms of embedding teaching these skills into it. I feel like teachers are often so rushed to get everything on the curriculum done so that students pass their exams that they don't have the time or resources to focus on other things like job related skills and other adult living skills."

Careers Education

Careers education continues to decline. Schools and colleges remain heavily focused on exams and university, with less time or emphasis given to apprenticeships, vocational routes or employer engagement.

- Only **32%** received face-to-face careers advice (down from 40% in 2024).

- Just **30%** had careers lessons (down from 43%).

- Only **23%** had an employer visit (down from 40%).

- Apprenticeships were raised with just **18%** of students.

Young people in college or sixth form were more likely to have participated in a number of career-related activities compared to those in school.

The largest differences were for:

- **CV workshops**: 24% of college/sixth form students versus 8% of school students.

- **Careers fairs**: 35% of college/sixth form students versus 20% of school students.

- **Face-to-face careers advice**: 41% of college/sixth form students versus 27% of school students.

In contrast, students in school were more likely to have received careers lessons and learned about careers in curriculum lessons than their college/sixth form counterparts.

Who gets the **least advice**?

- Only **45%** of students eligible for free school meals had university discussed with them (vs 60% not eligible for free school meals).

- Students with additional needs are significantly less likely to have higher education routes raised.

- Young people eligible for free school meals were less likely to have received careers lessons (**26% vs 32%** of those not eligible), careers support (**20% vs 26%**), and attended careers fairs (**23% vs 29%**).

- Young people with additional needs were more likely to report participating in career-related activities than those without, with the largest differences seen for:
  - Mock interview sessions (18% vs 11%, a 7 ppt difference)
  - CV workshops (19% vs 13%, a 6 ppt difference)

- Young women were:
  - **11 ppts more** likely to have attended careers fairs (31% vs 20%)
  - **9 ppts more** likely to have access to online information (25% vs 16%)
  - **7 ppts more** likely to have careers in curriculum lessons (22% vs 15%)

> "We know nothing about how to run a household. We aren't taught about how taxes work or how to fix common issues like dead car batteries. Moreover, we don't receive proper sex-ed. (Overall, PSHE is underwhelming)."

Free School Meals / Non-Free School Meals bar chart:
Discussed Uni 45 / 60; Careers Lessons 26 / 32; Careers Support 20 / 26; Careers Fairs 23 / 29

Women / Men bar chart:
Careers Fairs 31 / 20; Online Information 25 / 16; Careers Lessons 22 / 15
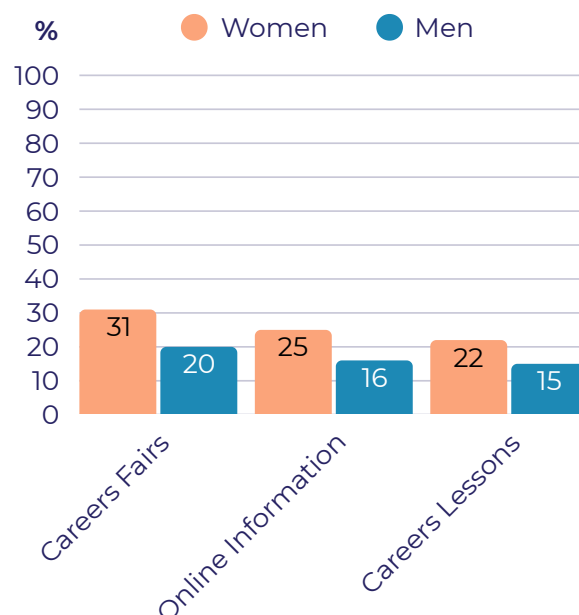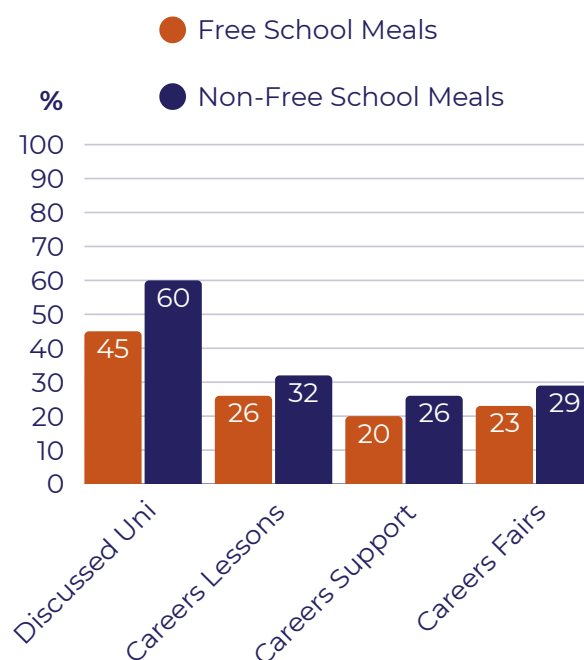
The most frequently discussed topics in the last 12 months were:

1. GCSEs (**51% discussed 5 or more times**)
2. A Levels (**29% discussed 5 or more times**)
3. Getting a Job (**29% discussed 5 or more times**)

Data for this section is shown in appendix 2

Conversely, topics that were "**never**" discussed for the vast majority of young people included:

1. NVQs (**86%**)
2. A Levels (**84%**)

This highlights a strong emphasis on traditional academic routes and general employment, while vocational qualifications and external support services are largely ignored.

What's discussed with different groups?

Female respondents were more likely than males to have discussed several key options "five times or more".
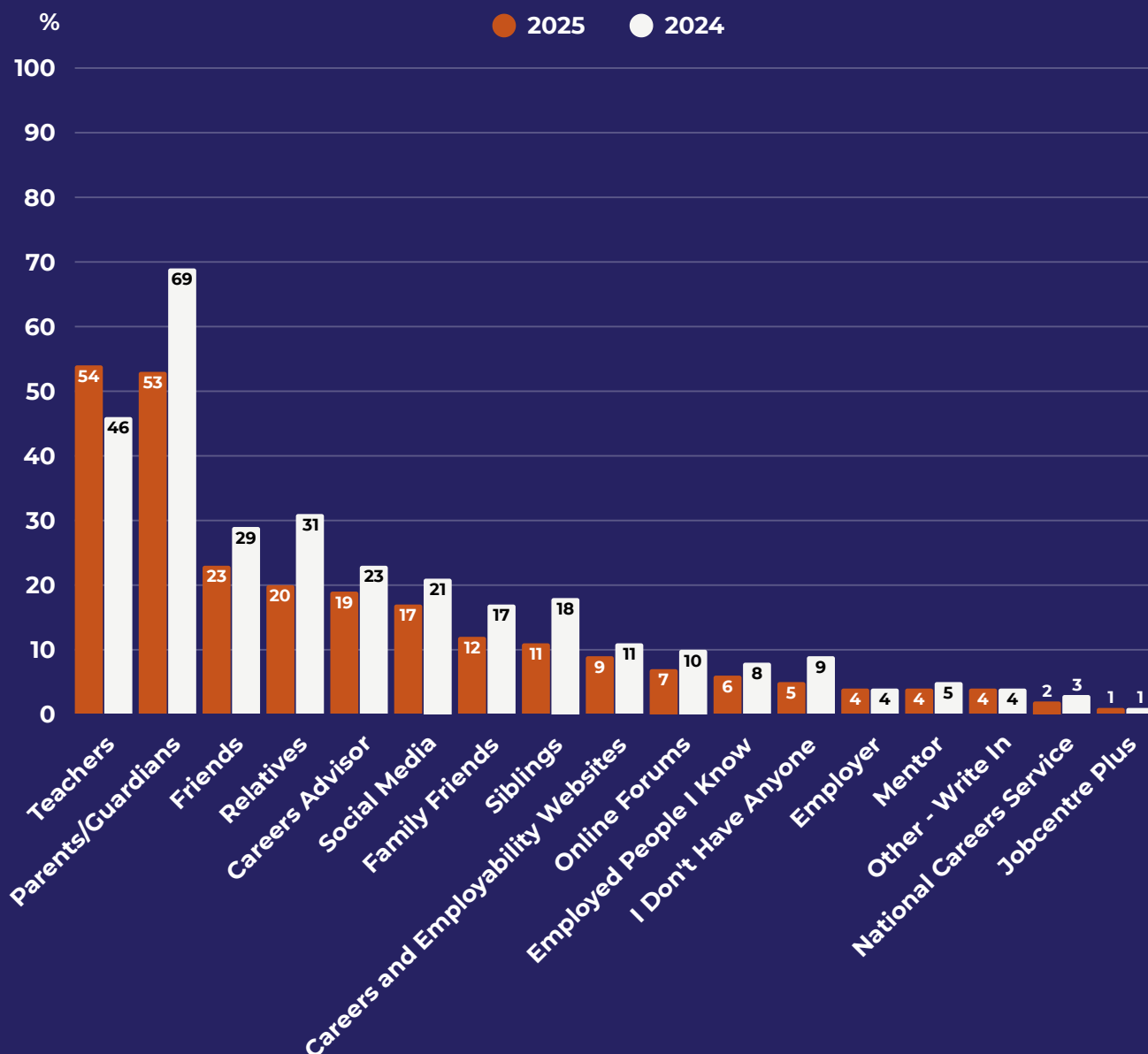
The largest differences were for
- GCSEs (**54% of females vs 44% of males**).
- A Levels (**32% vs 24%**).
- University (**29% vs 22%**).
- College (**29% vs 23%**).

Young people eligible for free school meals were more likely to have discussed College "five times or more" (**32% vs 25%** of those not eligible).

However, they were less likely to have discussed University (**22% vs 30%**) and A Levels (**22% vs 32%**) to the same extent.

Sources of Support

In the last 12 months, who has provided you with careers support?

%

● 2025   ○ 2024

Source	2025	2024
Teachers	54	46
Parents/Guardians	53	69
Friends	23	29
Relatives	20	31
Careers Advisor	19	23
Social Media	17	21
Family Friends	12	17
Siblings	11	18
Careers and Employability Websites	9	11
Online Forums	7	10
Employed People I Know	6	8
I Don't Have Anyone	5	9
Employer	4	4
Mentor	4	5
Other - Write In	4	4
National Careers Service	2	3
Jobcentre Plus	1	1

Overall, young people are most likely to seek career support from teachers (**54%**), parents/guardians (**53%**), and friends (**23%**).

Compared to last year, reliance on parents/guardians and other family members has declined, while reliance on teachers has increased.

50%

When scoring the usefulness of these sources, young people rated parents/guardians most highly, with **50%** finding them "**Extremely Useful or Very Useful**".

28%

Teachers followed at **28%**.

(*see appendix 2 for for full data set*)

Who **relies on what**?

- Female respondents were more likely than males to seek career support from teachers (58% vs 50%) and social media (21% vs 13%).

- Black, African, Black British, or Caribbean young people were most likely to report that their parents/guardians were "very useful" or "extremely useful" (46%). They were also most likely to find careers advisors (30%) and youth workers (17%) "very useful" or "extremely useful".

- Young people eligible for free school meals were less likely to find their parents/guardians "very useful" or "extremely useful" (38% vs 45% of those not eligible).

- Young people with additional needs were more likely to report that social media and parents/guardians were "not useful at all" or "slightly useful" compared to their peers.

Who do you think is **responsible for supporting you to develop employability skills?**
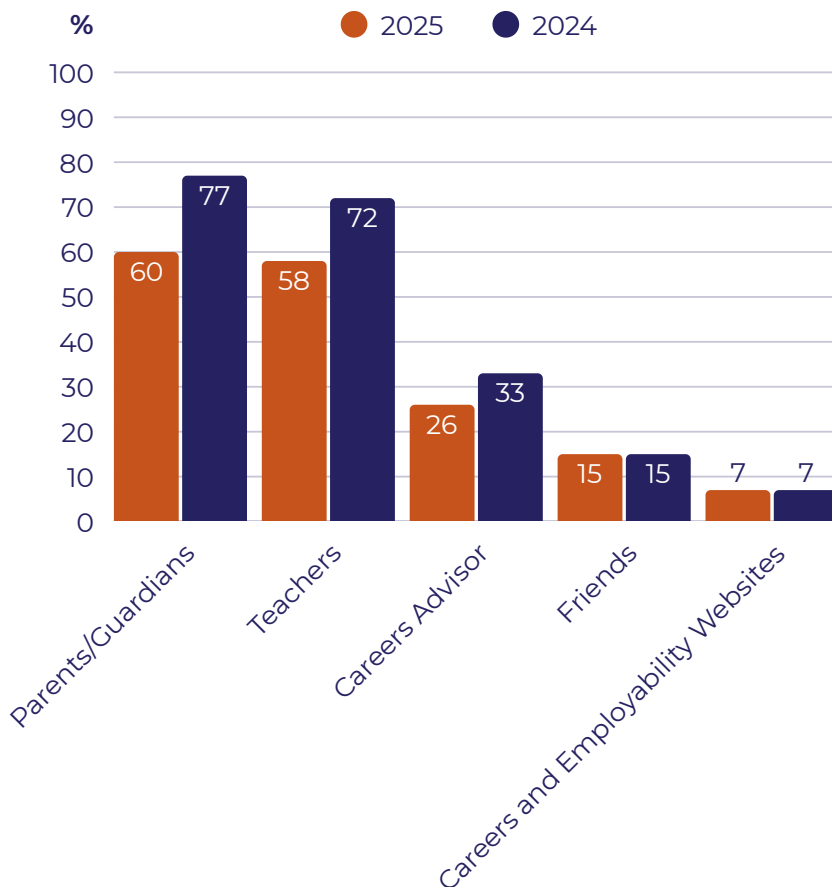
Young people continue to see parents/guardians (60%), teachers (58%), and careers advisors (26%) as the primary individuals responsible for supporting the development of employability skills.

Compared to last year, there's been a significant decline in the number of young people who feel parents/guardians (down 17 ppts) and teachers (down 14 ppts) should be responsible.

See appendix 2 for full data set

> **My school doesn't really help. I research careers stuff and I ask my mum or my friends about it.**

Work Experience

Work experience is widely valued but hard to access. Where placements take place, most young people say they are high quality - but preparation before, and follow-up afterwards, remain inconsistent.

- **26%** undertook work experience in the past year, though **74%** say it helps them understand work.

- Nearly half of college and sixth form students (**47%**) had placements compared with just **19%** of school students.

40%   **30%**
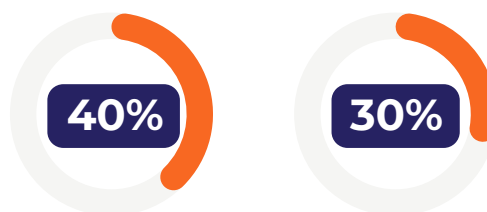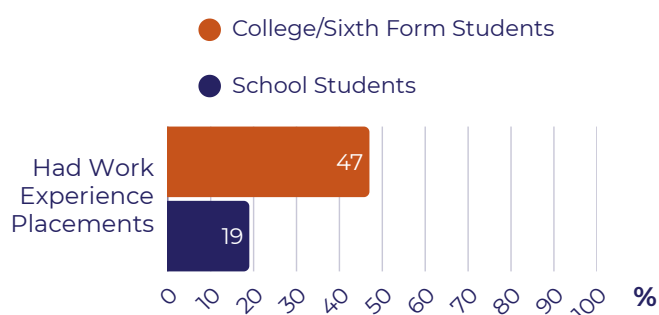
- Only **40%** received preparation before placements, and just **30%** had structured follow-up afterwards.

- Students eligible for free school meals were more likely to access placements, but less likely to find them relevant.

- Black, African, Black British or Caribbean students were least likely to have had work experience (**24%**).

Most young people agree that work experience is beneficial, particularly for understanding what it feels like to be at work (74%) and for building experience to help them get a job (73%). However, a significant gap exists between this perception and actual participation. 62% did not undertake a work experience placement in the last 12 months.

To what extent do you agree with this statement: "Work experience helps you to..."

Statement	Year	Strongly Disagree or Disagree	Neutral	Strongly Agree or Agree
Build useful skills	2024	6%	20%	74%
	2025	7%	21%	72%
Build networks and contacts	2024	9%	28%	63%
	2025	9%	25%	66%
Understand what it feels like to be at work	2024	8%	20%	73%
	2025	7%	19%	74%

Statement	Year	Strongly Disagree or Disagree	Neutral	Strongly Agree or Agree
Build experience that can help you get a job	2024	6%	23%	71%
	2025	7%	20%	73%
Make decisions and choices about your future	2024	7%	26%	67%
	2025	6%	23%	71%

Have you been offered work experience in the last 12 months?

Overall   In school   In college or sixth form

	No	Yes	Unsure	Other - Write In
Overall	59	30	9	2
In school	71	19	8	2
In college or sixth form	41	47	10	2
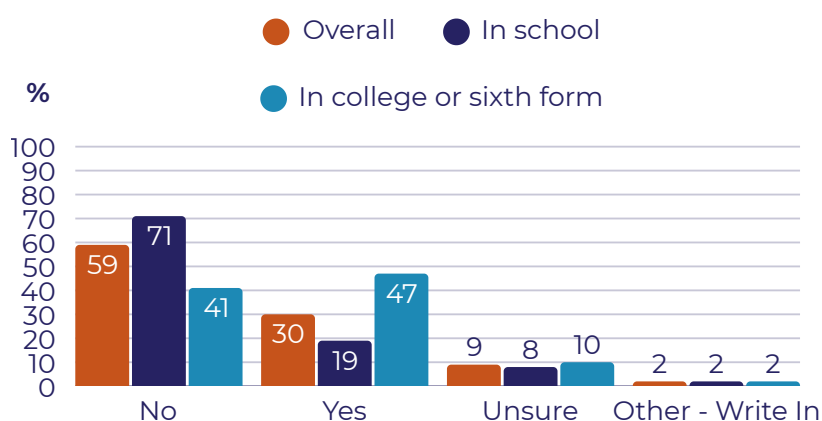
30% of young people were offered work experience in the last 12 months, only a quarter of young people (26%) reported undertaking a placement in the last 12 months. Students in college or sixth form were significantly more likely to have been offered and to have undertaken work experience than those in school (**46% vs 19%**).

Have you undertaken work experience in the last 12 months?

Overall   In school   In college or sixth form

	No	Yes	Unsure	Other - Write In
Overall	62	26	10	2
In school	71	16	10	3
In college or sixth form	46	42	10	2
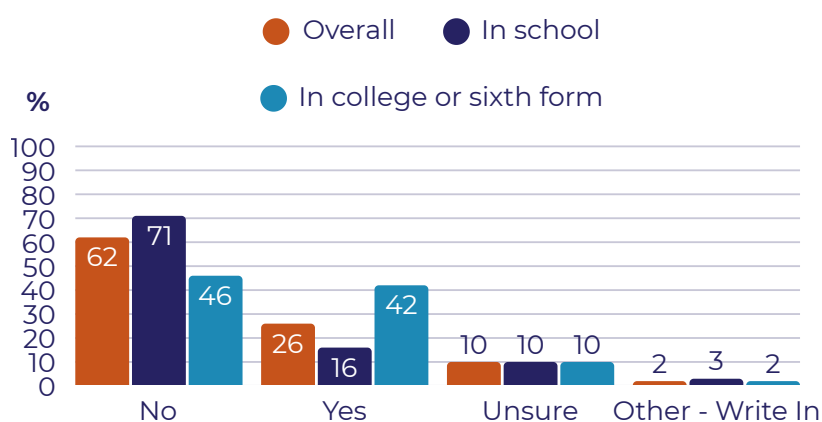
"Nowhere local replied to me or could facilitate my school–mandated work experience in Y10, and I didn't want a random school–arranged placement, so my dad arranged it as his place of work. I then did work experience the following summer in the constituency office of my local MP (who now is no longer in office, so that is not an option any more, as the new one is a parachute candidate who doesn't informally engage with constituents)."

Who misses out?

- Just **24%** of Black, African, Black British or Caribbean students had work experience (vs **26%** overall).

- Young people eligible for free school meals were slightly more likely to have been offered (**32% vs 29%**) and to have undertaken (**29% vs 25%**) work experience than those not eligible for free school meals, but less likely to find them relevant.

- Female respondents were more likely than male respondents to have been offered (**34% vs 25%**) and to have undertaken (**29% vs 25%**) work experience in the last year.

- Young people with additional needs were more likely to have been offered (**35% vs 29%**) and to have undertaken (**36% vs 25%**) work experience compared to those without any additional needs.

Have you **undertaken work experience** in the last 12 months?

20+ 28%
1-5 42%
15-20 6%
10-15 7%
5-10 17%
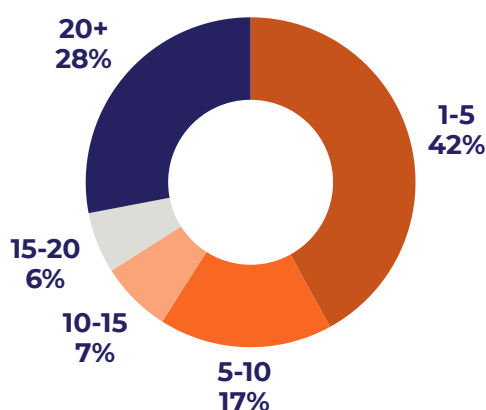
Most young people who had completed work experience reported doing so for 1–5 days (**42%**). However, a significant number of young people also completed placements of 20 days or more (**28%**).

- While both male and female respondents most often completed 1–5 days of work experience, female respondents were more likely to have completed 20 or more days than male respondents (**30% vs 23%**).

- Students in college and sixth form were more likely to have completed 20 or more days of work experience than students in school (**29% vs 20%**).

To what extent do you agree with this statement: "**Work experience helps you to...**"

Statement	Year	Yes	No	Unsure
Was the work experience in a job you are interested in?	2024	38%	39%	23%
	2025	60%	30%	10%
Was the work experience in a sector you are interested in?	2024	*N/A*	*N/A*	*N/A*
	2025	63%	27%	10%
Did anyone help you find your work experience placement?	2024	51%	24%	8%
	2025	66%	28%	6%

Most (**60%**) of respondents said their placement was in a job they were interested in, a notable increase from **38%** in 2024.
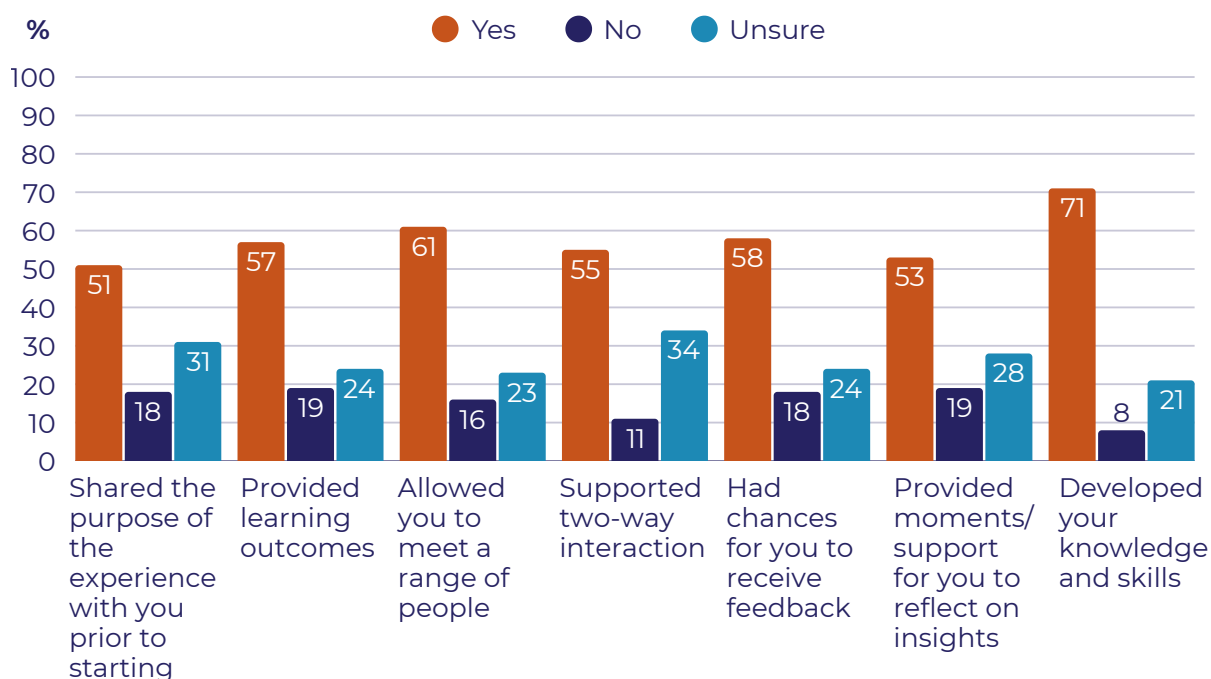
Similarly, **63%** said the experience was in a sector they were interested in. A majority of young people (**66%**) also reported receiving help to find their placement.

● 2024
● 2025

13 ppt

> "Work experience at a pharmacy near me was fairly easy to get. My relative has a contact with the pharmacist. The experience was eye–opening and helped me make more decisions about what type of work I enjoy."

- Female respondents were more likely to report that their work experience was in a sector they were interested in (**66% vs 56%**). Conversely, male respondents were more likely to have received help finding their placement (**69% vs 64%**).

- Young people in college or sixth form were more likely than those in school to have had a work experience placement in a job (**62% vs 53%**) and a sector (**68% vs 48%**) they were interested in. However, students in school were slightly more likely to have received help finding their placement (**66% vs 65%**).

- Young people eligible for free school meals were less likely to report that their work experience was in a sector they were interested in (**58% vs 66%**). They were, however, slightly more likely to report that they received help to find it (**67% vs 65%**).

Please indicate whether your work experience:

%	Yes	No	Unsure
Shared the purpose of the experience with you prior to starting	51	18	31
Provided learning outcomes	57	19	24
Allowed you to meet a range of people	61	16	23
Supported two-way interaction	55	11	34
Had chances for you to receive feedback	58	18	24
Provided moments/ support for you to reflect on insights	53	19	28
Developed your knowledge and skills	71	8	21

A majority of young people who completed a work experience placement reported that it developed their knowledge and skills (**71%**) and allowed them to meet a range of people across the organisation (**61%**). However, they were most likely to say they were not provided with learning outcomes or support to reflect on insights (**19% each**)

Work experience quality by group

Female respondents were more likely than males to report a positive experience across all statements. The biggest differences were in:

- Developing knowledge and skills (**74% of females said yes vs 66% of males**), and supported two-way interaction (**58% of females said yes vs 50% of males**).

- Young people with additional needs were more likely to report having a positive experience. The largest differences were for having opportunities to receive feedback (**68% said yes vs 57% of those without additional needs**) and being provided with learning outcomes (**64% said yes vs 56% of those without additional needs**).

- Young people in college or sixth form were more likely to report a positive experience than those in school. The most notable differences were in whether the purpose of the experience was shared with them beforehand (**57% of college/sixth form students said yes vs 40% of school students**) and whether the experience developed their knowledge and skills (**77% vs 60%**).

- Young people eligible for free school meals were more likely to say their work experience did not develop their knowledge and skills compared to those not eligible (**11% vs 7%**)

**How would you rate the following aspects of your work experience placement?**

	Year	Very Poor or Poor	Average	Excellent or Good
Overall	2024	8%	25%	67%
	2025	4%	20%	76%
Staff support	2025	7%	17%	76%
Activities engaged in	2025	9%	20%	71%

Young people generally rate the overall quality of their work experience highly, with **76%** saying it was "excellent" or "good".

The quality of staff support also received high marks, with **76%** of young people rating it positively. However, they were less likely to positively rate the activities they engaged in, with only **71%** calling them "excellent" or "good".

Despite these positive ratings, a majority of young people felt unprepared for their placement, with **52%** feeling "neutral" and only **29%** feeling "very prepared" or "prepared"

"*I was lucky enough to be able to shadow someone at the hospital, but this was because my dad used to work in the department so they knew him and he could ask them if I could. It was good and I really appreciated the opportunity to see what the role does and talk to people who have the role about their experience with it and what it's like day to day.*"
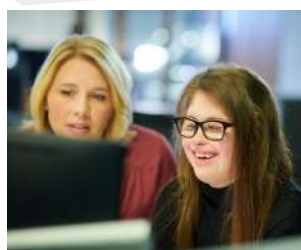
"*Very enjoyable, learnt a lot, no application process – used contacts I already had.*"

How prepared did you feel for your work experience placement?

Very Unprepared or Unprepared
19%

Neutral
52%

Very Prepared or Prepared
29%
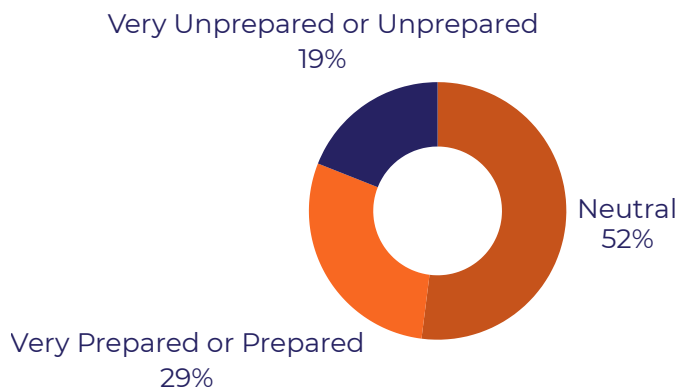
Is there anything that would have made you feel more prepared for work experience?

Young people who had undertaken work experience stated that they wanted timely information, in advance of the placement starting, regarding where they would be situated, the tasks they would be given and the structure of the work day. In addition, some respondents wanted more information in regards to the expectations the provider has and what questions students should be asking them to get the most out of their placement.

One participant recommended initial shadowing before being set tasks, whilst another asked for more time to adjust to the environment and providers having resources in place to support the work experience students' wellbeing.

> "My college could have provided me more info on the tasks being undertaken by myself with more time, not 1 day before the placement was undertaken."

> "More about expectations on you and the provider. More about what questions might be good to ask. More about how to find work experience and apply for it/email to ask for it."

> "Allowing for a stretched work experience where we have a few days shadowing someone and the rest where it is actual work."

> "Walking me through what's going to happen throughout the work day and giving me time to acclimatise to a new environment, also having a quiet room to decompress."

> "Could have been told what to try to get out of it and how to communicate my needs (e.g. please can I do something more relevant/see what actually do everyday)"

Wider Opportunities

Extracurricular activities and social action

Engagement in extracurricular activities and social action has declined sharply in 2025. One-third of young people (**33%**) reported not participating in any extracurricular activities, a significant 20 ppt increase from 2024.

Participation in sports clubs fell from **53% to 31%**, and in music or arts clubs from **35% to 15%**. Similarly, participation in social action, such as volunteering or fundraising, dropped from **46%** in 2024 to **39%** in 2025.

The perceived benefits of these activities have also weakened since 2024.

The steepest declines were in seeing them as fun, confidence-building, or helping young people feel part of something. For social action, the perceived benefits of helping people, building skills, and being good for a CV all saw notable decreases.

Despite the decline in participation and perceived benefits, a majority of young people still consider these activities important. Nearly two-thirds (**65%**) believe that participating in extracurriculars is "very important" or "important". Similarly, **60%** rated social action as "very important" or "important".

In the last 12 months, which of these have you taken part in?
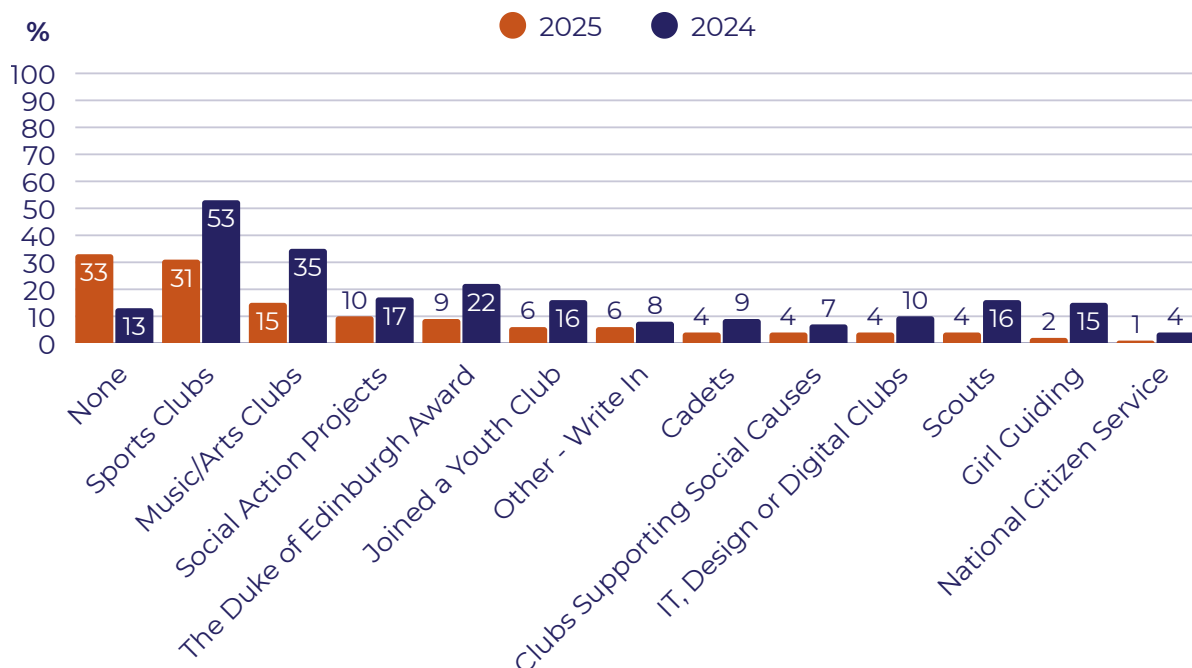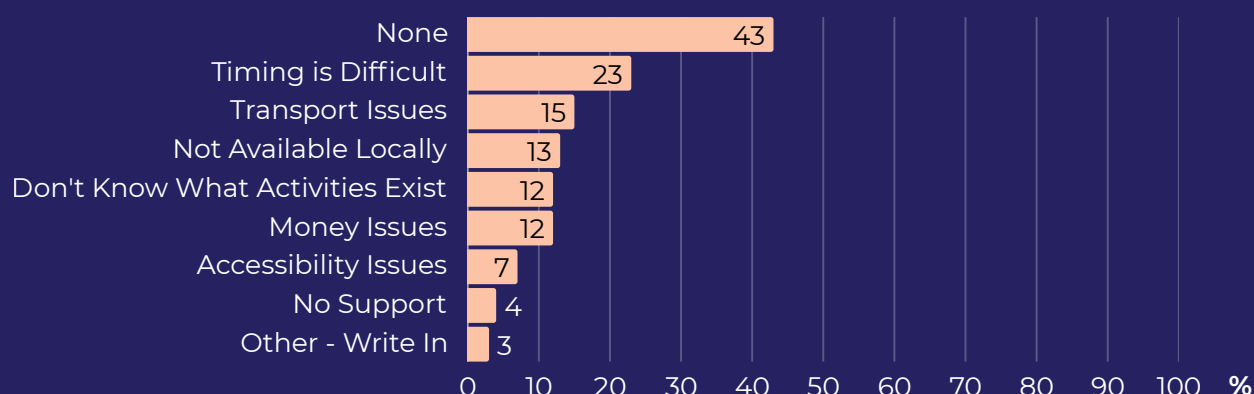

- Males were more likely to participate in sports clubs (**36% vs 29% of females**), while females were nearly twice as likely to participate in music or arts clubs (**18% vs 10% of males**) and three times as likely to be involved in social action projects (**13% vs 5% of males**).

- White young people were most likely to participate in extracurricular activities overall.
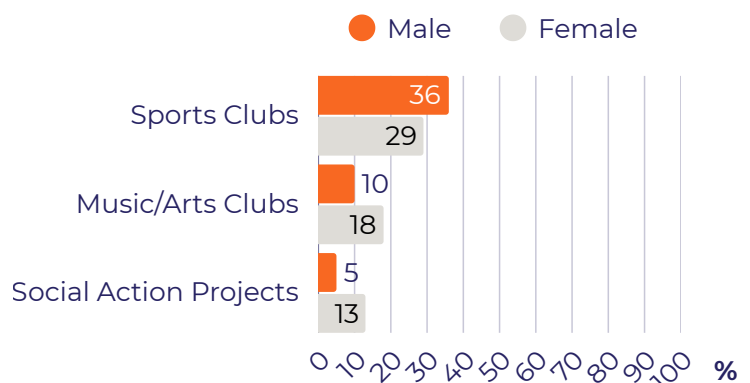
- Young people with additional needs were less likely to participate in sports clubs (**27% vs 33%** of those without additional needs) but were more likely to have joined a youth club (**9% vs 5%**).

- Young people eligible for free school meals were less likely to participate in sports clubs (**27% vs 34%** of those not eligible) and music or arts clubs (**12% vs 17%** of those not eligible).

- Young people in school were more than twice as likely as those in college or sixth form to participate in sports clubs (**47% vs 19%**). Over half of young people in an apprenticeship (**58%**) reported not taking part in any extracurricular activities.

Did you face any of the following barriers when accessing extra-curricular activities?

Barrier	%
None	43
Timing is Difficult	23
Transport Issues	15
Not Available Locally	13
Don't Know What Activities Exist	12
Money Issues	12
Accessibility Issues	7
No Support	4
Other - Write In	3

The most common barrier to participation in extracurricular activities was timing (**23%**). Other significant barriers included transport issues (**15%**) and a lack of available opportunities in the local area (**13%**).
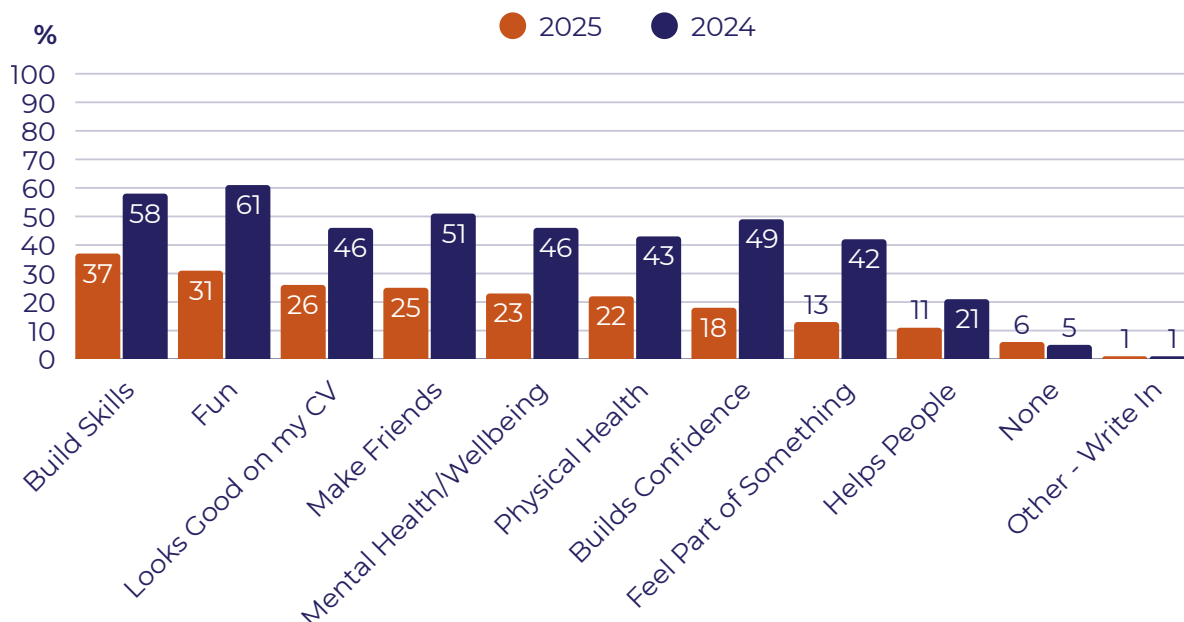
However, despite a considerable decline in participation, a large portion of young people (**43%**) reported facing no barriers, suggesting other factors may be at play.

Barriers by group

- Females were more likely than males to report that timing (**27% vs 17%**), transport issues (**16% vs 14%**), and a lack of local availability (**15% vs 10%**) were barriers.

- Young people eligible for free school meals were more likely to report barriers related to money or finance (**17% vs 10%**), transportation (**20% vs 13%**), and accessibility (**11% vs 5%**) compared to those not eligible.

- Young people with additional needs were significantly more likely to cite accessibility as a barrier (**16% vs 4%**). They also cited transportation issues more often than those without additional needs (**20% vs 14%**).

- The difficulty of timing was most reported by older young people, particularly those aged 26-30 (**34%**). Younger people aged 11-13 were the most likely not to face any barriers (**55%**) and were least likely to report financial issues as a problem (**7%**). Young people in college or sixth form were more than twice as likely as those in school to cite accessibility as a barrier (**12% vs 5%**)

What are the **biggest benefits** to undertaking extra-curricular activities?

Legend: 2025, 2024

Bar chart values (%):
- Build Skills: 37 (2025), 58 (2024)
- Fun: 31 (2025), 61 (2024)
- Looks Good on my CV: 26 (2025), 46 (2024)
- Make Friends: 25 (2025), 51 (2024)
- Mental Health/Wellbeing: 23 (2025), 46 (2024)
- Physical Health: 22 (2025), 43 (2024)
- Builds Confidence: 18 (2025), 49 (2024)
- Feel Part of Something: 13 (2025), 42 (2024)
- Helps People: 11 (2025), 21 (2024)
- None: 6 (2025), 5 (2024)
- Other - Write In: 1 (2025), 1 (2024)

Young people in 2025 were less likely to report benefits from extracurricular activities compared to the previous year.

2025 **2024**

↓ **30 ppt**

1. The perceived benefits related to fun, which fell from **61% to 31%.**

2025 **2024**

↓ **31 ppt**

2. Building confidence, which fell from **49% to 18%.**

2025 **2024**

↓ **31 ppt**

**3.** Feeling part of something, which fell from **42% to 13%.**
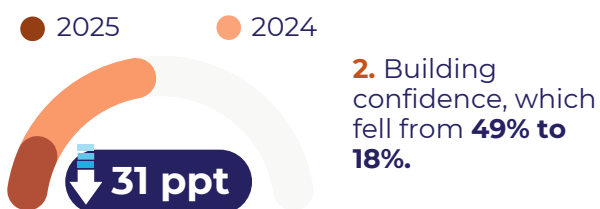
Overall, young people in 2025 reported a much weaker sense of personal, social, and wellbeing benefits from extra-curricular activities than in 2024.

Despite these trends, the top three benefits cited were:

1. Building skills (**37%**)

2. Being fun (**31%**)

3. Looking good on a CV (**26%**)

- Female respondents were more likely than males to highlight social and wellbeing benefits, such as making friends (**29% vs 19%**) and improving mental health (**27% vs 19%**).

- Young people with additional needs were significantly more likely to report that extracurricular activities improved their mental health and wellbeing (**32% vs 22%** of those without additional needs) and built their confidence (**23% vs 17%**).

- The perception of benefits shifted with age and career stage. Younger participants (ages 11-13) were most likely to cite "fun" as a key benefit (**43%**). In contrast, older young people and those actively seeking work were more likely to prioritise benefits related to career advancement, such as looking good on a CV.

- Young people who were unemployed and looking for work were notably more likely to report that extracurricular activities benefit their CV than those who were already employed (**35% vs 16%**).

To what extent do you think it is important that young people take part in extra-curricular activities?

Not Important or Slightly important
11%

Neutral
24%

Very Important or Important
65%
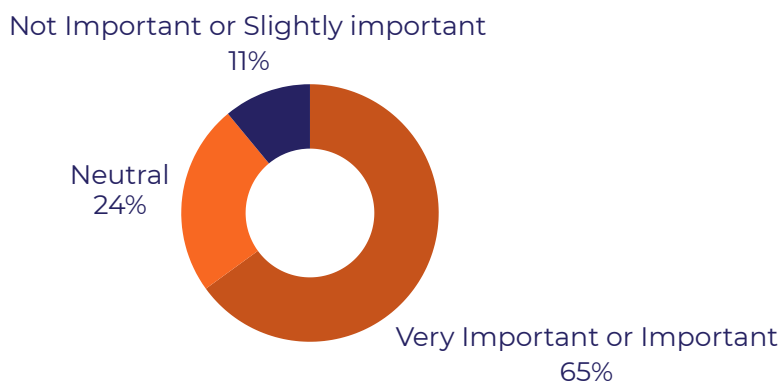
Based on the data, nearly two-thirds of young people (65%) believe that participating in extracurricular activities is "very important or important".

Nearly two-thirds of respondents (**65%**) felt that taking part in activities was 'very important or important', while around a quarter (**24%**) were 'neutral'. Only a small minority (**11%**) considered it 'not important or slightly important'.

Nearly two-thirds of young people (**65%**) believe that participating in extracurricular activities is "very important or important". Around a quarter (**24%**) were 'neutral'. Only a small minority (**11%**) considered it 'not important or slightly important'.

Statistics by group

- Females (**33%**) were more likely than males (**26%**) to state that participation in extracurricular activities is "very important".

- Fewer young people eligible for free school meals felt that extracurricular activities were "very important" compared to those not eligible (**24% vs 34%**).

- Young adults aged 26-30 were the most likely to rate participation as "very important or important" (**83%**), while the lowest proportion was among 11-13 and 17-19 year-olds (**60%** for both groups).

- Young people who were employed (full-time or part-time) were significantly more likely than those who were unemployed and looking for opportunities to rate participation as "very important or important" (**84% vs 57%**)

%   ● 26-30   ● 11-19

83

60

Rated participation as "very important or important"

%   ● Employed   ● Unemployed

84

57

Rated participation as "very important or important"
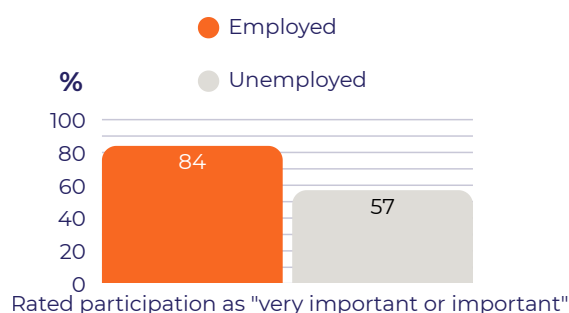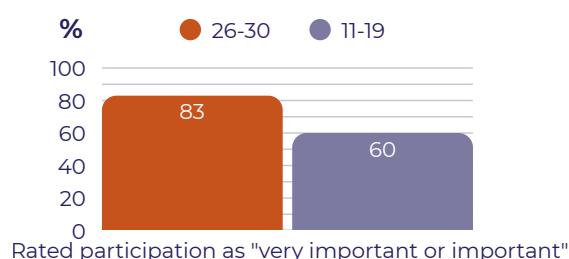
Volunteering and social action

In 2025, **39%** of young people reported taking part in social action, such as volunteering or fundraising, a decrease from **46%** in 2024.

Just over half (**54%**) said they had not participated, which is a 10-point increase from the previous year. However, young people are more likely to consider participating in social action this year (**39%**) compared to last year (**34%**).

Have you taken part in social action (volunteering or fundraising) in the last 12 months?

● 2025   ● 2024

	No	Yes	Unsure
2025	54	39	7
2024	44	46	10
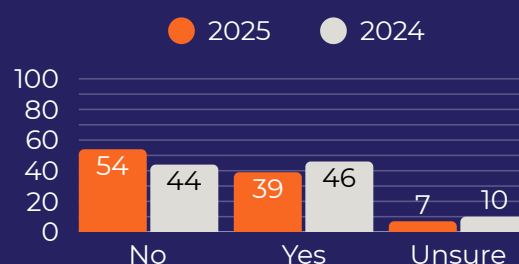
Is social action something you would consider doing?

% — 2025 ● 2024 ●

	No	Yes	Unsure
2025	54	39	7
2024	32	34	34

% — Female ● Male ○

	Undertook	Considered
Female	42	60
Male	34	34
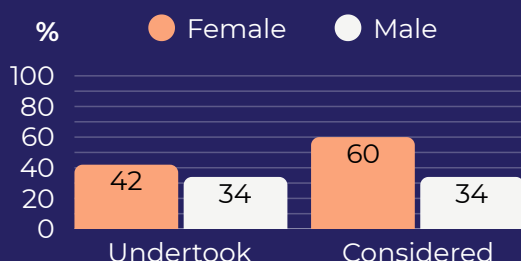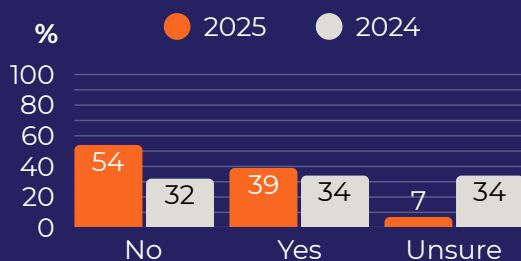
- Females were more likely than males to have taken part in social action in the last 12 months (**42% vs 34%**). The proportion of female respondents who would consider participating in social action is almost double that of male respondents (**60% vs 34%**).
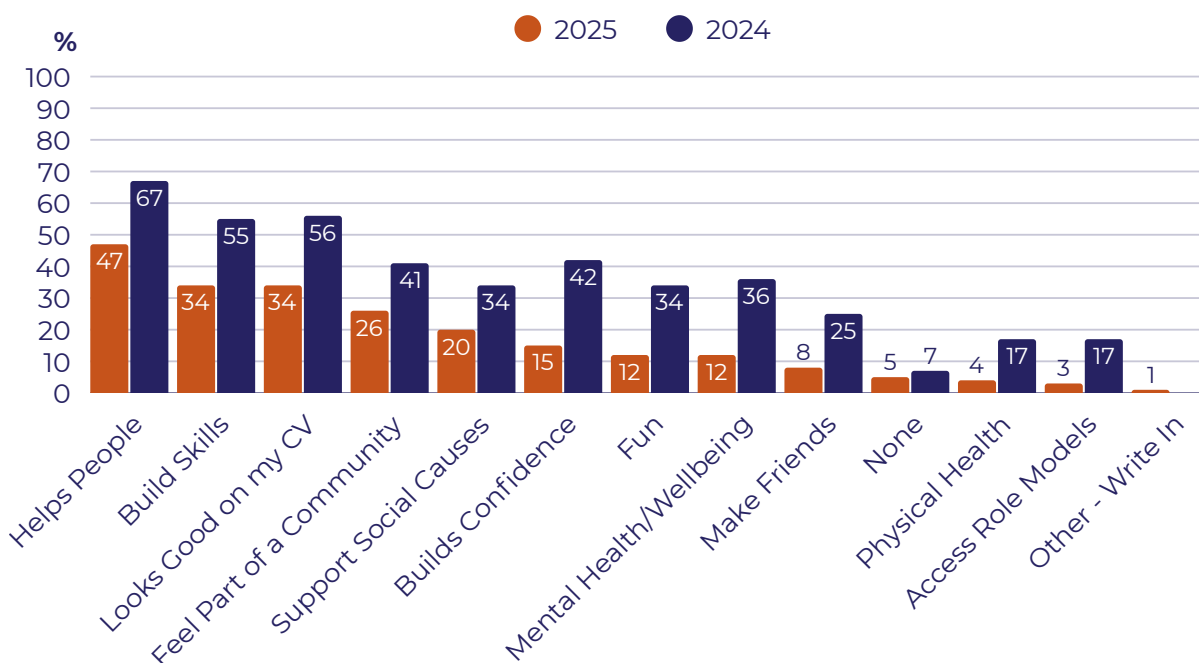
- Young people aged 14-16 were the most likely to have taken part in social action (**47%**). However, those aged 26-30 were the most likely to consider participating in social action projects (**65%**).

- Mixed or Multiple Ethnicity respondents were most likely to consider participating in social action projects (**42%**). In contrast, Black, African, Black British, or Caribbean respondents were the most likely to report that they would not participate in social action projects (**55%**).

- Young people eligible for free school meals were slightly less likely to consider participating in social action projects than those not eligible (**42% vs 47%**).

- Young people in apprenticeships were most likely to report not taking part in social action in the past 12 months (**62%**).

What do you think are the biggest benefits to social action/volunteering?

% — 2025 ● 2024 ●

	2025	2024
Helps People	47	67
Build Skills	34	55
Looks Good on my CV	34	56
Feel Part of a Community	26	41
Support Social Causes	20	34
Builds Confidence	15	42
Fun	12	34
Mental Health/Wellbeing	12	36
Make Friends	8	25
None	5	7
Physical Health	4	17
Access Role Models	3	17
Other - Write In	1	

In 2025, young people were less likely than in 2024 to see key benefits from social action and volunteering. The biggest declines were in recognising it as helping people (**47% vs 67%**), building confidence (**15% vs 42%**), supporting mental health and wellbeing (**12% vs 36%**), and being fun (**12% vs 34%**).

Perceived benefits by group

- Female respondents were more likely than males to report that social action benefits others and their community (**53% vs 37%**).

- Young people with additional needs were more likely to report that social action projects were "fun" (**14%**) and that they improved their "mental health or wellbeing" (**16%**) when compared to those without additional needs.

- The perception of benefits shifts with age and career stage. Younger people (11-13 years old) were most likely to cite "fun" as a main benefit (**18%**). In contrast, young people aged 14-22 were most likely to report that a main benefit is that it "looks good on their CV" (**39%**).

- Unemployed young people were significantly more likely than those who are employed to report that social action benefits their CV (**54% vs 31%**)

Is there anything that would have made you feel more prepared for work experience?

The majority of young people recommended that extracurricular activities be linked with schools or embedded into the curriculum to foster participation. This way, they are accessible and more affordable.

Some recommended improving the advertisement of local opportunities through social media. A few recommended that there needs to be more variety in the extracurriculars offered. In essence, young people not only want sports clubs but also other, more artistic or advocacy-related activities to engage with.

> **"Embed this into the curriculum from an early age and make this a focal point throughout school, initiatives that remove barriers to young people accessing extra curricular activities, focus on not only traditional extra curricular activities but what young people actually might want/need."**

> **More funding to the community, to help bring people together in nice spaces.**

> **''Accessibility – a lot of activities take place in the day/morning, which means if you work you can't take part. Transport – needs to be accessible. Flexibility – being able to adjust depending on other time commitments.''**

> **Make them more obviously tied to work, i.e counting as work experience or supervisors being able to be referees**

> **"Just more advertisements so that they can do it! Young people do not know opportunities are out there. Needs to be talked about in schools, emailed in newsletters, on bus shelters, on buses and trains, and come up as ads on social media."**

> **I think a push in education centres such as schools and colleges to encourage students to take part in small acts of volunteering in their areas.**

To what extent do you think it is important that young people take part in social action activities?

Not Important or Slightly important
10%

Neutral
30%

Very Important or Important
60%

● 2025　　● 2024

↓ 5 ppt

60% of young people believe that taking part in social action activities is either "very important" or "important". This reflects a slight decrease from **65%** in 2024.

Statistics by group

- Female respondents were more likely than males to agree that social action is "very important" (**60% of females vs 34% of males**).

- Fewer respondents eligible for free school meals rated social action as "very important" (**17%**) compared to those who were not eligible (**23%**).

- Respondents with additional needs were more likely to state that social action was "important" (**41%**) and "very important" (**24%**) compared to those without additional needs (**38% and 21% respectively**).

- The perceived importance of social action increased with age. Young people aged 26-30 were the most likely to rate participation as "very important or important" (**75%**), a substantial 24 ppt difference from 11-13 year-olds (**51%**).

Have applied for or undertaken any of the following opportunities since March 2024

	Applied For	Undertook Once	Undertook Twice	Undertook 3 or More Times	Never Applied
Internship in Person	6%	3%	3%	1%	87%
Internship Online	3%	3%	2%	1%	91%
Mentorship in Person	3%	4%	2%	3%	88%
Mentorship Online	3%	3%	2%	2%	90%

Overall, young people have low engagement with formal opportunities like internships and mentoring. A majority reported that they have never applied for any of these opportunities since March 2024, with the highest rates for virtual internships (**91%**) and in-person mentoring (**88%**).

A third of young people are not working alongside their studies and are not looking for work.

However, **20%** have looked for work, and an additional **21%** are considering it in the next 12 months.

Do you currently work alongside your study?
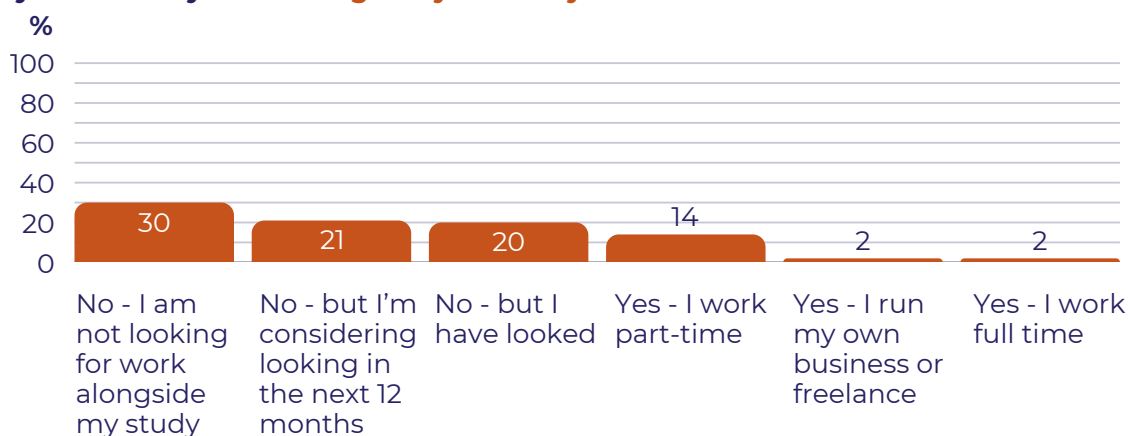
- Female respondents were substantially more likely than male respondents to report that they are not working and not looking for work alongside their study (**51% vs 34%**).

- Young people eligible for free school meals were less likely to report that they are not working and are not looking for work alongside their studies than those not eligible (**35% vs 44%**, a small difference of 9 ppts).

Not Working While Studying
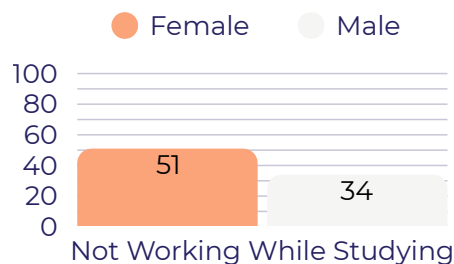
- **36%** of students combined study with part-time work (down from over **40%** in previous years).

2025 2024

▼ 4 ppt
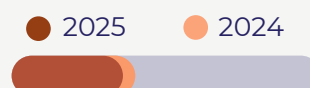
Conclusion

Education is doing better at the basics. More young people feel supported, believe they can access quality provision locally, and trust their teachers for guidance. But careers preparation is patchy, advice remains narrow, and too many miss out on work experience, volunteering or wider opportunities. Even where placements happen, support before and after is inconsistent.

On top of this, places and spaces to grow, gain experience and develop skills are in decline too. Young people are less enthusiastic about taking part in activities and can see less benefit in them. Exposure to employers is an important part of exploring work, and there are fewer opportunities for young people this year to see and hear from employers.

Unless this bridge between education and employment is strengthened, young people will continue to leave education with qualifications, but without the preparation, practice and connections they need to succeed.

Perceptions on Skills, Employment and the Future

Results are in

YOUTH VOICE CENSUS

Introduction

Skills and work sit at the centre of young people's hopes and fears. In 2025, most young people say they value teamwork, creativity and resilience. More feel able to prepare CVs and attend interviews than in previous years too. Yet confidence in digital, numeracy and leadership skills has declined, leaving many unsure they will have the mix of qualifications, skills and experience employers expect.

Perceptions of work itself are conflicted. Young people want fair pay, training and development, flexible hours and autonomy, but few believe employers are supportive of hiring them.

Anxiety and lack of experience remain the most frequently cited barriers, while technology and AI spark both excitement and deep concern about future opportunities. Alongside this, fewer young people are engaging in volunteering or extracurricular activities - opportunities that once helped build confidence and networks.

Key Findings

- **Skills confidence is uneven.** Soft skills like teamwork (66%) and listening (74%) are strong, but less than half of young people feel confident in leadership (47%) or organisation (50%). Digital confidence has fallen 7 ppts since 2024.

- **Employability skills are improving, but readiness lags.** 61% feel able to write a CV, 60% feel prepared to start work, but only 46% feel confident at assessment centres. Just 49% know what employers want - falling to only 26% among those who are NEET.

- **Perceptions of employers are weak.** Only 25% feel employers are supportive of hiring them (down from 31% in 2024). For those who are NEET, this drops to just 4%.

- **Barriers persist.** Lack of work experience (47%) is the top barrier, followed by anxiety (30%) and lack of local jobs (26%). Paid work experience is the most requested support (55%).

- **The future of work feels conflicted.** Young people want flexibility (71%), autonomy (59%) and fair pay (60%), but more than half (53%) fear AI will take jobs. Only 18% are aware of green jobs.

- **Volunteering and wider opportunities are declining.** Only 30% volunteered in the past year, 55% joined extra-curricular activities, and a third (33%) did none of these.

Skills Confidence

Overall, self-reported confidence in their skills generally **declined in 2025 compared to 2024.** Young people remain most confident in listening (74%) and teamwork (66%), but confidence in speaking and leadership dropped to less than half of those surveyed (47% for both). Practical skills, including problem-solving (63%), organisation (50%), digital skills (57%), literacy (61%), and numeracy (55%), also saw a decline.

How confident are you in the following?

Skill	Year	Not Confident At All or Not Very Confident	Neutral	Very Confident or Confident
Speaking	2024	25%	22%	53%
	2025	26%	27%	47%
Listening	2024	7%	18%	74%
	2025	7%	19%	74%
Teamwork	2024	11%	24%	65%
	2025	13%	25%	66%
Leadership	2024	26%	27%	48%
	2025	25%	28%	47%
Problem Solving	2024	10%	21%	69%
	2025	11%	26%	63%
Creativity	2024	11%	24%	65%
	2025	13%	25%	62%

Skill	Year	Not Confident At All or Not Very Confident	Neutral	Very Confident or Confident
Staying Positive	2024	29%	29%	43%
	2025	22%	33%	45%
Aiming High	2024	15%	24%	61%
	2025	15%	28%	57%
Self Management	2024	18%	24%	59%
	2025	21%	29%	50%
Digital	2024	12%	24%	64%
	2025	14%	29%	57%
Numeracy	2024	15%	25%	60%
	2025	18%	27%	55%
Literacy	2024	9%	23%	68%
	2025	13%	26%	61%

Who feels least confident?

- Young people with additional needs are 12 ppts less confident across all skills.
- Students who were eligible for free school meals show a 7-point gap in numeracy (**49% vs 56%**).
- NEET young people report the lowest digital confidence (**42%**).
- Male respondents generally reported higher confidence across a range of skills by an average of 3 ppts. The only area where females reported greater confidence was literacy (**26% vs 24%**).
- White respondents were the least confident group overall, particularly in ambition (**22%**) and self-management (**18%**).
- Digital skills confidence was strongest among those in employment (**78%**), apprenticeships (**73%**), and university (**66%**), but dropped steeply among vulnerable groups such as NEET young people (**42% low confidence**) and those who were home educated (**22% low confidence**).
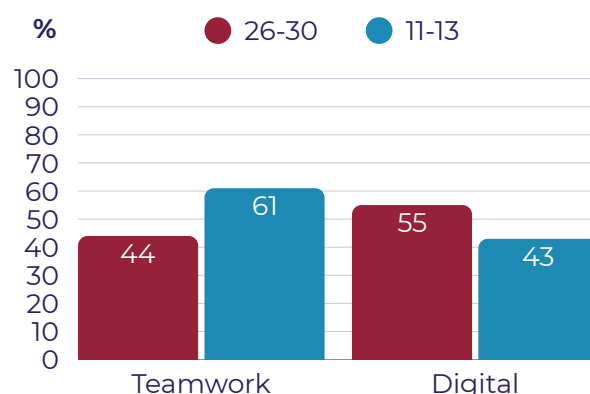
Understanding Employers

Only **49%** of young people feel they know what employers want. Apprentices (72%) and those in work (75%) are most confident, while just 26% of those who are NEET feel they understand employer expectations.

Teamwork (66%), problem-solving (43%) and listening (42%) are most often seen as valued by employers.

> **Employers want what young people cannot possibly have – years of experience for entry– level jobs.**
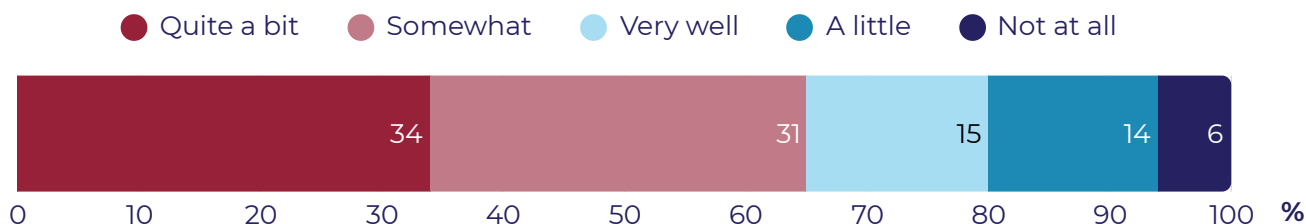
The perceived importance of certain skills shifts with age. Teamwork is highly valued by younger teens but drops from 61% at ages 11-13 to 44% at ages 26-30. Conversely, the importance of digital skills rises from 43% to 55% over the same age range.

%   ● 26-30   ● 11-13

	Teamwork	Digital
26-30	44	55
11-13	61	43

Young people repeatedly describe the **"experience catch-22":** employers demand experience for entry-level roles without offering opportunities to gain it.

How well do you think you understand what skills employers are looking for?

● Quite a bit   ● Somewhat   ● Very well   ● A little   ● Not at all

Quite a bit	Somewhat	Very well	A little	Not at all
34	31	15	14	6

Which of these skills do you think are the most important for work?

Skill	%
Speaking	31
Listening	42
Teamwork	66
Leadership	18
Problem Solving	43
Staying Positive	14
Creativity	10
Aiming High	11
Digital	6
Numeracy	4
Literacy	5
Self Management	26
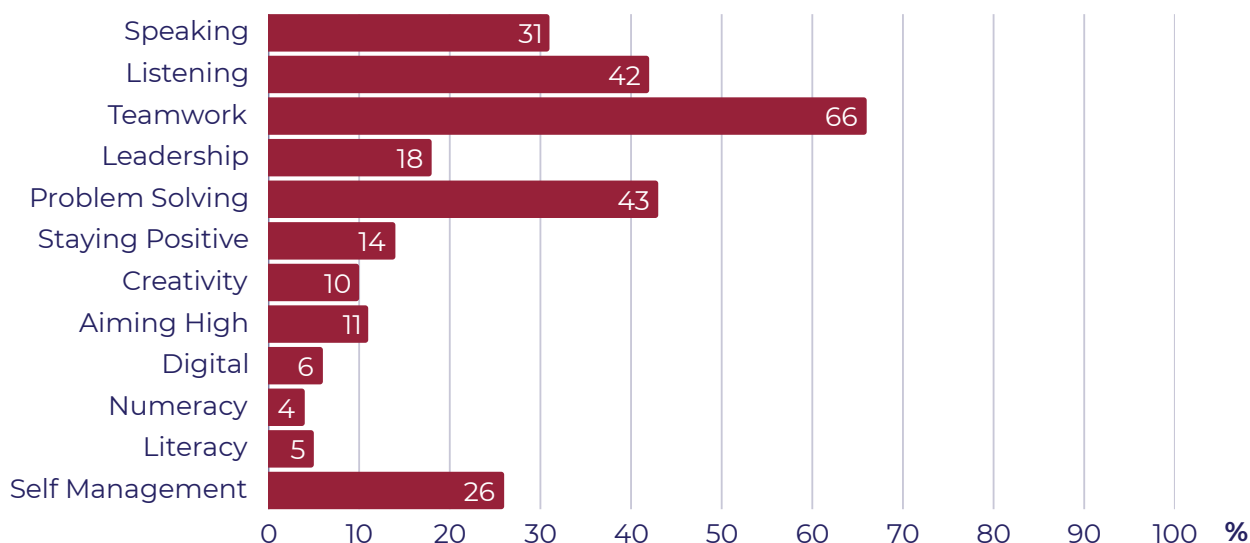
How does **understanding differ** by groups?

- Awareness increases with age, rising from **38%** of 11–13 year-olds to 72% of 26–30 year-olds.

- Young people with additional needs were less likely to report a good understanding of the skills employers are looking for (**43%**) compared to those without (**54%**).

%

● 26-30   ● 11-13

100	
80	
60	72
40	
20	38
0	

Understand the Skills Employers Look For

● With Additional Needs

● Without Additional Needs

%

100	
80	
60	
40	54
20	43
0	

Understand the Skills Employers Look For
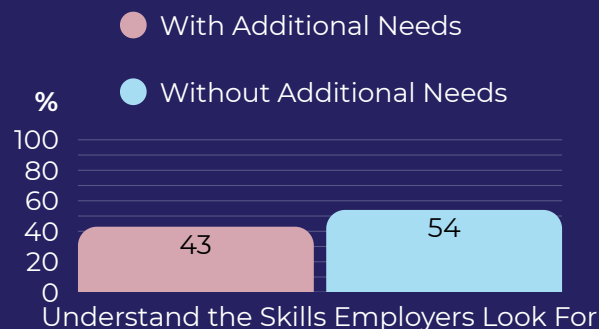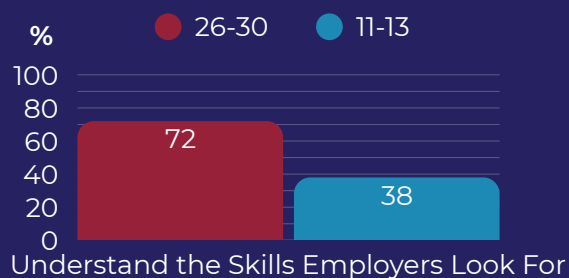
Is there anything you think **employers are looking for** when hiring young people?

Experience and qualifications (educational attainment)

Many young people identified experience and qualifications, especially prior work experience, as expectations employers place on young people. A recurring theme was the "experience catch-22", where employers require experience for entry-level roles, yet rarely offer opportunities for young people to gain it. Many respondents also cited qualifications and education (educational attainment) as something that they believe employers are looking for when hiring young people.

Many young people also felt that employers were not motivated to hire or train young people, instead favouring those who already have industry-specific experience or have worked in similar settings. Some respondents expressed that they do not believe that employers are particularly interested in hiring young people at all, especially if it requires investment in training or support.

Some respondents stated that these expectations can vary, depending on the employer or sector, with some valuing potential or confidence more than formal experience of qualifications.

However, the overall consensus was that the job market is oversaturated, the recruitment process is complex and young people are often set up to fail through no fault of their own.

> "I don't think employers explicitly care about hiring young people. There is no benefit to doing so for employers. Employers are not encouraged (or seemingly willing) to provide additional support and training to young people to bring them into work. Employers seek candidates with relevant experience and training but are not open to providing this themselves. In my opinion, this creates a barrier to entry for young people as this experience is not easy to achieve."

> "From what I've gone through in the job market, employers want what young people cannot possibly have or give – lengthy, pre-existing experience in their chosen field. Most are unwilling to countenance using someone fresh from education or training, meaning young people are left languishing through no fault of their own."

> "Honestly, the hiring process is so bad nowadays, you are always left second guessing as to what employers are actually looking for. I think young people get a terrible rep courtesy of the media. Companies are not willing to train employees (due to cost cutting) and subsequently want employees who have already worked with their systems/have the experience/qualifications which is why this whole catch 22 problem exists."

"I don't think they hire young people much nowadays. I think to get through there's no clear way of what exactly one should do to make it. And I wouldn't blame employers, it's just that the market is too saturated with workers. But otherwise being somewhat reliable and going through an apprenticeship should in theory be enough to get a job."

The ability to adapt previous experience. In some cases, employers want lots of experience despite advertising for an entry-level role.

Depending on the employer, some could be looking for specific experience and qualifications. Others could be looking for potential and adaptability.

"Employers seem to want experienced individuals. Therefore a lot of students find themselves studying for years and then unable to find a job. I think it depends on the employer, the company you're working for and the role. Employers don't want reserved, nervous and unequipped individuals. They want confident people who have the skills they are looking for."

There are no jobs here. So I don't know what these mysterious 'employers' want. Probably experience doing the same job.

They want a certain level of experience sometimes but it is an unfair expectation to think young people will have that.

Reliability, attitude and work ethic

Young people cited a positive attitude and work ethic as perceived valued qualities for employers. Comments frequently mentioned that a "good attitude" and a "can-do mindset" can outweigh qualifications or experience in some cases.

Respondents also highlighted traits such as reliability, adaptability, initiative, dedication and willingness to learn as characteristics they believe employers are looking for when hiring young people

The ability to adapt, this could be with new people, new environments or any new work you may not have handled before.

Not being late and being reliable when called in and having initiative.

"Being reliable – on time, getting tasks done on time and to a good standard. Being professional – dressing appropriately, being respectful to fellow workers, bosses and customers, not giving the company a bad reputation by acting in bad ways. "

Someone with great punctuality, someone who is committed, someone willing to learn new things.

Having a good attitude and always being ready to learn new things.

"When employers are looking to hire they will be looking at how the person presents themself through the interview and if they have good punctuality and social skills so if they can work together and listen and speak. "

Application and Interview Skills

Confidence in practical application skills is improving. More young people feel ready to write CVs (**61%**), attend interviews (**61%**) and complete applications (**60%**).

The lowest confidence was in preparing for an assessment centre, though confidence in this area still saw an increase to **46%** in 2025 from **41%** in 2024.

How much do you agree with the following? I have the skills and knowledge to...

	Year	Strongly Disagree or Disagree	Neutral	Strongly Agree or Agree	Unsure/ Not Applicable
Write a good CV	2024	19%	25%	56%	N/A
	2025	14%	23%	61%	2%
Write a good application form	2024	18%	25%	57%	N/A
	2025	13%	24%	60%	3%
Write a good cover letter	2024	23%	30%	47%	N/A
	2025	19%	29%	48%	4%
Prepare for and attend an interview	2024	18%	25%	57%	N/A
	2025	13%	24%	61%	2%
Prepare for and attend an assessment centre	2024	25%	34%	41%	N/A
	2025	17%	28%	46%	9%
I feel confident I'm prepared for employment	2024	21%	24%	55%	N/A
	2025	14%	21%	60%	5%

Application skills improving overall, **but all is not even**

Young people with additional needs and those who were eligible for free school meals are not growing in confidence at the same rate:

- Young people with additional needs were, on average, **11 ppts less confident** across all statements than their peers. The largest gap was in confidence to start employment, with a **13 ppt difference** (23% disagreed vs 10% of those without additional needs).

- Young people eligible for free school meals were **only 3 ppts less confiden**t on average than their peers.

● With Additional Needs
○ Without Additional Needs

Not Confident to Start Employment

With Additional Needs: 23
Without Additional Needs: 10
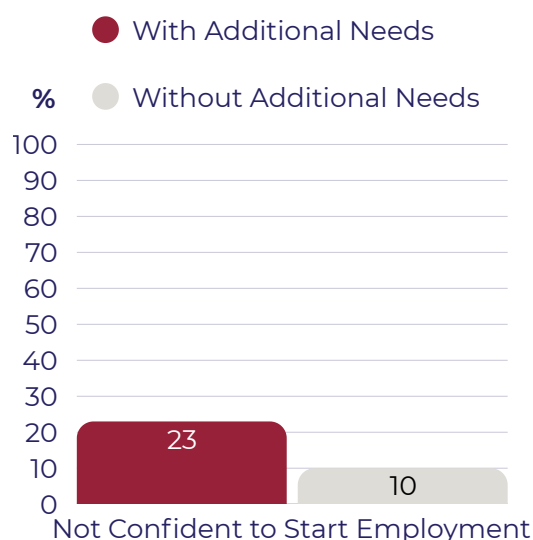
Whilst young people are more confident in their ability to perform job-seeking tasks, their confidence in having the necessary attributes to actually secure a job is much lower:

47%
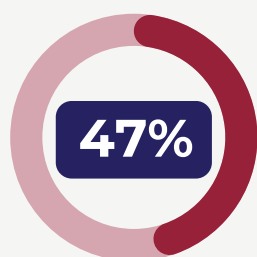
Only 47% feel confident they have the right skills.

35%

Only 35% feel confident they have relevant work experience.

41%
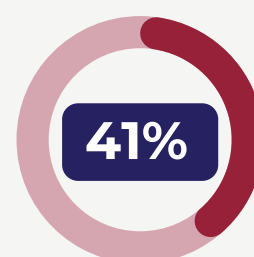
Only 41% feel confident in their qualifications.

How **confident are you** in the following in relation to finding work?

○ Not Confident At All or Not Confident   ● Neutral   ● Very Confident or Confident

	Not Confident	Neutral	Very Confident or Confident
That you have the right skills	17	36	47
That you have relevant work experience	34	31	35
That you have the right qualifications	21	38	41
That you have a good personal network	25	38	37
That you will progress into a good job	18	35	47

0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100 **%**
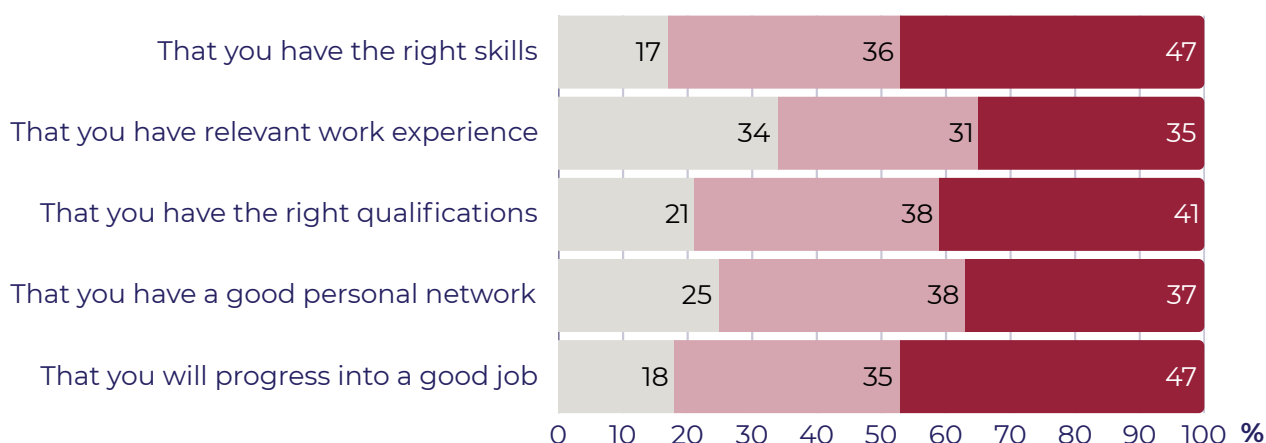
Views on Work and Employers

Young people's career ambitions are wide-ranging, but perceptions of employers are weak. Only **25%** feel employers are supportive of hiring young people (down from 31% in 2024).

Apprentices (**44%**) are most positive, while unemployed young people (**12%**) and those who are NEET (**4%**) are least confident.

When choosing an employer, young people prioritise:

- Fair pay (**60%**)
- Good reputation (**30%**)
- Offers training and development (**29%**)
- Flexibility in hours (**71%**)
- Home working (**36%**)

Legend: ● Overall ● Apprentices ● Unemployed ● NEET
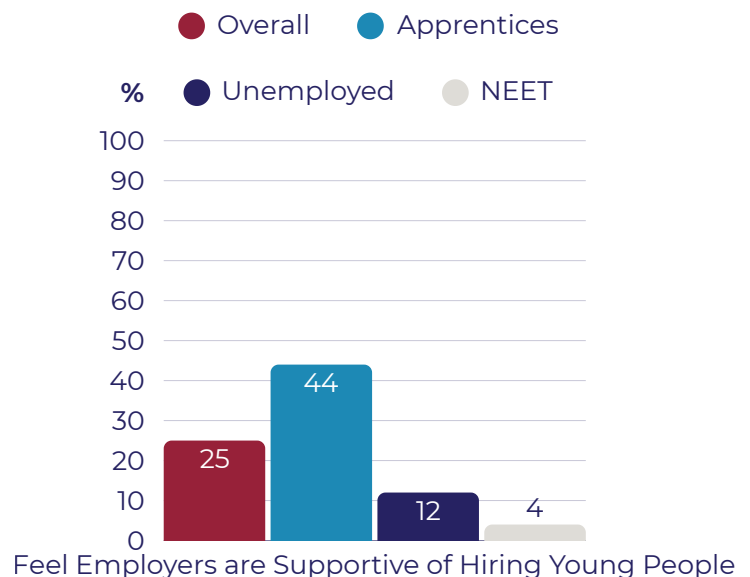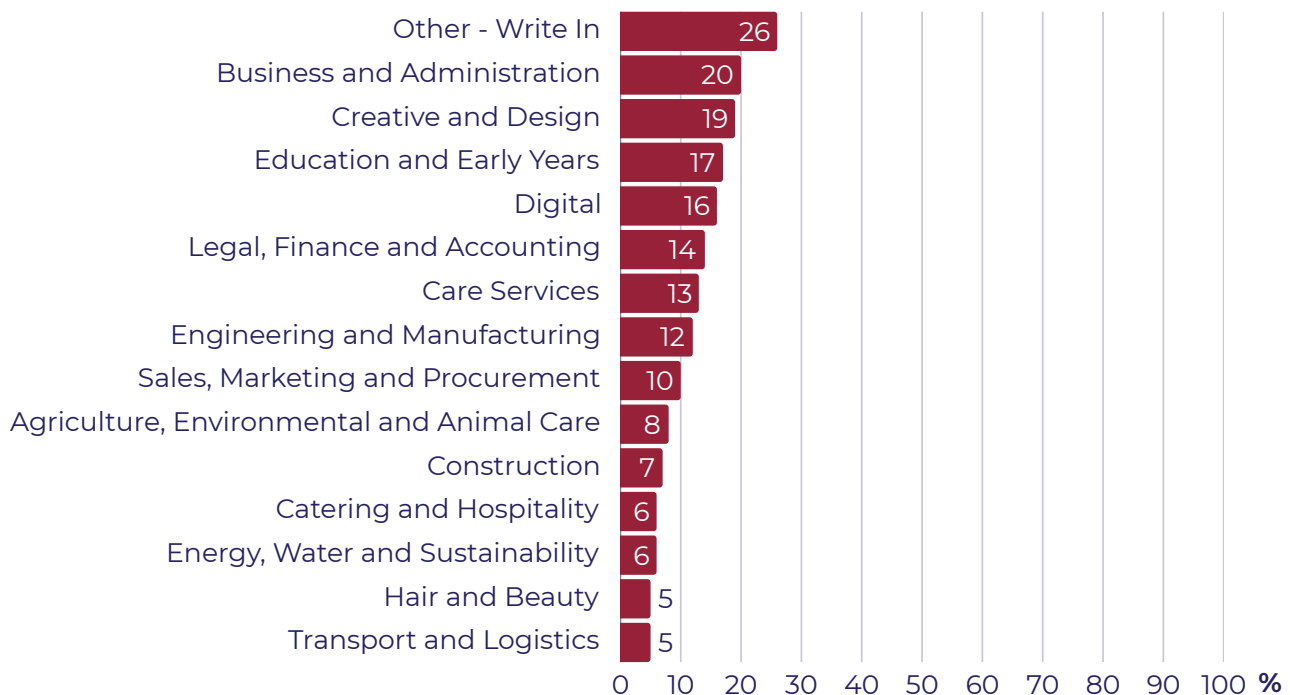
%

Feel Employers are Supportive of Hiring Young People

- Overall: 25
- Apprentices: 44
- Unemployed: 12
- NEET: 4

Thinking about your ideal future career, which of these areas are you interested in?

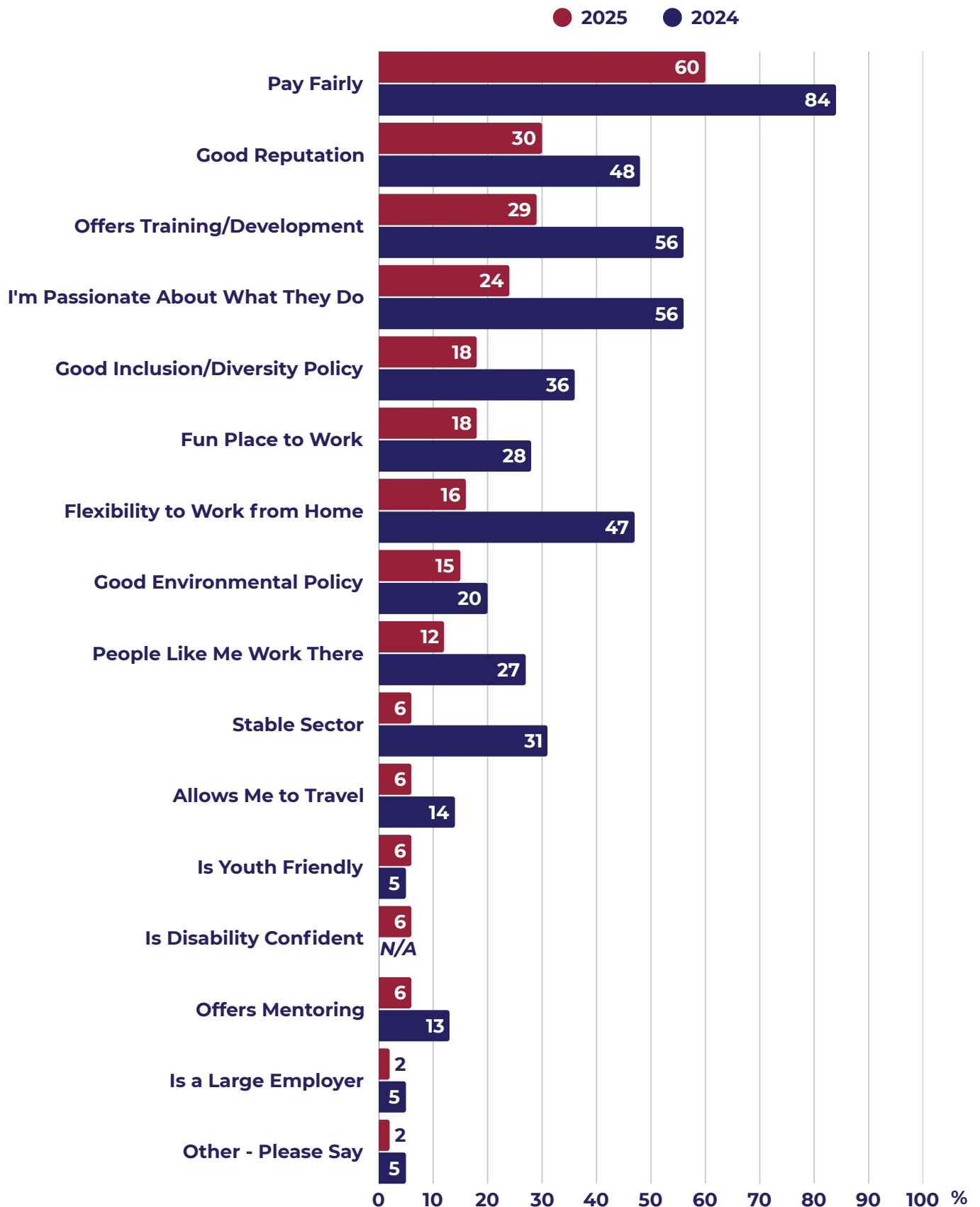| Area	%
Other - Write In	26
Business and Administration	20
Creative and Design	19
Education and Early Years	17
Digital	16
Legal, Finance and Accounting	14
Care Services	13
Engineering and Manufacturing	12
Sales, Marketing and Procurement	10
Agriculture, Environmental and Animal Care	8
Construction	7
Catering and Hospitality	6
Energy, Water and Sustainability	6
Hair and Beauty	5
Transport and Logistics	5

Other common sectors young people aspired to work in included:

- Academia and research
- Animal care
- The charity sector
- The entertainment industry
- Information and technology
- Medicine
- The military
- Public services
- Youth work

When considering work, how do you feel about the following?

● 2025   ● 2024

| Category	2025	2024
Pay Fairly	60	84
Good Reputation	30	48
Offers Training/Development	29	56
I'm Passionate About What They Do	24	56
Good Inclusion/Diversity Policy	18	36
Fun Place to Work	18	28
Flexibility to Work from Home	16	47
Good Environmental Policy	15	20
People Like Me Work There	12	27
Stable Sector	6	31
Allows Me to Travel	6	14
Is Youth Friendly	6	5
Is Disability Confident	6	N/A
Offers Mentoring	6	13
Is a Large Employer	2	5
Other - Please Say	2	5

**When it comes to employer qualities, priorities vary by ethnicity.**

White respondents were more likely to prioritize a good reputation (**32%**) and training opportunities (**33%**) than Black, African, Black British or Caribbean respondents (**23% and 18%**, respectively).

They were also more likely to choose a job based on passion (**28%**) than Asian or Asian British respondents (**17%**).

In contrast, Black, African, Black British or Caribbean respondents placed a higher value on an employer having a good environmental policy (**23%**) compared to White respondents (**13%**).
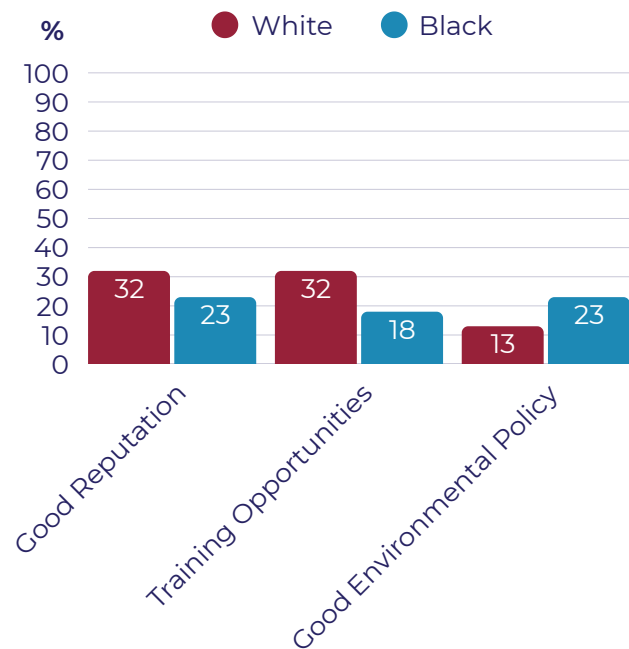

**When considering work, how do you feel about the following?**
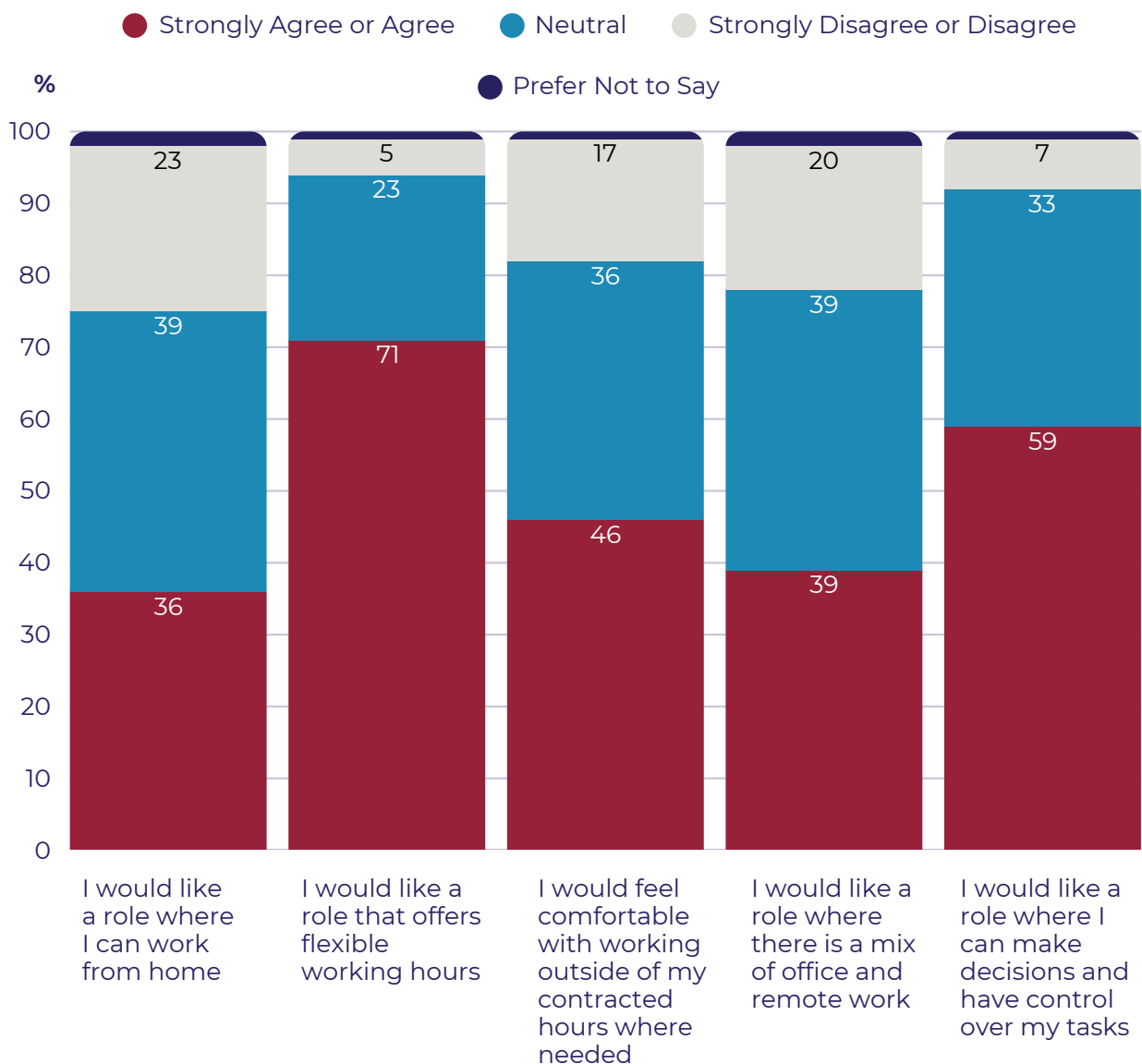
When it comes to work, young people prioritize flexibility and autonomy, but they are more divided on working from home.

Nearly half (**46%**) are comfortable with working outside of their contracted hours when necessary.

- Males are more likely to prefer a fully remote role (**16%**) than females (**10%**). Conversely, females are more likely to want a mix of office and remote work (**31%**) than males (**26%**).

- Black, African, Black British or Caribbean respondents show a stronger preference for both flexible working options (**36%**) and a mix of office and remote work (**20%**). This is significantly higher than White respondents (**7%**) and Mixed or Multiple Ethnicity respondents (**13%**).

- The desire to work from home increases with age, rising from **34%** among 14–16 year-olds to **54%** among 26–30 year-olds. However, the preference for flexible working hours slightly decreases with age. The desire for autonomy over tasks and decision-making also grows steadily, peaking at **71%** among 26–30-year-olds.


% ● Male ● Female

Fully Remote: 16, 10
Hybrid: 26, 31

% ● 14-16 ● 26-30

Desire Home Working: 34, 54
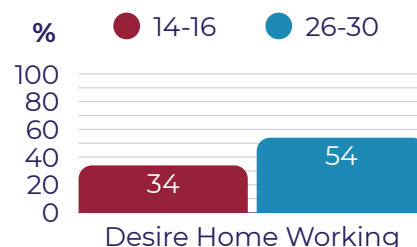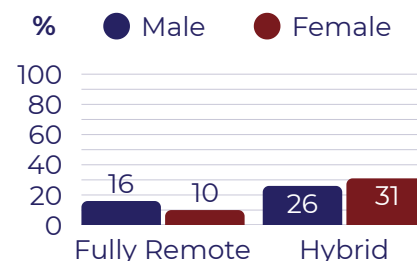
To what extent do you think employers are supportive of hiring young people?

● Very Unsupportive or Unsupportive   ● Neutral

● Very Supportive or Supportive

2025: 35 | 40 | 25
2024: 32 | 37 | 31

%
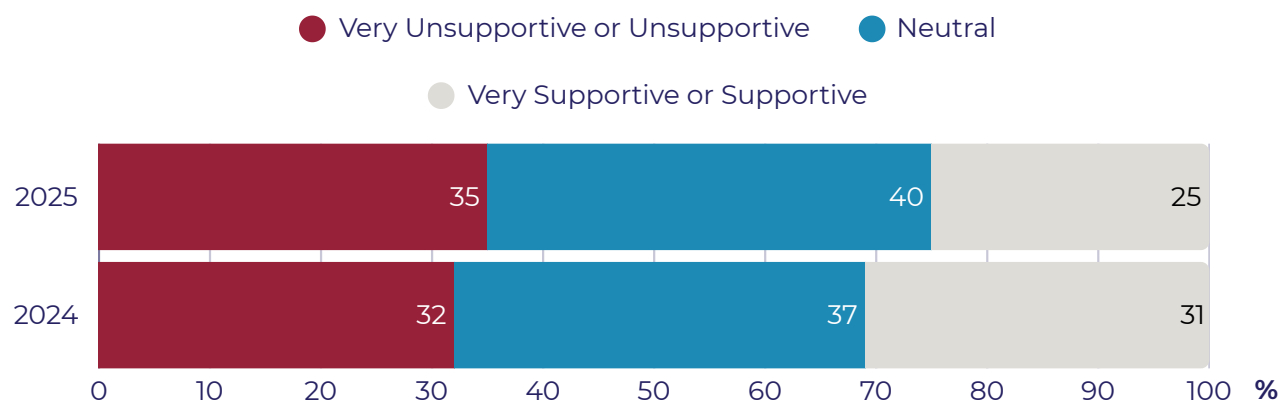
Who feels like employers aren't supportive?

- Only **25%** of young people feel employers are supportive of hiring them - falling to just **4%** among NEET young people.

- Young people's career aspirations continue to follow tradition, with young women most interested in education, and young men most interested in construction.

- The importance of fair pay rises with age, from **58%** among 14-16 year olds to **70%** for 26-30 year olds. The value of training and development also increases sharply after age 19. Conversely, the desire for a "fun place to work" declines significantly with age.

- Young people eligible for free school meals were less likely to prioritise fair pay (**56% vs 63%**) and training and development (**24% vs 33%**) than their peers.

● Eligible for FSM

% ● Not Eligible for FSM

Prioritise Fair Pay: 56, 63
Prioritise Development: 24, 33
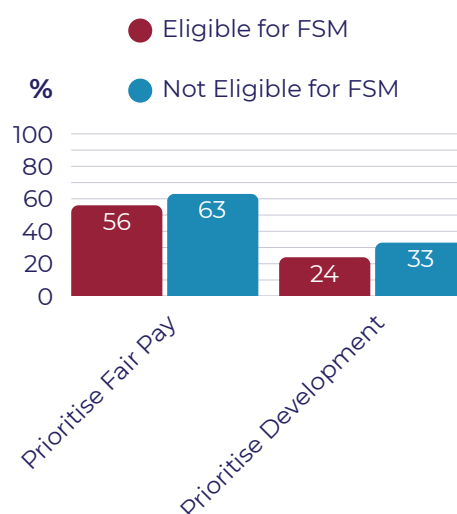
Young people provided some practical recommendations for employers to consider implementing such as taster days at their organisation and providing younger people (ages 14+) with some part-time work experience in order for them to gain some experience early on and varied experience in creative sectors.

A handful of participants discussed improving support for people with additional needs such as physical disabilities, mental health issues and visual impairment.

They recommended that schemes for people with additional needs offer high-quality roles in fields that are traditionally competitive, and for employers to have transparent and honest conversations with them so that they can make a fully informed decision about whether they are suitable for the job and vice versa.

> **"Disability specific careers advice. Disabled people being able to have honest and fair discussions with potential employers about how accessible they can be and whether the job is right for that individual person and their differences and difficulties as there's nothing worse than finding out a job or course can't actually support you or accommodate you after you have applied or even started– I'd rather know before and find something that would be better for me and wont make me ill from fatigue, burnout or overwhelm long term."**

> **"More in the curriculums of schools and colleges about careers and employability skills while also letting young people know its OK to not be sure as I think I felt pushed to know what I wanted to do and kind of avoided thinking about it because it felt like too much pressure– i didn't realise that nearly everyone else also had no clue what they wanted to do."**

> **"Employers offering shadowing to people considering a career in their field. Employers offering internships or summer based schemes where young people can get an idea of what the job and workplace are like."**

What, if any, help or support would you like for finding a job now or in the future?

> **"I would like a kind of taster day available, for example my college arranges a day when we go into the industry to experience/shadow how it is to work in that particular field. I would also like my college to actually help us find work experience, not the work experience team leaving us to sort it out entirely ourselves."**

> **"I think support specifically for people with disabilities and/or mental health issues as some of the issues we face in knowing what job is right for us and then being well enough to do the job make it harder. Also while some amazing schemes are in place for these groups they mostly focus on lower ability roles or skills which may work and being great for some but others may not want to be a barrister or a work in a corner shop, and we may have the ability to do academic work but the systems are harder for us to access often not letting us do the roles that would let us reach our full potential."**

> **"Schools and colleges should have job or volunteering opportunities on an email bulletin like unis do so that young people know what is available to them. Schools and colleges to do more to find young people volunteer positions as it gives young people responsibility, increases confidence and sense of purpose, gives them a flavour of work and is great for their CV's."**

> **"Help finding a job when you haven't completed a degree, such as a summer job would be really helpful as it can be difficult to find this kind of work when your vision impaired."**

> **"I would like for careers advisors to find and provide us with a variety of job opportunities involving more creative sectors instead of the prioritised business jobs."**

Barriers and Support

Lack of experience remains the top barrier, alongside anxiety and lack of local jobs. Discrimination is also cited, particularly among Black, African, Black British or Caribbean young people (13% vs 1% of White respondents).

47%
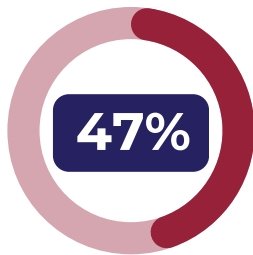
47% cite lack of experience.

30%

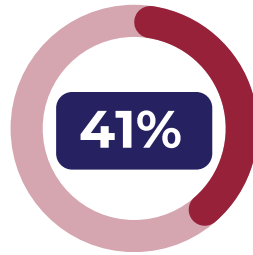**30%** cite anxiety.

26%

26% cite lack of local jobs.

55%

55% want paid work experience.

41%

41% want CV support.

38%

38% want interview training.

- A lack of work experience is the top cited barrier across all major ethnic groups, with the highest concern among Asian or Asian British respondents (**49%**).

- Anxiety and mental health are much greater concerns for young women, with **36%** citing anxiety and **17%** citing mental health challenges as a barrier, compared to just **23%** and **10%** of young men, respectively. Within ethnic groups, White respondents were significantly more likely to report anxiety (**36%**) and mental health challenges (**18%**) as barriers than Asian or Asian British respondents (**21% and 7%**, respectively).

- Racial discrimination is a significant barrier for Black, African, Black British or Caribbean respondents, cited by **13%** - a rate substantially higher than for White respondents (**1%**). This group was also twice as likely to cite a criminal record as a barrier (**4%**) compared to White and Asian or Asian British respondents (**2%** each).

Male ● Female ●

	Anxiety	Mental Health
Male	23	10
Female	36	17

White ● Asian ●

	Anxiety	Mental Health
White	36	18
Asian	21	7
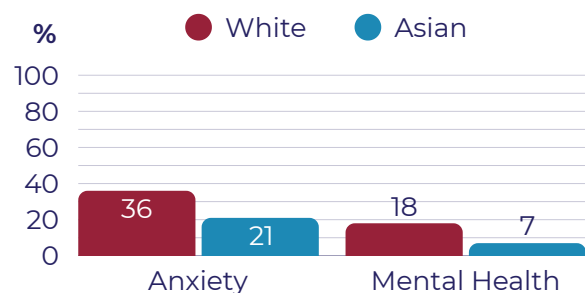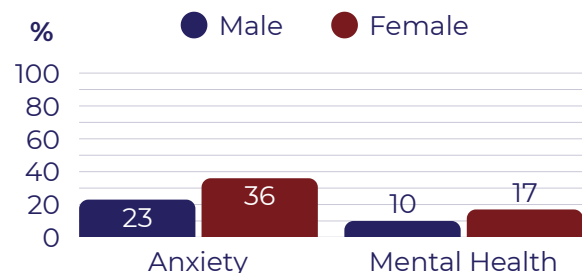
See appendix 3 for the full data set on barriers to employment.

What kind of support would be most helpful to you finding a job?

Category	%
Paid Work Experience	55
CV Writing Help	41
Careers Advice	38
Interview Skills Training	38
Financial Support	21
Mentoring	21
Information about Employer Rights	18
Skills Bootcamps	13
Digital Careers Support	9
Other - Write In	4
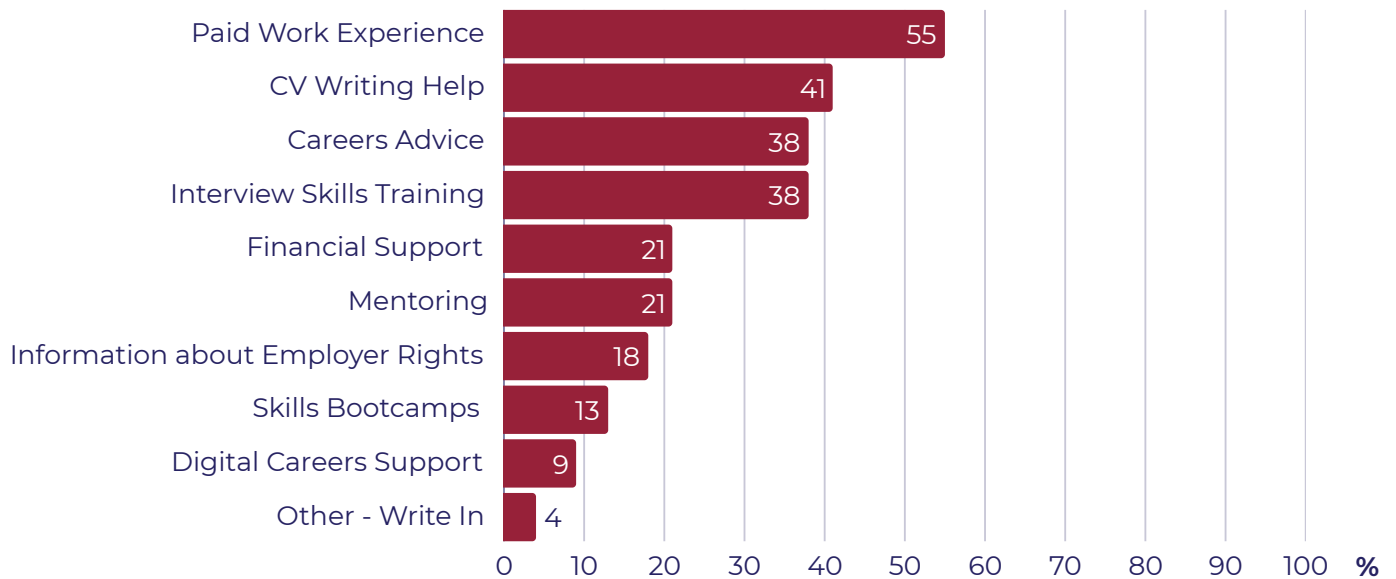
When it comes to finding a job, young people are clear about the kind of support they need. The most valued form of assistance is **paid work experience**, with **55%** of respondents identifying it as the single most helpful tool. This is followed by a strong demand for practical, skills-based support, including **CV writing help** (**41%**) and **interview skills training** (**38%**).

Not everyone needs the same support

- Female respondents express a greater need for assistance with job application mechanics, with a higher demand for CV writing help (**43% vs 39%** of males) and interview skills training (**43% vs 34**% of males).

- The need for CV writing help is particularly high among Black, African, Black British or Caribbean respondents (**45%**). In contrast, Asian or Asian British young people (**25%**) are more likely to seek financial support.

- The demand for practical support like paid work experience and CV/interview training is most pronounced among younger age groups (14–22), while the need for career advice is highest among the youngest respondents (**43%**) and again for those in their late twenties (**42%**).

- Young people with additional needs also highly value paid work experience (**55%**), CV writing help (**46%**), and careers advice (**41%**).

- Those eligible for free school meals are more likely to seek financial support. (**25% vs 18%**)

● Male ● Female

%

	CV Help	Interview Training
Male	39	34
Female	43	43

● Black ● Asian

%

	CV Help	Financial Support
Black	45	
Asian		25

● Eligible for FSM

● Not Eligible for FSM

%

	Financial Support
Eligible for FSM	25
Not Eligible for FSM	18
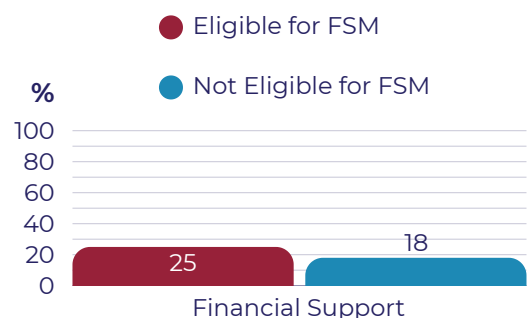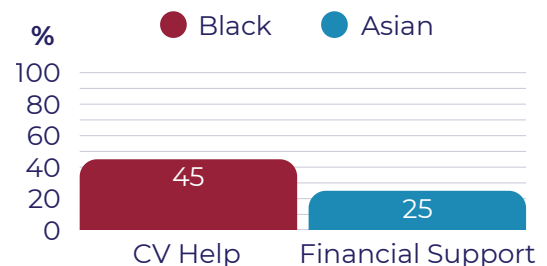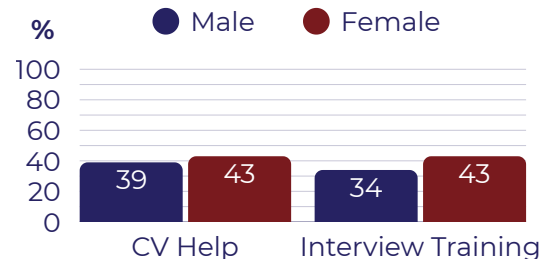
How likely are you to attend in person services to help you find work if they are local to you?

Very Unlikely or Unlikely
24%
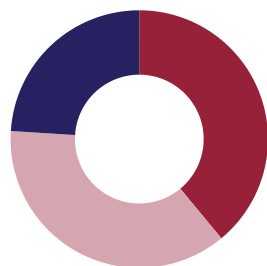
Very Likely or Likely
39%

Neutral
37%

Young people were 'neutral' (36%) or 'likely' to attend in person support services to find a job (30%) if they were available in their local area or within an accessible distance.

Technology, AI and the Future of Work

AI and technology spark both excitement and fear. Over half (53%) worry AI will take jobs, while 29% believe it will create new ones. AI use is rising (61%, up from 54%), but those who are NEET are far less likely to use it (32% vs 76% in work). Awareness of green jobs remains very low, with only 18% having heard of them.

AI fears and divides

53%

53% fear AI will replace jobs.

% ● Overall ● NEET

76

32
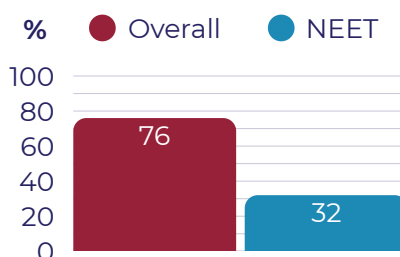
76% of young people in work use AI vs **32%** of NEET young people.

18%

18% are aware of green jobs.

What, if any, are your big concerns about the future of work?

Concerns about the future of work

Young people's primary concerns about the future of work are centred on a few key areas: job insecurity, the growing influence of AI and technology, and economic pressures like the rising cost of living.

While AI is a major concern, it's often viewed as a factor that exacerbates existing issues related to a lack of opportunities and job stability.

Job insecurity and lack of opportunities

Young people consistently expressed fears of a highly competitive and unstable job market, where they may be "stuck in low-paid, short-term or underqualified roles."

Many feel caught in a "catch-22" where employers demand experience, but opportunities to gain that experience are scarce.

The concern is "the unlikelihood to hire young people without work experience, but never getting work experience as a result of that. Getting stuck only living to work, not working to live."

Another highlighted the broader context, noting that "people are being made redundant in mass numbers and the job market is very competitive at the moment."

A key source of frustration is the lack of communication from employers, with one person describing the job hunt as "exhausting," where "an applicant can apply to hundreds of jobs, and maybe hear back from 10."

The impact of AI and technology

The increasing role of AI and technology is a major concern for young people, who fear it will lead to job displacement. This concern is particularly acute for creative and entry-level roles.

"Workers being driven out of the market due to AI, leading to large amounts of impoverished unemployed people."

"AI taking over the jobs that people want to do e.g. creative roles like writing & art, and leaving fewer & less enjoyable roles for humans."

Beyond job loss, some fear AI will be used to "reduce jobs more generally" rather than simply to improve productivity, which could have a devastating impact on "lower bands of companies' pay scales."

Low pay and the cost of living

Many respondents feel that wages are not keeping pace with the rising cost of living, making it difficult to achieve financial independence and stability. This is often tied to concerns about poor work-life balance and under-compensation.

"I am concerned about having a stable, well-paid job that won't be taken over by robots/AI, that I enjoy, and where I won't be made redundant due to the cost of living crisis/large scale financial issues."

"Inflation outstrips wage increases consistently."

The desire for a job that allows one to "not only survive (pay all necessary bills) but also thrive (being able to save)" is a recurring theme among respondents.

Accessibility and EDI

Although a less common concern than the top three, issues related to accessibility and discrimination are a significant worry for many. Young people with disabilities, in particular, fear that employers are unprepared to make reasonable adjustments or that they will face discrimination.

One respondent with Autism and ADHD feared that despite being well-suited for certain roles, "some businesses won't take me on."

Another highlighted a broader concern, stating, "My worry revolves around the feeling of isolation in my workplace, stemming from the fear of being treated differently simply because of my identity."

Concerns also extended to wider issues of discrimination, with one person noting, "As a Muslim, another concern is employers not being inclusive and diverse."

Have you **used AI or machine learning** in the last 12 months?

Legend: ● Yes ● No ● Unsure ● Prefer Not to Say

Year	Yes	No	Unsure
2025	61	22	15
2024	54	34	12

(x-axis: 0 to 100 %)
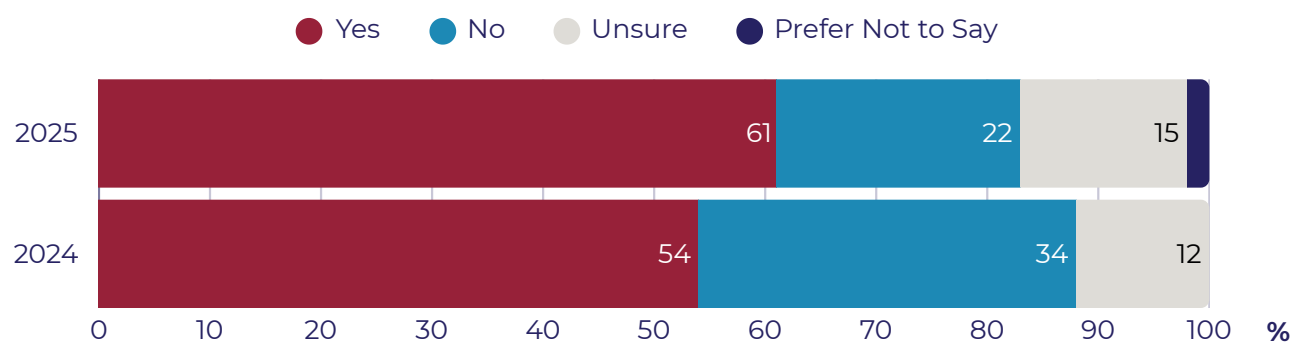
What, if any of the following, have you used AI or machine learning for?

Category	Value
Answer General Questions	56
Homework	50
Personal Recommendations	32
Image/Video Editing	26
Social Media	23
Presentations/Papers for Work	19
CV Writing	14
Application Forms	9
Other - Write In	8
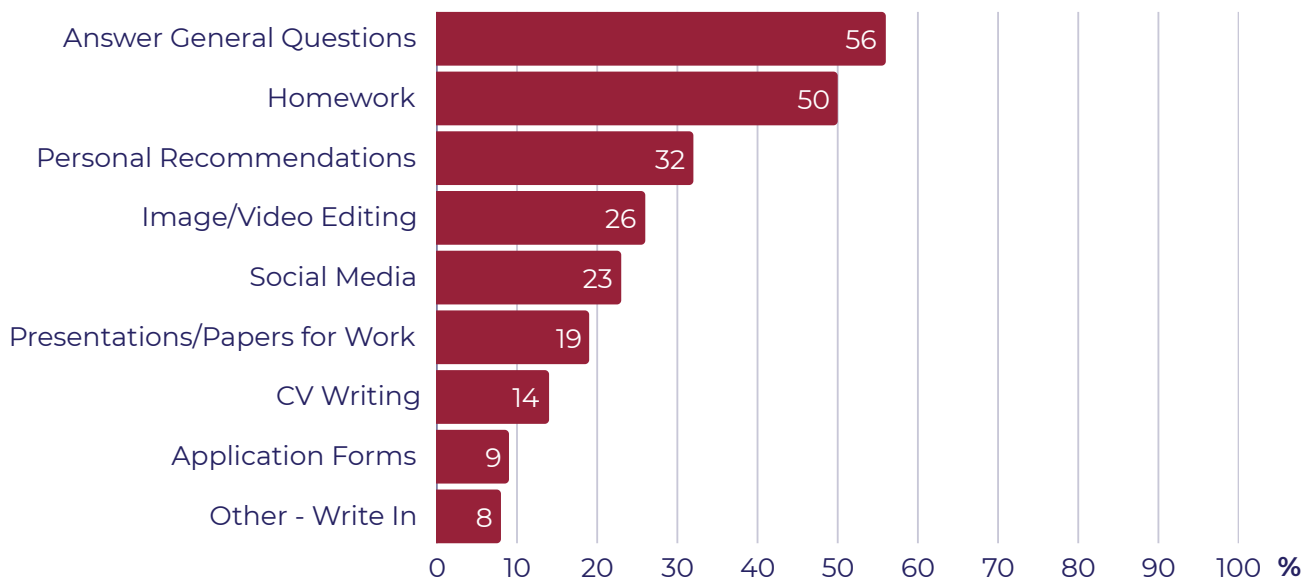
The use of AI and machine learning among young people has increased significantly in 2025. **61%** of young people now report using AI in the last year, a **7ppt increase** from 2024.

While AI use is widespread, it is not evenly distributed. Usage is highest among those in employment (**76%**) and higher education (**64%**), and less common among those who are NEET (**32%**).

The most common applications for AI are for general knowledge and academic tasks. Half of all respondents (**50%**) used AI for homework, and **56%** used it to answer general questions.

The use of AI for career related tasks, such as creating CVs (**14%**) and cover letters (**9%**), is much less common but rises sharply with age.

Spotlight on AI usage

While AI use is growing, there are clear differences in who is using it and for what purpose, based on demographic and life stage.

Who is using AI?
- Asian or Asian British respondents have the highest rate of AI use (**68%**), while Black, African, Black British or Caribbean respondents express the most concern about AI's impact on their future job prospects (**31%**).

68%   **31%**

- Young people with additional needs are less likely to use AI (**51%**) than those without (**65%**).

What are they using AI for?
- AI for homework is most popular with the youngest age groups, with **66%** of 11-13-year-olds using it for this purpose. Use for homework declines significantly among university students (**38%**).

- For career related tasks, usage increases with age and stage of education or employment. The use of AI for CVs and cover letters is highest among those in employment (**29%**) and university (**27%**).

- Social media and content creation are more popular among younger groups, with use highest among those in school (**26%**) and home-educated young people (**28%**).

%

100
80
60
40
20
0

51

65

Use AI

Use AI for Homework

66%

28 ppt

38%

11-13 Year Old Students

University Students
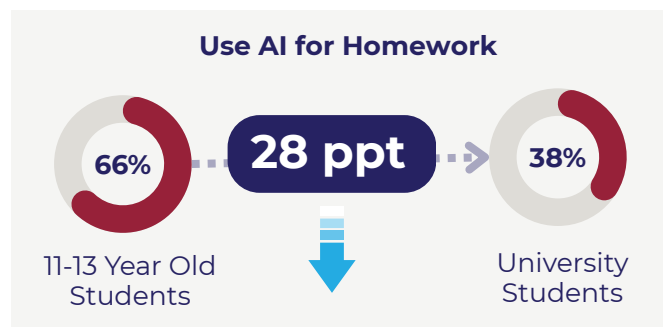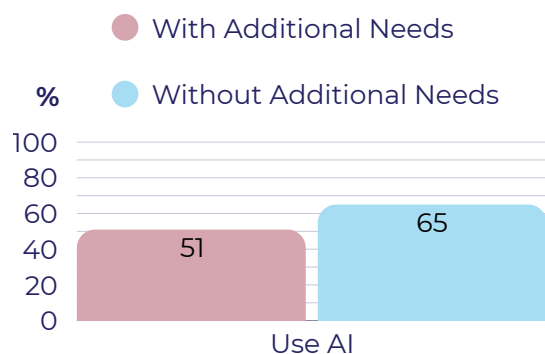
Digital Skills

Thinking about your digital skills, how much do you agree that you can…

● Strongly Disagree or Disagree ● Neutral ● Strongly Agree or Agree ● N/A

Task	Strongly Disagree or Disagree	Neutral	Strongly Agree or Agree	N/A
Set up an email	6	8	83	3
Set up/host online meeting	12	18	65	5
Communicate with others	4	7	87	
Use a Word programme	9	14	70	7
Use search engines	3	5	90	
Fill online forms	4	6	88	
Set privacy settings	4	7	86	3
Use social media safely	3	6	89	
Make transactions online	7	13	75	5

0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100 **%**

When asked about their digital skills, young people report high levels of confidence across most core abilities.

The vast majority of respondents are confident in everyday tasks like:

- Using search engines (**90%**).
- Filling out online forms (**88%**).
- Communicating via email or messaging apps (**87%**).

They also feel highly capable of managing their online safety, with **86%** confident in setting privacy settings and **89%** in using social media tools safely.

However, confidence drops slightly for more advanced tasks. Only **70%** feel they can use a word programme to create documents like a CV, and just **65%** are confident in setting up and hosting an online meeting.

What could employers do to help young people develop their skills?

Some key recommendations young people provided to employers included flexible working arrangements, more detailed post-interview feedback, transparent communication in terms of what skills employers are looking for, and making jobs inclusive of young people and people with additional needs, as well as providing mentorship.

Overall the majority of respondents simply asked employers to give young people a chance and not rule them out because they did not have previous work experience or the minimum exam grades.

One respondent also recommended that employers encourage and promote young people based on their skill progression rather than their age.

"Training and give young people a chance even if they don't pass English and maths . Just cause your brainy doesn't mean you can't learn and do a great job and someone who passes the grades could be absolutely rubbish at the job. Give people a chance, it's 2025 not the 1900s."

"Be open to employing young people, paying more and promoting them for their skillset, not based on age. Telling them explicitly what is good, and what to work on and providing more opportunities within the workplace to improve and enhance skills."

"Give us a chance to prove ourselves and remove stereotypical ideas of youth unreliability. I have had to work alongside my university education and so have been employed for 6 years for the same company."

"Offer an overview of progression and skills they will develop as they start at the job. allowing them to shadow a more seasoned employee for the first few weeks. giving them a contact to ask questions to. allowing more regular breaks to allow them to adjust to the demand and understand the tasks they need to complete more deeply."

"I think that employers could make it more clear to young people what skills will be useful for specific roles, as well as which skills benefit someone in the majority of workplaces."

Actually have job listings open for people with mental and physical disabilities, specifically for people with autism.

Provide flexible work hours and tailored contracts for younger students so that we don't have to wait until 18.

Conclusion

Young people are building skills, applying for jobs, and volunteering, but too often it isn't translating into opportunity. Confidence in digital and technical skills is slipping, perceptions of employers are weak, and opportunities to gain experience are shrinking. NEET young people and disadvantaged groups are being left furthest behind.

Unless practical skills are linked directly to opportunities, and employers are encouraged to invest in young people, confidence will continue to erode and divides will deepen. The future of work risks feeling more conflicted than confident.

Youth Voice Census Results: Appendices

Appendix 1 - Demographics Overview

(referenced in Methodology)

The charts in this section provide an overview of the demographics and the number of respondents who completed the Youth Voice Census.

Age	Percent	Number of Respondents
11-13	26%	2,178
14-16	27%	2,224
17-19	29%	2,439
20-22	7%	550
23-25	5%	403
26-30	6%	479

n= 8,273

Gender	Percent	Number of Respondents
Female	53%	4,361
Male	42%	3,471
Non-Binary	1%	122
Unsure/Questioning	1%	66
Other - Write In	2%	144
Prefer Not to Say	1%	107

n= 8,269

Transgender	Percent	Number of Respondents
No	93%	3,896
Yes	5%	193
Prefer Not to Say	2%	98

n= 4,187

Sexuality	Percent	Number of Respondents
Heterosexual	75%	3,122
Gay or Lesbian	4%	189
Bisexual	10%	431
Unsure	3%	110
Other	3%	127
Prefer Not to Say	5%	204

n= 4,183

Ethnicity	Percent	Number of Respondents
Asian or Asian British (includes any Asian background, for example, Bangladeshi, Chinese, Indian, Pakistani)	21%	1,704
Black, African, Black British or Caribbean (includes any Black background)	42%	712

Ethnicity	Percent	Number of Respondents
Mixed or multiple ethnic groups (includes any mixed background)	5%	412
White (includes any white background)	61%	5,045
Another ethnic group (includes any other ethnic group, for example, Arab)	2%	180
Prefer not to say	2%	214

n= 8,267

Additional Needs	Percent	Number of Respondents
Yes	17%	3,896
No	68%	5,595
Unsure	12%	990
Prefer Not to Say	3%	256

n= 8,252

Free School Meals	Percent	Number of Respondents
Yes	33%	2,697
No	63%	5,123
Prefer Not to Say	4%	322

Carer	Percent	Number of Respondents
Yes	8%	582
No	89%	6,791
Prefer Not to Say	3%	239

In Care or Care Leaver	Percent	Number of Respondents
Yes	5%	391
No	92%	7,394
Prefer Not to Say	3%	276

n= 8,142

If you are a national of another country, are you?

	Percent	Number of Respondents
A EU National	37%	447
A Refugee	7%	83
An Asylum Seeker	2%	21
A Student	16%	194
Other (e.g. on a working holiday visa)	16%	186
Prefer Not to Say	22%	269

n= 1,200

Appendix 2 - Preparing for the World of Work

Which of these have you received where you study?

	Overall	In School	College/Sixth Form
Face-to-face careers advice	**32%**	**27%**	**41%**
Careers lessons	**30%**	**32%**	**28%**
Careers fairs	**26%**	**20%**	**35%**
Employers visiting you where you study	**23%**	**20%**	**28%**
Access to online careers and job information	**21%**	**18%**	**26%**
Learning about careers in curriculum lessons	**19%**	**20%**	**17%**
Interview with a careers advisor	**18%**	**15%**	**23%**
Careers talks by employers	**15%**	**12%**	**19%**
CV workshops	**15%**	**8%**	**24%**
Mentor	**15%**	**11%**	**19%**
Visits to colleges	**15%**	**15%**	**16%**
None of the above	**14%**	**19%**	**8%**

	Overall	In School	College/Sixth Form
Apprentices visiting you where you study	**13%**	**12%**	**16%**
Mock interview sessions	**12%**	**9%**	**16%**
Enterprise activities	**8%**	**8%**	**8%**
Visits to employers' sites	**8%**	**6%**	**10%**
Visits to careers shows (e.g. Skills Show or The Big Bang)	**6%**	**5%**	**8%**
Mock assessment centres	**4%**	**4%**	**4%**
Access to labour market information	**3%**	**2%**	**3%**
Other - Write In	**3%**	**4%**	**2%**
Visits to training providers	**2%**	**2%**	**3%**

n= 2,780

In the last 12 months, how often were the following options discussed with you where you are currently studying?

	Never	Once	Twice	3 Times	4 Times	5 Times or More
Joining your education setting's Sixth Form	49%	14%	10%	7%	3%	17%
Attending College	31%	15%	11%	11%	5%	27%
Going to University	31%	16%	10%	10%	6%	27%
Apprenticeships	32%	15%	13%	12%	5%	23%
Getting a Job	25%	14%	12%	12%	8%	29%
Starting your own business	57%	16%	10%	7%	3%	7%
Accessing supported employment	72%	10%	7%	5%	2%	4%
How to access Jobcentre Plus support	84%	5%	4%	3%	2%	2%
A Levels	36%	12%	10%	8%	5%	29%
T Levels	61%	13%	7%	7%	3%	9%
GCSEs	20%	10%	8%	7%	4%	51%
Nationals	83%	5%	4%	3%	1%	4%
Highers	78%	6%	5%	4%	2%	5%

	Never	Once	Twice	3 Times	4 Times	5 Times or More
Technical qualifications (e.g BTECs, Cambridge National)	57%	12%	9%	7%	4%	11%
NVQs	86%	5%	3%	2%	1%	3%
Foundation Courses	67%	11%	8%	5%	3%	6%
Entry level certificates	72%	9%	6%	5%	3%	5%

n= 1,613

In the last 12 months, how useful have you found the following for careers support?

	Not Useful At All or Slightly Useful	Moderately Useful	Extremely Useful or Very Useful	Not Used
Parents/ guardians/ carers	15%	27%	50%	8%
Teachers	30%	31%	28%	11%
Friends	27%	26%	24%	23%
Careers advisor	23%	16%	12%	48%
Careers and employability websites	24%	18%	14%	44%

	Not Useful At All or Slightly Useful	Moderately Useful	Extremely Useful or Very Useful	Not Used
Social media	28%	24%	21%	27%
Online forums	24%	15%	8%	53%
Mentor	22%	11%	7%	60%
Youth worker	22%	12%	5%	61%
National careers service	22%	12%	5%	61%
People I know who are employed	22%	16%	15%	47%
Siblings/other relatives	21%	20%	23%	36%
Apps	24%	19%	13%	44%

Who do you think is responsible for supporting you to develop employability skills?

	2024	2025
Parents/guardians	77%	60%
Teachers	72%	58%
Careers Advisor	33%	26%
Friends	15%	15%

Data continues on the following page →

	2024	2025
Careers and employability websites	**7%**	**7%**
Family/relatives	**N/A**	**7%**
Mentor	**5%**	**5%**
Other - Write in	**5%**	**5%**
Siblings	**5%**	**5%**
Social media	**3%**	**5%**
National Careers Service	**5%**	**4%**
Family friends	**3%**	**3%**
Other people I know who are employed	**2%**	**3%**
Jobcentre Plus	**3%**	**2%**
Online forums	**1%**	**2%**

n= 2,533

Appendix 3 - Perceptions on Skills, Employment and the Future

**When thinking about work and finding a job, what, if any, do you think your barriers might be?**

	2024	2025
Lack of work experience	47%	47%
Anxiety	43%	30%
There are no jobs where I live	26%	26%
I have no contacts	19%	20%
Travel/location	17%	18%
Not having the right skills	20%	17%
Mental health challenges	21%	14%
There are no jobs at all	8%	11%
The cost of getting to work	8%	9%
Other - write in	9%	7%
Depression	8%	5%
Racial discrimination	3%	4%

Data continues on the following page →

	2024	2025
Physical disability	5%	4%
Impact on family	3%	3%
Not having any role models	4%	3%
Carer responsibilities	1%	2%
Criminal record	1%	2%
Losing benefits	2%	2%
Sexual orientation discrimination	4%	2%
Alcohol or drug dependency	1%	1%
Being a single parent	1%	1%

n= 2,453

Results are in

YOUTH VOICE CENSUS
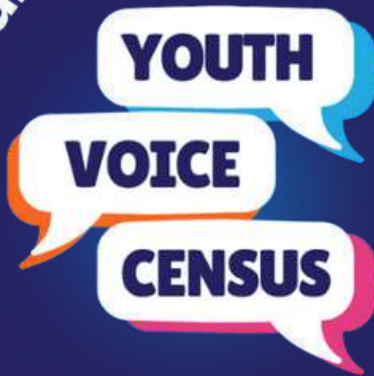
Youth Employment UK

Our policy and research work has positioned us as a leading youth employment expert. We understand "what works" across this broad and complex landscape and provide support and best practice guidance for all of those working with and for young people.

Having established strong partnerships across government departments and maintaining our role as secretariat for the All Party Parliamentary Group for Youth Employment we have been able to represent our membership at a range of round-tables, conferences, parliamentary events and within specific projects.

Our leading research includes the Annual Youth Voice Census and the Role of the family in social mobility, we have been instrumental in producing key research from inquiries and presenting these reports to Ministers, MPs and civil servants.

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