“Today’s teenagers are more engaged with social issues than ever …”

INTRODUCING GENERATION CITIZEN

Jonathan Birdwell
Mona Bani

DEMOS

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The views expressed in this report represent those of the authors and not necessarily the NCS Trust. As ever, any omissions and errors are solely the authors own.

Jonathan Birdwell
Mona Bani
February 2014

About NCS

NCS (National Citizen Service) is a once–in-a-lifetime opportunity open to all 15 to 17 year olds across England and Northern Ireland. It is a unique two or three week full-time programme focused around fun and discovery, plus 30 hours committed to a community project that benefits both young people and society. On this government-backed programme, participants build skills for work and life, while taking on new challenges and adventures, making new friends, learning new skills and contributing to their community.

Government backing means that it costs just £50 or less to take part in NCS and bursaries are available on a case-by-case basis. Support is provided for young people with additional needs.

NCS represents great value for money for parents as participants spend up to two weeks away from home with all meals and activities covered. The first week is spent at an outward-bound facility participating in activities such as abseiling, water rafting and canoeing. The second week teens live away from home, typically at local university halls of residence, learning how to be self-sufficient, developing new skills and finding out more about the needs of their local community.

Taking place outside school/term time, teens can sign up for the part-residential experience and participate in either the spring, summer or autumn programmes. In every programme they will experience four sections that focus on personal and social development including leadership, teamwork and communication skills. Not only do 16 and 17 year olds have the chance to give something back, but it also looks great on CVs and helps with job, college and university applications, building future aspirations. NCS is now recognised by UCAS and taking part is a sought after addition to any CV.

In 2013, NCS Trust, an independent social enterprise, was established to manage NCS and execute the ambitious expansion of the government backed programme.

Foreword

We're on the cusp of a new generation. Today's teenagers will shape the future of our country and our planet. If you believed the headlines, our outlook would look distinctly gloomy.

We know the next generation faces some real challenges. They've grown up in the shadow of the financial crash and live in a globally competitive world. From the media debate it sometimes seems that our teens are at best feckless and at worst feral.

The teenagers I meet through National Citizen Service (NCS) couldn't be further from these stereotypes. They are committed, connected and caring. They are responding to the challenges of the future not just by buckling down but also by giving back. During the three years of NCS, over 70,000 teens have come together in their holidays to put back over one million hours to make their mark in their communities.

When I spoke out against the stereotypes, the cynics told me that the people signing up for NCS were the exception: the good apples in a rotten basket. At NCS, we wanted to prove them wrong and that's why we commissioned this report from Demos.

The report shows the true face of the next generation. On just about every indicator, the popular stereotypes are wrong. Today's teenagers are shown to be behaving more responsibly when it comes to drink and drugs; caring more about social issues both at home and abroad; and being more willing to get out and take action to make their world a better place.

Critically, the report reveals that teenagers and their teachers want more opportunities for young people to engage in social action. Both groups recognise the profound impact that social action can have in terms of skills for life and work – confidence, wellbeing, teamwork and leadership. I believe that NCS can play a unique role as a social action programme that brings young people from different backgrounds together in common purpose – building bridges across divides and ladders to opportunity. That's why more and more of us believe that NCS should be a national institution available to every teenager.

The false stereotypes about the next generation are not only grossly unfair, they are also holding them back. Something incredibly powerful is happening among the teenagers of our country. If we understand it and harness its power, then we will all reap the benefits. That's why I'm proud to be setting the record straight and introducing Generation Citizen.

Michael Lynas
CEO, NCS Trust

Executive summary

A new generation emerges every 15 to 20 years. Teenagers today (between the ages of 14 and 17) are the last cohorts of Generation Y (figure 1). In this report, we present the first ever look at this cohort in order to determine what insights we can derive about the next generation to come.

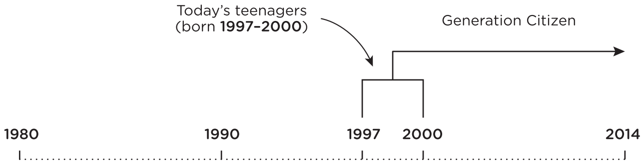
Teenagers today are 'digital natives'. Social media and new technologies have transformed the way that they view the world, politics and possibilities for the future. At the same time, they are growing up in the 'age of austerity': they face increasing education and housing costs as well as a rapidly changing and highly competitive labour market.

It has been argued that young people today are apathetic, selfish and narcissistic.[1] And yet, the research presented in this report shows that, contrary to negative stereotypes, today's teenagers are characterised by their tolerance, compassion and motivation to tackle social issues.

Teachers are overwhelmingly positive about them, describing teenagers as 'caring', 'enthusiastic' and 'hard working'. They are volunteering more. The Cabinet Office's Community Life Survey for 2012–13 showed that 16–19-year-olds reported substantial increases in annual formal and informal volunteering, up 16 and 15 percentage points respectively from 2010 to 2011.[2] They are also behaving more responsibly over alcohol and drugs than generations of teenagers over the past 15 years.

Our research suggests that teenagers are motivated to make a difference in their community but the tools they use and the approach they take is different from those of previous generations. They do not rely on politicians and others to solve the world's problems, but instead roll up their sleeves and power up their laptop and smartphone to get things done through crowd-sourced collaboration. They value bottom-up social action

Figure 1 **Timeline of Generation Y and the Generation Citizen subset**



1979–90 Thatcher Prime Minister

1980–85 Recession

1984–85 Miners' strike

1991 End of Cold War

1997 Labour landslide victory

1997 Kyoto Protocol

2000 UK GDP grows by 3%

1990–2000 US economic boom – 10 years of GDP growth

2001 9/11 terrorist attacks

2003 Iraq War

2004 Facebook founded & Google IPO

2005 7/7 terrorist attacks

2006 Twitter launched

2008 Banking crisis and recession

2010 Protests against tuition fee increases

2011 London riots

2011 Youth unemployment hits 1 million

and social enterprise over top-down politics. As digital natives, they are accustomed to speed and responsiveness and desire a politics that engages them at the same pace. If given the right opportunities and support, today's teenagers might just transform our notions and expectations of active citizenship.

Some have referred to the next generation as 'Generation C' because they will be the most 'connected' generation in history.[3] Our research suggests that the letter 'C' is apt for another reason: because this cohort could include the most active *citizens* we have seen in a generation. This report thus introduces the great generation that will shape the next century: Generation Citizen.

Findings

The research presented in this report is based on a new representative survey (n=1,000) and three focus groups of British teenagers between the ages of 14 and 17 years old. We also conducted a survey (n=500) and three focus groups with teachers.

Below we present the most interesting and surprising top ten findings to emerge from our research.

1 Today's teenagers are more engaged with social issues both globally and locally than previous generations of teenagers

Their access to knowledge and news through social media suggests that teenagers are highly aware and concerned about social issues:

- Four out of five teenagers in our survey (80 per cent) thought that their generation was more concerned about social issues than previous generations of teenagers.
- This view was also held by a majority of teachers: 56 per cent of teachers thought that 14- and 15-year-olds were more engaged in social issues than their generation was, and 66 per cent of teachers thought this about 16- and 17-year-olds.

Teachers also thought that those in the current generation of teenagers were more active volunteering than their own generation:

- A large majority –88 per cent – of teachers in our survey (two-thirds of whom were between 30 and 50 years old) thought that current teenagers were more likely or as likely as their generation was to volunteer for good causes and organisations, with almost half of teachers saying they were more likely to do so.

Thus, the views of teachers strongly suggest that the current generation of teenagers are highly active and motivated citizens.

2 Teenagers see themselves as less engaged with traditional politics than previous generations of teenagers, and teachers agree

While teenagers are seen as more engaged in social issues than previous generations, they do not think that traditional politics is the most effective means of tackling social issues:

- Only one in three teenagers (35 per cent) felt that their generation was more interested in politics than previous generations of teenagers.
- Teachers shared this view. Only one in five thought that 14- and 15-year-old teenagers were more engaged with politics, while just under one in three thought that 16- and 17-year-old teenagers were more engaged with politics.
- Moreover, only half of teenagers thought that traditional politics was 'an effective way to respond' to their concerns.
- At the same time, young people overwhelmingly disagreed with Russell Brand's recent call not to vote:[4] 84 per cent of teenagers said they intended to vote when they turn 18.

Against the backdrop of falling turnout among first time voters in recent elections, some commentators have asserted that young people are irreversibly turned off politics. Our research confirms that Generation Citizen are less engaged with traditional politics. However, the research also suggests that young people are open to being engaged in politics and still see voting as a civic duty. Moreover, young people are committed to effecting change through digital engagement, social action and social enterprise.

3 Teenagers see charities and social enterprises, alongside personal volunteering and social action, as the most important agents for positive change in their local communities

Our survey suggests that teenagers have a stronger sense of individual responsibility and are looking to other actors in society instead of government to make a difference:

- Asked which organisations and groups of individuals they thought made the most positive impact in their communities, three out of five teenagers cited 'charities and social enterprises' compared with just one in ten who cited politicians.

- Approximately one in three teenagers felt that campaigners (32 per cent) and businesses (31 per cent) had the most positive impact in their communities.
- Moreover, two-thirds (64 per cent) of teenagers thought that by getting involved themselves they could make a positive difference to social issues in their local community.

4 Today's teenagers are highly active through volunteering and other forms of social action

The Community Life Survey for 2012–13 showed a significant increase in annual formal and informal volunteering rates among 16–19-year-olds compared with 2010–11.[5] While our figures are not directly comparable for methodological reasons, our survey also demonstrates high levels of volunteering and civic engagement among teenagers:

- Almost two-fifths (37 per cent) of teenagers reported that they had volunteered either formally (through an organisation or group) or informally (of their own initiative) in the past year.
- Over half of teenagers (56 per cent) reported that they had raised money for charity; 35 per cent had signed a petition to support a local or national issues; and a third (33 per cent) helped an organisation such as a local charity.
- Three out of four teenagers (76 per cent) – including many who did not report volunteering – expressed a desire to participate in a high quality social action and volunteering programme.

5 Teenagers who volunteered reported higher levels of wellbeing, social cohesion and employability

Our survey adds to the large body of evidence showing that young people who do volunteer overwhelmingly report a wide range of benefits:

- Among those who did volunteer, over 90 per cent said it made them 'feel better about themselves', 'care more about others',

'work better in a team' or 'improved their self-confidence'.
- Over 80 per cent said it improved their future employment chances and made them want to volunteer more.
- Over 70 per cent thought it improved their motivation in school and desire for future education.
- The views of these teenagers also suggests that their experience volunteering helped forge social mixing and cohesion, by changing teenagers' views of other groups in society (79 per cent) and helped to create friendships with people they would not have otherwise met (86 per cent). This is especially important because UK schools have been deemed among the 'most socially segregated in the developed world'.[6]

Teachers also overwhelmingly see the benefit of volunteering and social action programmes for teenagers:

- Nearly all (90 per cent) of the teachers agreed that taking part in social action or volunteering has inherent benefits for teenagers' personal and social development.
- Nearly as many (88 per cent) thought that social action or volunteering is the best way for their pupils to improve their soft skills and build character, which are beneficial for the workplace.
- More than two-thirds (70 per cent) reported that taking part in social action or volunteering led to better engagement with social issues, while over 60 per cent reported that it enhanced the school's relationship with the community and led to stronger and more cohesive communities.
- Just under half of teachers (45 per cent) reported that social action made young people become better learners as a result of taking part.

While many teachers in our sample thought that their schools encouraged active citizenship, a very large majority expressed desire for further support in encouraging their students to participate in social action:

- Over 90 per cent said they would welcome more support with 35 per cent expressing a strong desire for more support.

6 Although teenagers prefer real world engagement in their communities, teenagers are increasingly using social media for social action

Young people are increasingly turning to social media for civic engagement. In our survey, substantial proportions of teenagers reported using social media for activities like raising awareness and funds for charity, and expressing support for political causes:

- More than one in three (38 per cent) said they had signed a petition online; 29 per cent had used Facebook or Twitter to raise awareness of a cause; 21 per cent had 'liked' a political cause or group that they agreed with; and 19 per cent had donated money online (eg through a JustGiving website).
- This trend is already being noticed by teachers: 57 per cent say that they noticed teenagers are using social media to become involved in politics and good causes.

The online space will become an increasingly important platform for young people to engage in politics and social issues:

- A large majority (87 per cent) of teenagers agreed that using social media was an effective way to gain momentum behind social issues, while 71 per cent believed that social media were just as important as more traditional ways for raising awareness of social issues.
- The majority of teachers (84 per cent) also believe that these new networks and forms of engagement are or can be just as effective as traditional forms of engagement (eg joining a political party or voting).

We argue below that it is vital that organisations that work with young people keep pace with this trend.

7 Getting a job, living costs and bullying concern teenagers the most

As noted above, there is increasing focus from media and policy makers about the challenges that younger generations are facing. For our research, we wanted to know which social issues concerned teenagers the most. We found that the social issues that teenagers are most concerned about are:

- unemployment and access to work (43 per cent)
- living costs (34 per cent)
- bullying (28 per cent)
- crime (27per cent)
- student debt (23 per cent)

However, there were notable differences across the different age groups:

- As teenagers grow older, concerns over getting a job and living costs steadily increase, with around 50 per cent of 16- and 17-year-olds citing getting a job as their number one concern and concerns over student debt also increasing.
- Bullying was the biggest concern among 14-year-olds, with over 40 per cent citing it as a top three concern, followed by crime and getting a job. Image pressures and drugs and alcohol abuse were also more likely to be cited by 14-year-olds than other ages.
- The findings from our focus groups suggest that immigration and integration concern young people, particularly in the northwest of England.

Teachers' views about what teenagers are concerned about generally mirrors those of teenagers themselves:

- Teachers view image pressures and bullying as the biggest issues facing students between 14 and 15 years of age at key stage 4; they view student debt as one of the biggest issues facing 16- and 17-year-olds.

8 Teenagers see negative media portrayals as having a detrimental impact on their lives and future

Faced with these challenges it is important that teenagers do not feel they are on the margins of society. However, our research suggests that teenagers – and teachers – feel they are too often negatively stereotyped and this affects how they engage with the world around them:

- A large majority (81 per cent) of teenagers considered that they were negatively presented in the media and this was having an adverse impact on their lives:
    - 85 per cent thought it affected employment opportunities
    - 62 per cent thought it made them less willing to reach out to those outside of their peer group
    - 58 per cent thought that it made them less actively engaged in their community.

Teachers also considered that the media portray young people in an exceedingly negative light:

- Two-thirds of teachers thought that the media portray teenagers as 'lacking in respect'; 58 per cent thought that teenagers were portrayed as 'lazy'; and just over half thought they were portrayed as 'anti-social'.

Moreover, they disagreed strongly with these stereotypes and were much more likely to describe teenagers in compellingly positive terms:

- The most common characteristics of today's teenagers according to teachers were 'caring' (48 per cent), 'enthusiastic' (44 per cent) and 'hard working' (43 per cent) – in direct contrast to media stereotypes.

As we argue in our recommendations below, politicians and the media in particular need to lead the way in establishing a new, more positive narrative about young people that encourages, supports and champions them.

9 Teenagers desire careers that change the world for the better and help people less fortunate and the majority are ethical consumers

In addition to their motivation to volunteer, teenagers continue to follow in the footsteps of Generation Y and express their social conscience through the choices they make as consumers and in the careers that they aspire to:

- Three out of four teenagers (77 per cent) said that being happy with the ethical record of their employer was essential.
- A further 70 per cent said that it was important that they were involved in a career that helped change the world for the better.
- Three out of five teenagers specifically aspired to a career that helped people less fortunate than themselves.
- While making money was still important to most (83 per cent of) teenagers, possibly reflecting their concerns about living costs, they are clearly still strongly motivated for careers that go above and beyond financial security.

Teenagers also continue to reflect a community conscience through their choices as consumers:

- Our survey also found that a majority of today's teenagers (61 per cent) considers a company's ethical record and reputation before buying a product or service.

10 British teenagers cite inspirational leaders and celebrities who use their fame for positive action as role models

Finally, we wanted to know who in the public eye teenagers look up to most as role models:

- Nelson Mandela was by far the most cited individual, followed by Barack Obama and David Beckham.
- While one in four teenagers mentioned celebrities, such as singers, actors, TV presenters, comedians and footballers as their role models, nearly two-thirds of them did not meet this preconception and those who were cited were primarily those who have used their fame to back worthwhile social

causes. The actress Jennifer Lawrence, for example, was often cited as promoting a healthy body image and David Beckham was described as being a family man alongside his thriving career.

- Teenagers also cited a wide variety of other role models, including politicians, royals, parents, teachers, entrepreneurs and people who do something worthwhile for society.
- One in five teenagers stated that they had no role models in the public eye and many stated specifically that they did not admire celebrities.

Recommendations

With the right support, the next generation can become confident and active citizens with the motivation and know-how to effect real and lasting change. To facilitate this and capitalise on the positive shift we are seeing, Demos makes the following recommendations.

Policy makers and the media should lead the way in establishing a new, more positive narrative about the next generation

The findings of our research provide the basis for a more positive and true-to-reality narrative to describe the next generation. This is important because both teachers and teenagers believe that this negative portrayal is having a detrimental impact on how young people engage with the world around them and possibly prevents them from getting jobs. Politicians and the media can help to shift the narrative by more frequently and consistently highlighting the positive actions and attributes of the next generation. We challenge the media in particular to give young people more of a voice on the social issues of the day – particularly those with relevance to young people. As the British Youth Council puts it, 'Talk to us not about us.' The *Evening Standard* Dispossessed Fund and Ladder for London campaigns are excellent examples of how the media can have a positive impact on young people. We also challenge wider youth-sector organisations to help create a new narrative around young people that focuses on hope, empowerment and investment in their potential.

Social action should be at the heart of every young person's experience

Our research shows that volunteering and social action can have huge benefits for teenagers' confidence, motivation and personal development. It could also help to engage them with the political process, build skills that will help them compete in a competitive labour market, and encourage more integrated communities. While many young people are already involved in social action, the opportunity to take part is still unevenly spread throughout the country. Some schools have embraced social action, but not all have the capacity to do so and our research shows that teachers want more support. The recently launched Step Up To Serve campaign, of which National Citizen Service (NCS) is a part, aims to increase the number of young people taking part in social action to 50 per cent by 2020.[7] While all three political parties have supported Step Up To Serve, it is vital that they commit sufficient and ambitious levels of investment in social action in their 2015 election manifestoes.

Teachers need more support and opportunities to take part in social action, and those that do should be given more recognition

As part of the Step Up To Serve campaign, Ofsted has pledged to ensure that schools are assessed on the provision of opportunities for taking part in social action. While this type of signal from above is important, it has to be underlined by greater support for schools to take part in social action. Our research shows that there is also a significant desire among teachers to take part in social action, but that they need more support to do so. Part of this support can come from engagement with external organisations that specialise in delivering social action. This is important because, while schools have a key role to play in supporting social action, social action must also take part outside the school environment and in local communities. Past Demos research suggests that schools that embrace social action stress the importance of forging partnerships with outside organisations providing social action, such as NCS and Citizens UK.[8]

More radical reforms should also be considered, such as embedding social action into school curriculums. The experience in Canada and Scotland, where social action has been integrated into the curriculum, suggests that this can lead to high levels of engagement, with both young people and teachers recognising the benefits.

Employers and the CBI should continue to champion the value of volunteering and social action and give greater emphasis to employer-supported volunteering schemes and integrating social action into apprenticeships

Data from the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) show that employers value employees who are flexible, entrepreneurial and comfortable working in teams with people from different backgrounds. The NatCen evaluation of NCS shows that social action programmes can help endow young people with the attitudes and soft skills that employers value. Some employers have begun giving more attention to the importance of social action in their corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities and recruitment. For example, the CBI, National Grid, O2 and Linklaters among others have made pledges and commitments to the Step Up To Serve campaign. These pledges will help raise the profile of social action within the private sector as a valuable form of non-formal learning and skills development. Yet, more needs to be done to get employers to mainstream and create a culture of volunteering across their organisations: in particular, to recognise the benefits of employer-supported volunteering from a human resources perspective of skills and continuing personal development. Greater consideration should be given to how social action activities can be integrated into apprenticeships.

Government and political parties need to give greater recognition to the new methods of social engagement that appeal to younger generations, and consider reforms to channel this energy into traditional political engagement

As Universities Minister David Willets has argued, politicians need to find a way to speak directly to young people about the issues they care about.[9] To do this, government and politicians need to give greater recognition to the mechanisms that young people use to express their voice and make positive change in their communities. Our research suggests that this includes everything from participating in social action and volunteering, becoming involved in youth-led charities and political forums like the UK Youth Parliament, and participating in a variety of social media campaigns. All of these new forms of expression and engagement offer avenues for politicians to engage with young people through the methods that they believe will have greatest impact. Yet, while these new methods of engagement need to be given greater weight, the fact remains that voting and registering to vote is still the primary way in which citizens can ensure that their voice is heard. More needs to be done to ensure that young people are registering to vote and understanding the importance of doing so. Our research suggests that participating in social action, community organising and 'pavement politics' is essential to help bridge this gap and potentially motivate young people to engage in traditional politics.

The next generation is already presenting itself as having the potential to lead a revolution in active citizen engagement. We as a society must recognise this and give credit where credit is due, but also give support where support is needed. Doing this will help to ensure that those in the next generation live up to the name that we have given them in this report: Generation Citizen.

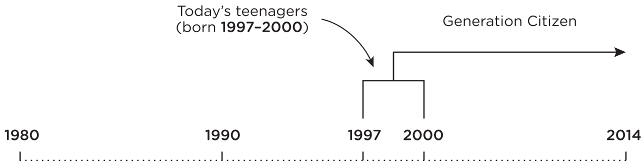
INTRODUCTION

This report is about teenagers today: the last cohort of Generation Y (also known as the 'Millennials'). These young people – between the ages of 14 and 17 – are the link between Generation Y and the next generation (figure 2). Like every cohort at the beginning or the end of a generation, they share much in common with their peers in Generation Y but may also differ in important ways. Their defining feature is the fact that they are 'digital natives': unfamiliar with the world prior to Facebook, Google, Amazon, iPhones and Android devices. The internet, smartphones and other technological innovations have brought unlimited access to information and knowledge and an incredible ability to communicate, network and organise. This ability is having a huge impact on how people view and engage with the world around them. Some commentators have begun referring to the next generation as Generation 'C', because of their *connectedness*.

Today's teenagers are also facing significant challenges, in part because they are growing up in the shadow of the 2008 global recession. Following the fiscal crisis in the UK, and the Eurozone sovereign debt crisis across Europe, they are growing up in a 'age of austerity' where public services in particular are expected to do more with less. According to Duffy and Cameron, there is now 'universal agreement that the youngest – Generation Y and those who come after them – are expected to bear the brunt of the current economic problems and now cannot expect an automatically better future'.[10]

The 2008 recession, combined with longer-term changes to the labour market as a result of technology and globalisation, are presenting particular challenges for young people. The labour market in the UK is now described as an hourglass, with jobs clustered at the high and low skilled ends of the spectrum, and

Figure 2 **Timeline of key events for Generation Y**



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2004 Facebook founded & Google IPO

2005 7/7 terrorist attacks

2006 Twitter launched

2008 Banking crisis and recession

2010 Protests against tuition fee increases

2011 London riots

2011 Youth unemployment hits 1 million

few opportunities in the middle.[11] A study conducted by the London School of Economics and the Resolution Foundation found that the number of middle paid roles fell by 170,000 between 2008 and 2012, while the number of low and high paid workers rose by 190,000 to 7.76 million and 140,000 to 6.79 million respectively.[12]

As jobs in the middle tier have disappeared, and there is an increasing number of young people attending university, some graduates are ending up working in low paying and low skilled jobs that are likely to be part time or temporary.[13] Those without a university degree are having an even tougher time. According to the latest figures covering August to October 2013, over a quarter of a million 16–24-year-olds have been unemployed for 12 months or more, which is 28 per cent of all unemployed 16–24-year-olds.[14] Research shows that long periods of unemployment can have a scarring effect, which lasts well into adulthood and is estimated to cost the UK £2.9 billion per year in the future.[15] As the Prince's Trust and Macquarie recently highlighted, long-term unemployment, and the stress related to getting a job, is impacting on many young peoples' mental health and leading to high rates of depression.[16] Teenagers also have to contend with the consequences of increasingly living their lives online. Cyber bullying and image pressures are now pervasive issues, leading to increasing incidences of eating disorders, depression, self-harming and even suicide.

And yet, as we argue below, many young people appear to be responding to these challenges in an incredibly positive way, by volunteering more in their communities, working to create new businesses themselves, and turning away from alcohol and drugs.

Introducing Generation Citizen

In this report we present the most detailed picture to date of the youngest group of Generation Y. Our research builds on the recent generational research produced by Ipsos MORI's Social Research Institute and published in October 2013. In their paper in *Understanding Society*, Bobby Duffy and Daniel Cameron make a compelling argument for the importance of generational research to inform policy making. They highlight a number of interesting findings about how Generation Y differs from previous generations.[17] In this report we drill down even further to determine what we can learn about those young people who are currently teenagers and who will serve as the bridge to the next generation.

Generation Y – and teenagers in particular – are often negatively characterised as narcissistic, selfish, apathetic and uninterested in politics and social issues. It is too often assumed that they are more concerned with themselves than with others.

Yet there are a number of indicators that suggest that the younger cohort of Generation Y might be undergoing a change in attitude. The most recent Cabinet Office Community Life Survey showed a huge jump in the percentage of teenagers reporting volunteering compared with 2010-11, suggesting that teenagers could be more motivated than ever to get involved in their communities.[18] Data also suggest that teenagers and young people are increasingly choosing to abstain from drugs and alcohol.

This report

In order to explore the defining attitudes, characteristics and aspirations of today's teenagers, Demos has undertaken a review of existing evidence alongside new primary research with teenagers and teachers. In addition to asking teenagers themselves, teachers are well placed to provide insights into the current generation of teenagers compared with previous generations. We commissioned a new survey of 1,000 14–17-year-olds in England and Northern Ireland, as well as a survey of 500 secondary school teachers across the UK. We also conducted three focus groups with teenagers and three focus groups with teachers in order to explore issues in greater detail.

Our research suggests that teenagers are more tolerant, compassionate and likely to volunteer in their communities than previous generations. Yet, their conception of active citizenship differs from previous generations, and the practice of traditional party politics may need to undergo substantial reforms to keep pace.

It is time for society to reassess its image of young people today. They are not the lazy, apathetic, binge drinkers that they are often portrayed to be. This negative stereotype is not only incorrect; it is having a detrimental impact on the way that young people engage with the world around them. It may also be negatively impacting their chances of getting a job. Contrary to this image, they are sober, industrious, entrepreneurial and motivated to make society a fairer and more just place.

1 Defining Generation Y

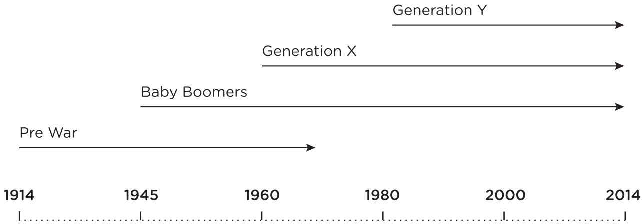
In this chapter we briefly outline the defining characteristics of Generation Y and the generations that preceded them, including Generation X, Baby Boomers and the Prewar Generation, based on previous research. Figure 3 presents a timeline of the generations – and the key events they faced – over the past 100 years.

As Skinner et al point out in a recent report, generations share values and characteristics as a result of their shared experiences. These are known as 'cohort effects' and are distinctly different from the change of views, values and opinions that social scientists observe as people get older (known as 'lifecycle effects').[19] There are also changes in society that impact on all generations, which are known as 'period effects', and include things like war or the introduction of the internet.

The dominant experience of those who grew up in the first half of the twentieth century, the so-called Prewar Generation (also known as the Lost Generation in the UK and the Traditionals or Great Generation in the US), was of war, hardship, sacrifice, death and loss. The wars and the Great Depression profoundly shaped their attitudes, values and aspirations. As a result, the Prewar Generation is considered to have worked hard, been unselfish and to have valued security and stability foremost.

The Baby Boomers were born in the aftermath of the Second World War as men and women returned from war to a time of peace and prosperity. Although the threat of the Soviet Union and Communism remained present, Baby Boomers grew up at a time when there was unprecedented growth in wealth among the middle classes, and new and affordable technologies such as the automobile and television, among other home comforts in the 1950s. They also came of age with the rise of

Figure 3 **Generational timeline**



1914–18 World War I

1929 Great Depression

1939–45 World War II

1960s Birth of hippy movement

1960–75 Vietnam War

1963 MLK 'I have a dream speech' & JFK assassination

1968 MLK and RFK assassinations

1970–85 Recession

2001 9/11 terrorist attacks

2001 Launch of iPod

2003 Iraq War

2004 Facebook launched

2005 7/7 London bombings

2008 Banking crisis and recession

1945–60 Post-war economic boom

1953 Colour TV invented

1979–90 Thatcher Prime Minister

1984–85 Miners' strike

1991 Fall of the USSR and end of the Cold War

1990s Economic boom, US GDP grows 10 years in a row

rock'n'roll, counter cultural movements and the turmoil of the 1960s: Vietnam, civil rights, assassinations, birth control and 'free love'. They also valued hard work and financial stability, but began questioning authority and traditional values.

Their children, born between 1960 and 1980, were too young to experience the heady, hippy 60s, and instead came of age in the 1970s and 1980s. Known as Generation X, their experience was not so much free love, but rather the fallout from the 1960s, with economic recessions in the 1970s, and the dominance of free market capitalism and individualism of the Reagan and Thatcher 1980s. For those who were not on the side of the market, there was radical politics: strikes, protests and punk rock. Those in Generation X were also the shapers of the affluence of the 1990s, when the Cold War ended and a new period emerged, which was famously referred to as the 'end of history' because of the triumph of liberal democracy and free market capitalism.

By the time of September 11 2001, the youngest cohort of Generation X was coming out of university and entering the labour market. The early 2000s were marked by turmoil and debate around al Qaeda and the Iraq War, but also a booming economy and the rise of the internet, which would change everything in an incredibly short space of time. Within a matter of years, completely new companies such as Facebook, Google, Twitter, eBay, Apple, Microsoft and Amazon came to dominate our lives in a way that could not have been foreseen.

This brings us to Generation Y, known in the US as the Millennials. Generation Y is the generation born between the years 1980 and 2000. The authors of this report are both members of Generation Y: children of the 1980s, teenagers of the 1990s, and young adults in the 2000s. Much like the youngest members of Generation X, the experience of Generation Y was shaped by affluence and the emergence of new technologies, primarily the internet. The world that those in Generation Y (and the generation that follows them) face is one of unprecedented technological access and innovation and difficult challenges around unemployment.

The internet, smartphones and other technological innovations have brought unlimited information and knowledge and an incredible ability to communicate, network and organise. The ease with which we can access information, purchase or sell something, post a video for the world to see, or stay in touch with everyone we have ever known is shaping our attitudes and opinions in other areas. Because of these revolutions in convenience, it seems that we are more impatient than ever with the failures and shortcomings of other social and political institutions. Trust in politicians and the government – as measured by voter turnout and party membership – has been in decline for decades. The frustration and relative apathy that young people have towards government is possibly driven by the fact that they believe they can change the world using these new tools at a greater speed, and government has not maintained the same pace.

The current cohort of teenagers has also grown up in the shadow of the 2008 recession. Between the ages of 14 and 17 now, they were between 9 and 12 years old when the 2008 recession occurred. Although youth unemployment has been on the rise for the past decade it has been exacerbated by the recession: the latest figures from September to November 2013 show that it currently stands at approximately 920,000, or 20 per cent of 16–24-year-olds.[20] It is worth noting that the increasing percentage of young people remaining in full-time education pushes up the unemployment rate because the size of the economically active population is reduced, and therefore the unemployment rate increases. Nonetheless, commentators and policy makers alike agree that young people are facing challenges relating to high unemployment and under-employment, as well as the increasing costs of education and housing.[21]

Before presenting our research in the following chapters, we first briefly outline what previous research has shown about the characteristics of Generation Y.

Who are Generation Y?

Like those in all generations, members of Generation Y have both positive and negative characteristics. On the positive side of the ledger, previous research suggests that those in Generation Y are considered to be much more liberal and tolerant than generations before them. Research by Pew Research Center in the US describes them as 'confident, self-expressive, liberal, upbeat and open to change',[22] but other articles have described Generation Y as narcissistic, selfish and entitled.[23]

Of course, there is huge variation within these somewhat crude generational characterisations, and while most of them are suggested as cohort effects, there are also period and lifecycle effects at play. Clearly, someone born in 1982 has very different life experiences from someone born in 1995 – in particular, the way in which they view and engage technology and social media varies considerably. Yet, both are considered Generation Y. There are also obviously differences within generations that emerge out of socio-economic background, regional and cultural variations, and personalities. Nonetheless, everyone of a same age or time has some similar experiences, and they are thus shaped to some extent by those overall societal shifts.

A recent article on *Huffington Post* by Tim Urban of the blog Wait But Why struck a chord with a dissection of the Generation Y cohort.[24] At the time of writing this report, the article had almost 1.2 million 'likes' and over 250,000 'shares' on Facebook and over 17,000 retweets.

Urban argues that many within Generation Y – particularly those in the middle classes – are frustrated and suffer from depression because of the mismatch between their ambitious expectations and the reality they find themselves in. Urban argues that Baby Boomers – the parents of Generation Y – were focused on working hard over a long period of time with economic security as their primary goal. With many achieving this objective, they wanted more for their children and encouraged them to be more ambitious, 'with a sense of optimism and unbounded possibility,' argues Urban. It was assumed that the trend for the next generation to be better off than the previous one would simply continue. However, rising youth unemployment exacerbated by the 2008 recession is leading many commentators to conclude that the next two generations may be worse off than their parents.

Cal Newport, professor at Georgetown University, argues that those in Generation Y have been badly guided by older generations. She contends that excessive use of the career advice to 'follow your passion' directed at young people during the 1990s and 2000s was misleading, creating disappointment when perceptions of instant gratification in one's chosen career are not realised.[25] Social media, which allow us to track and compare ourselves constantly to our peers, some of whom may be more successful than us, exacerbates feelings of anxiety and inadequacy for many, which can often lead to depression.[26]

However, research has shown that once in employment those in Generation Y are more likely to value teamwork and collective action, are adaptable to change, embrace diversity, are confident with independent working, and desire a good work–life balance.

Gen Y in the workplace

Much of the research into generational differences comes from the perspective of workplace management literature, which aims to help managers understand how best to motivate and work with colleagues of different ages. It often portrays Generation Y workers as a confident, highly educated generation, entrepreneurial and result driven.[27] They also value constant and immediate feedback more than previous generations, which suggests they have a greater resilience and willingness to self-reflect and develop.

A 2008 report by Anick Tolbize from the University of Minnesota found that job titles and authority do not hold the same sway over Gen Y as they did over previous generations. The oldest generation – Traditionals (or the Prewar Generation as described above) – are defined by their conservative views and reliance on structure and order. They believe in a hierarchy where respect is based on experience accrued through age.[28]

Baby Boomers are also seen as more likely to respect authority and institutions, and to consider job security as most important when it comes to their career ambitions, similar to the Prewar Generation before them. Younger generations, particularly Generation Y, are seen as less deferential towards authority, more sceptical about institutions, and desiring careers that offer fulfilment beyond financial security.

The report also stated that those in the younger generation are restless and see themselves as progressing through multiple companies, jobs and even occupations during the course of their lives. For example, only 20 per cent of Generation Y said they wanted to stay with the same organisation for the rest of their life (versus 40 per cent of Generation X, 65 per cent of Baby Boomers and 70 per cent of the Prewar Generation). They are also impatient for promotion and rapid advancement.[29]

Finally, unlike the Prewar Generation and Baby Boomers, who were likely to display blind loyalty to an organisation regardless of its values, Generation Y's loyalty and commitment is more dependent on whether they believe in the idea, cause or product of that organisation.[30] As we show in the following chapters, the same is true of today's teenagers although they face a highly competitive labour market.

Gen Y and politics

It is well known that views about and engagement with politics changes with age, but recent Ipsos MORI work has pointed out that there also appear to be specific 'cohort effects', which can be seen in Generation Y's views towards politics.[31]

One of the most cited characteristics of Generation Y is their increasing disillusionment in the political system and in public institutions. In his article 'The Outsiders: How can Millennials change Washington if they hate it?', Ron Fournier talks about the shift in attitudes towards politics among young people in the US. He describes Generation Y as more tolerant of diversity and less politically ideological than their parents.[32]

Fournier argues that Millennials or Generation Y do not hold the same regard for the institutions of government as their parents and prefer more personal, entrepreneurial and less formalised ways of exercising their civic duty. As a result, Fournier discusses the very real possibility of 'brain drain' within politics and the civil service as Baby Boomers approach retirement and Millennials or Generation Y look elsewhere in order to change the world.

The fact that Generation Y is less ideological and politically engaged than previous generations can be seen in the decline in political party membership and affiliation. While there is a generational gap among those who support a political party throughout Europe, it is most extreme in the UK.[33] This may in part be because young people have the impression that politicians generally do not speak to their concerns. A survey conducted for the Demos report *Back to the Future* showed the extent to which young people believed that the government made policy with their age group in mind: 54 per cent of young people surveyed believed that the government considered 36–50-year-olds most when formulating policy, 35 per cent believed the government prioritised 21–35-year-olds, while just 7 per cent considered that the government primarily thought about their own age group (11–20-year-olds) when making decisions.[34] As David Willetts (who wrote about generations in his book *The Pinch*) has admitted, 'the challenge for us politicians is to directly speak to [young people] as a group and directly address their interests'.[35]

Recent research from Demos and Ipsos MORI has also shown the extent to which those in Generation Y believe more in individual responsibility than those in previous generations and have more sceptical attitudes towards the welfare state. A survey conducted for the report *Generation Strains* found that the percentage of the population agreeing with the statement 'the government should spend more money on welfare benefits for the poor, even if it leads to higher taxes' peaked in 1989 and has been on a downward trajectory ever since.[36] The report argues that Generation Y is more likely than other cohorts to believe the role of the state should be less about managing the risks that individuals face and more about providing opportunities, but this appears less to do with younger generations being less compassionate and more with their scepticism towards whether top-down, centralised government can monitor social requirements effectively and efficiently.

Another survey conducted by Ipsos MORI shows a shift in attitudes towards the welfare state. Pride in the welfare state, as expected, is highest among the Prewar Generation. The survey found that while seven in ten of the Prewar Generation say they are proud of the creation of the welfare state, this is only true of one in four of those in of Generation Y,[37] but the same research showed that these views were not driven by a lack of compassion. In fact, young people were more likely to prioritise spending on pensions over unemployment benefits, the latter of course being more relevant to their own situation.[38]

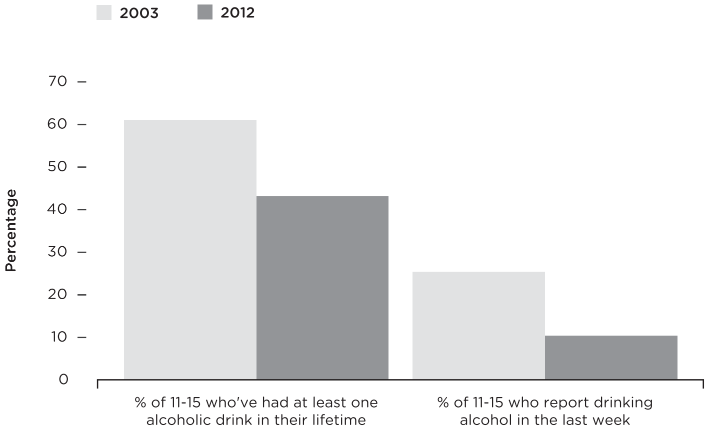
These findings are supported by the Demos report *Back to the Future*, which found that young people prioritised welfare spending on the elderly, feeling that they had earned it after years of paying taxes and working hard.[39] The fact that young people gave precedence to the needs of the elderly above their own, despite being the generation hardest hit by the current economic climate, suggests that far from being selfish, Generation Y may be categorised by altruism and respect for the elderly.

Gen Y on alcohol and drugs

The other significant change we are seeing in young people is a decline in the rates of harmful drinking and drug taking. Despite various reports highlighting a youth culture characterised by excess,[40] recent research has shown that alcohol consumption and drug use among young people is actually on a downward trend. Figure 4 shows research conducted by NatCen in 2012, which found that 43 per cent of pupils aged 11–15 reported having at least one alcoholic drink in their lifetime, which is a decline from 61 per cent in 2003. Similarly, only 10 per cent reported drinking alcohol in the last week compared with 25 per cent in 2003.[41]

A survey by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) identified a similar trend among 16–24-year-old men and women (figure 5). In 2010, 17 per cent of women drank more than six units on their heaviest day of drinking, down from 27 per cent who drank at this level in 2005. The survey found that 24 per cent of men drank more than eight units on their heaviest drinking day in 2010, down from 32 per cent in 2005. Other research shows that some young people are choosing not to drink alcohol at all, as the result of factors including seeing its harmful effects, the prevalence of violence and fighting related to drinking, its high cost, past negative experiences and the media's portrayal of alcohol.[43]

Figure 4 **The number of young people drinking alcohol in the UK, 2003 and 2012**

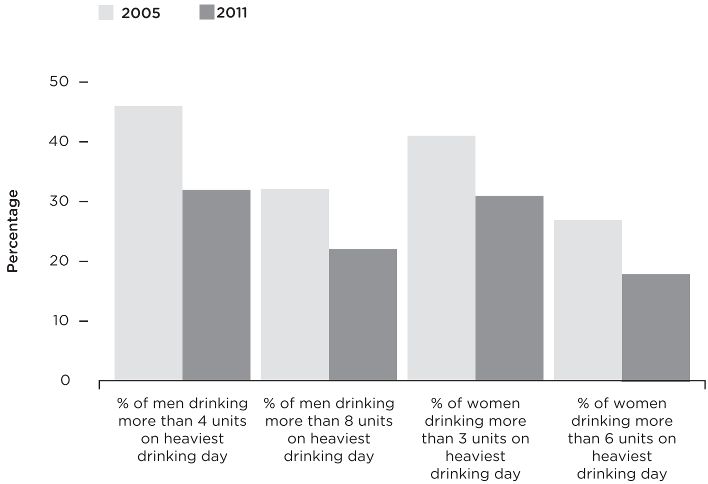


Source: NatCen[42]

While these trends have been occurring over the past ten years, there was a sharp drop in 2009 and 2010 among 11–15-year-olds, suggesting that lack of employment opportunities, low wages and rises in tuition fees may be contributing to the lower levels of drinking by young people.[45] Professor Fiona Measham from Durham University has argued that Generation Y simply wants to be different from the one before.[46] Fraser Nelson of the *Spectator* recently drew a parallel between these trends and the TV programme *Absolutely Fabulous*, where the sober daughter Saffy was constantly embarrassed by her mother's drinking and drug taking. Declines in harmful drinking levels among younger age groups also coincide with the rise of social media and technology, which may be providing diversionary activities away from drinking. It is also notable that the percentage of under 16s who are British Muslim – and thus forbidden to drink by their religion – is now 8 per cent compared with 5 per cent in 2001.

Drug use among young people, particularly in the UK, is following a similar pattern. Over the past year reports and

Figure 5 **Indicators of heavy drinking among 16–24-year-olds, 2005 and 2011**



Source: ONS[44]

surveys have shown that drug use is 'going out of fashion'.[47] According to a 2012 NatCen survey drug use among 11–15-year-olds has also decreased from 29 per cent in 2001 to 17 per cent in 2012.[48] The 2011 European School Survey Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs (ESPAD) report, based on surveys of 16-year-old students, found that between 1995 and 2011, there was a 13 per cent decrease in the number that had tried illicit drugs.[49] Reports have pointed to the high cost of drugs, young people's lack of money and the consequences of drug use as factors that are contributing to this decline, reasons similar to those given to explain the reduction in harmful drinking among young people discussed above.[50] Demos analysis also suggests that changing demographics and the rise of social media as a diversionary activity are potentially influential in this decline. Further research is needed, however, to determine if young people are actively choosing to abstain from alcohol and drugs as a conscious response to some of the challenges they face (highlighted above) around education and employment.

The next generation: Generation Citizen

With the last of Generation Y now entering adulthood, we are on the cusp of a new generation. While the research above highlights some of the defining characteristics of Gen Y, there has been little research looking at young people who are the last cohort of Generation Y and the first cohort of the next generation. At the tail end of Generation Y, they inevitably share many of the characteristics described above. But they may also be different in surprising and important ways. What we are told about the youngest cohort of Generation Y often comes from the media, and it tends to be negative.

In the chapters that follow we present some of the first research ever looking exclusively at the current generation of teenagers.

FINDINGS: INTRODUCING GENERATION CITIZEN

In next four chapters we present the findings from our surveys and focus groups with teenagers and teachers. For teenagers, we commissioned Populus Data Solutions to undertake a bespoke survey of 1,000 14–17-year-olds in England and Northern Ireland. This was then supplemented by three focus groups with teenagers at three different schools in the UK: one local-authority-maintained school in South Yorkshire, one local-authority-maintained school in Liverpool and one independent girls school in London. In total, 38 teenagers took part in our focus groups: 13 boys and 25 girls.

In addition to our research with teenagers, we commissioned a separate survey of teachers across the UK. This survey was undertaken by Schoolzone and obtained a sample size of 500. We also conducted three focus groups with teachers in the same schools in which we conducted focus groups with teenagers. In total, 10 teachers participated in our focus groups.

A detailed explanation of our methodology is included in the technical appendix at the back of this report.

2 The impact of negative media portrayals

As a society, our perception of the attitudes and characteristics of teenagers comes primarily from media. It is commonly stated that the media tend to present an unduly negative impression of teenagers.

A study by Ipsos MORI for Young People Now analysed newspapers for a week in 2005 and found that 57 per cent of stories about youth were negative, with 30 per cent neutral and only 12 per cent positive. The biggest proportion of stories (two out of five) were focused on crime, vandalism and anti-social behaviour.[51] Women in Journalism conducted a more extensive survey of newspapers over a year, focusing on stories about teenage boys. They similarly found a prevalence of negative stories, with more than half (4,374) of the 8,269 surveyed stories related to crime. According to the report 'teenagers were referred to variously (in descending order of frequency) as yobs, thugs, sick, feral, hoodie [sic], louts, heartless, evil, frightening, scum, monsters, inhuman and threatening'.[52]

To explore more recent descriptions of young people, we used word cloud software to explore UK newspaper articles online for the past ten years. We conducted a quick search of six newspapers – the *Guardian*, the *Telegraph*, the *Times*, the *Sun*, the *Daily Mail* and the *Daily Mirror* – for stories containing either 'young people' or 'teenagers'. Out of the prominent words listed, those most common across publications included 'crime (six mentions), those related to alcohol and drunkenness (eleven mentions), smoking and drugs (six mentions), and sex and pregnancy (five mentions). Some of the most frequently occurring words and phrases included 'binge drinking', 'yobs', 'immature', 'riots', 'crime' and 'alcohol'.

Fear of youth is nothing new. In an analysis of anti-social youth in Britain throughout history, Dr Abigail Wills notes that recent concerns about young peoples' primarily deal with 'the decline in mutual respect and social cohesion, the dominance of anti-social behaviour, materialism and the cult of celebrity'.[53] She goes on to argue that all generations have 'ardently believed that an unprecedented "crisis" in youth behaviour is taking place' when in fact there is no evidence to suggest that youth are becoming more immoral. She argues that it is such views that often lead to mistrust between generations.

Negative stereotypes holding young people back

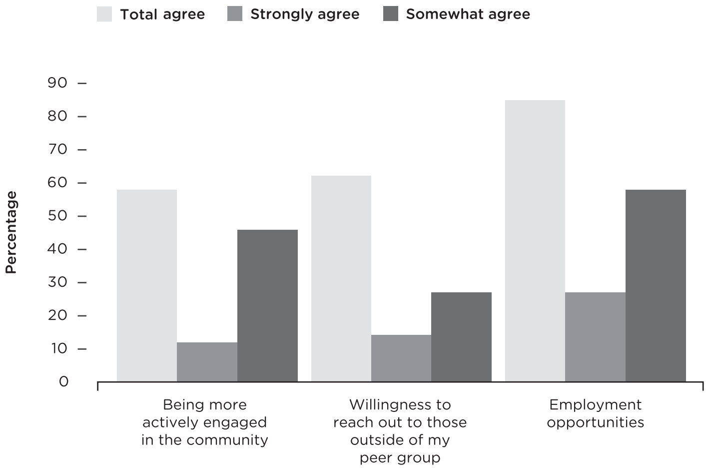
These views about young people are also problematic because our research shows that a majority of teenagers believe that negative stereotypes are having a detrimental impact on how they engage with the wider world and their employability.

Among the teenagers who responded to our survey, the overwhelming majority (81 per cent) felt that they were negatively presented in the media. Teachers also thought that the image of teenagers presented by the media was highly negative and contrary to the way teenagers actually behave. Most important is the impact that these negative stereotypes might be having on the way teenagers engage with the world around them.

Our survey found that over half of the teenagers thought that negative media portrayals made them less active in their communities (58 per cent) and less willing to reach out to those outside of their peer group (62 per cent). Most importantly, four out of five teenagers (85 per cent) considered that it harmed their opportunities for employment, and one in four teenagers felt strongly that this was the case (figure 6).

The same views were in evidence in our focus groups with teenagers. Participants unanimously agreed that the portrayal of teenagers was negative and largely incorrect, although some conceded that some stereotypes had some truth behind them. One pupil summed up the general consensus across the three schools by saying that 'a majority are judged based on a minority'. They suggested that some teenagers were driven to some of the negative behaviours highlighted by the media (eg drugs and alcohol, crime, teen pregnancy) because 'there's

Figure 6 **The extent to which teenagers think the negative media portrayal influences their involvement in the community, reaching out to people outside their peer group, and their employment opportunities**



Source: Demos and Populus survey of teenagers, Dec 2013

nothing to do at our age'. Others blamed these negative behaviours on the way that they were treated by adults and the media reflecting the views above about the self-reinforcing impact of negative stereotypes. One pupil said they were 'aware that we face more problems now than previous generations' but that the portrayal of young people as apathetic was not correct.

Teachers' views

Teachers similarly believed that the media present teenagers in a highly negative light. The most frequently mentioned views offered by teachers on how the media portray young people were 'lacking respect' (68 per cent), 'lazy' (58 per cent), 'anti-social' (54 per cent), 'lacking direction' (53 per cent) and 'apathetic' (48 per cent). Only 3 per cent of teachers thought the media portrayed young people as either ‘empathetic’, ‘engaged’, ‘community minded’ or ‘enthusiastic’. Yet, as figure 7 demonstrates, this is precisely how teachers themselves tended to see them.

The same views were expressed in our focus groups with teachers. All of the teachers from the three schools believed that young people have a negative reputation that is not deserved; they also felt that where the reputation has some truth behind it, it is because young people have it tough at the moment with few opportunities or things to do. A teacher from the local-authority-maintained school in South Yorkshire summed up the consensus by commenting that in relation to young people, ‘the media belittles them’ and gives the impression everything is ‘all doom and gloom’. Teachers from the local authority school in Liverpool took issue with the media descriptions of teenagers as ‘lazy’, ‘obnoxious’, ‘greedy’ and ‘expectant’.

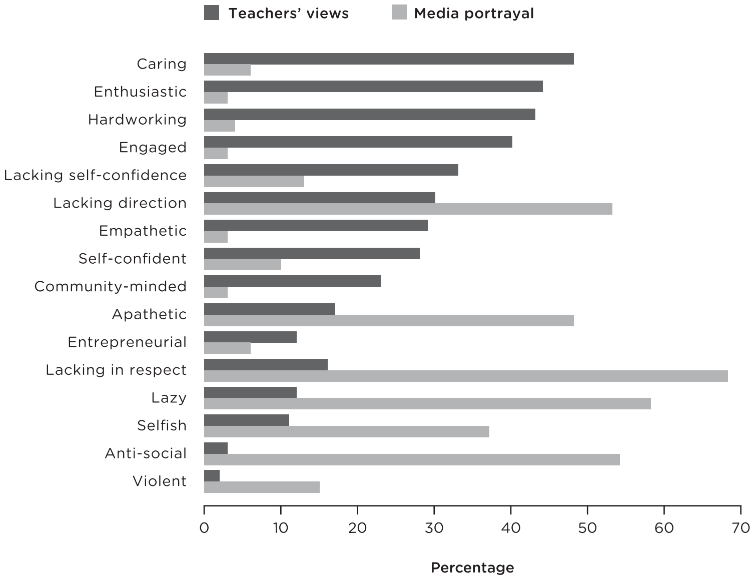
In contrast with media stereotypes, in our survey the most common responses of teachers when asked to describe teenagers were overwhelmingly positive. The most common answers included ‘caring’ (48 per cent), ‘enthusiastic’ (44 per cent), ‘hard working’ (43 per cent) and ‘engaged’ (40 per cent). Figure 7 shows just how divergent the views of teachers on the characteristics of teenagers are from media portrayals of them. In our focus groups, by far the most positive attribute given to teenagers by teachers was their tolerance of diversity.

We asked teachers to describe the negative characteristics of teenagers. The most common responses were that they lacked self-confidence (33 per cent) and direction (30 per cent). The least common, in direct contrast to the media’s portrayal, were that they were ‘violent’ (2 per cent) and ‘anti-social’ (3 per cent).

Our research suggests that participating in social action and volunteering can help to build confidence, direction and motivation among young people.

In our focus groups, teachers tended to describe teenagers positively and said they had energy, dynamism and potential, but that often this was not put to good use or they were perhaps discouraged. Teachers from one school with a higher proportion of disadvantaged students than the other schools included in our

Figure 7 **The characteristics of teenagers as viewed by their teachers compared with the media's portrayal of them**



n=500
Source: Demos and Schoolzone survey of teachers, Dec 2013

research noted particular concern about their pupils lack of political understanding: 'Young people in this area have very little knowledge, awareness or interest in politics.' They considered that their pupils did not fully understand the value of money and were more in tune with local issues than global ones.

While negative media stories are somewhat inevitable because of the nature of news, we argue below that more needs to be done to push back against negative stereotypes and highlight the more positive (and true) characteristics of young people. Given their views, there is clearly a role for teachers in this debate. Politicians and the media need to lead the way in creating a more positive narrative for the next generation.

3 Social versus political engagement

One of the key questions that we aimed to uncover with our research was the relationship between young people's engagement with social issues on the one hand, and traditional politics on the other. One of the dominant narratives about younger generations is that they are disillusioned with politicians and forms of traditional political engagement. This has led some commentators to conclude that younger generations are lazy, apathetic and self-centred. Our research suggests that this is not the case but that there is instead a growing gap between young people's interest in social issues (which is increasing) and their engagement via traditional politics (which is decreasing).

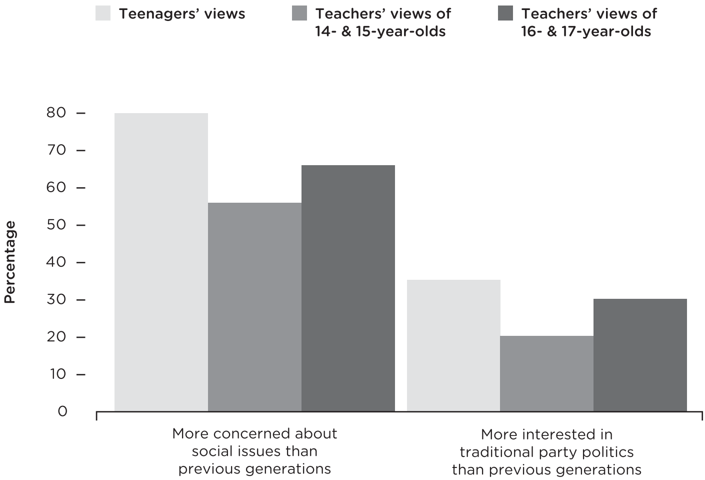
While we also reference objective measures of social and political engagement, we were interested to know the extent to which young people considered that they engage with social matters, and the teachers' views on this. Notably, their views were largely consistent.

Four out of five teenagers in our survey (80 per cent) thought that their generation was more concerned about social issues than previous generations of teenagers and the majority of teachers shared this view: 56 per cent of teachers thought that 14- and 15-year-olds were more engaged in these issues than teenagers of their age in the past, and even more – 66 per cent – thought this of 16- and 17-year-olds (figure 8).

This higher level of engagement is very likely because young people are more aware about social issues affecting all parts of the world because of 24-hour news and the internet.

In our survey teenagers reported that they frequently discuss issues affecting their local community – as well as global issues. Three out of four teenagers reported discussing social issues at least once a month while two out of five reported doing so weekly.

Figure 8 **Teenagers' and teachers' views on whether teenagers engage with social issues and traditional party politics more than those of previous generations**



Source: Demos and Populus survey of teenagers, Dec 2013; Demos and Schoolzone survey teachers, Dec 2013

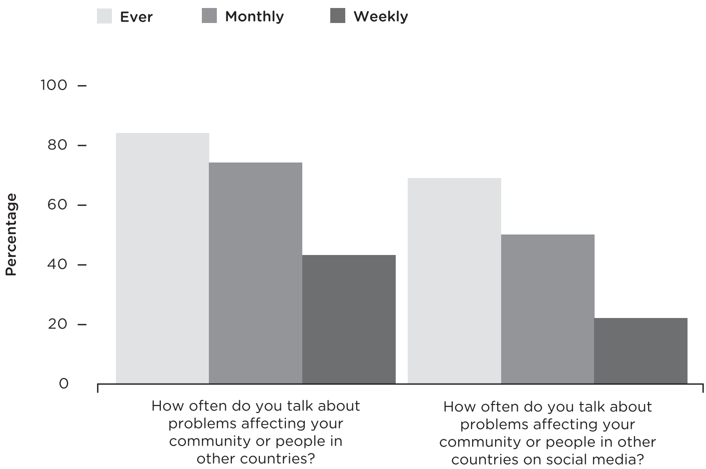
Many teenagers were also having these discussions online: half of teenagers said they discussed social issues online at least once a month, while one in five said they did so weekly (figure 9).

We discuss teenagers' use of social media in this manner in more detail below.

Political engagement

As we hypothesised at the outset of this research, the high level of interest in social issues among teenagers is not mirrored by an interest or engagement in politics through traditional methods.

Figure 9 **How often teenagers say they discuss social issues face to face and on social media**

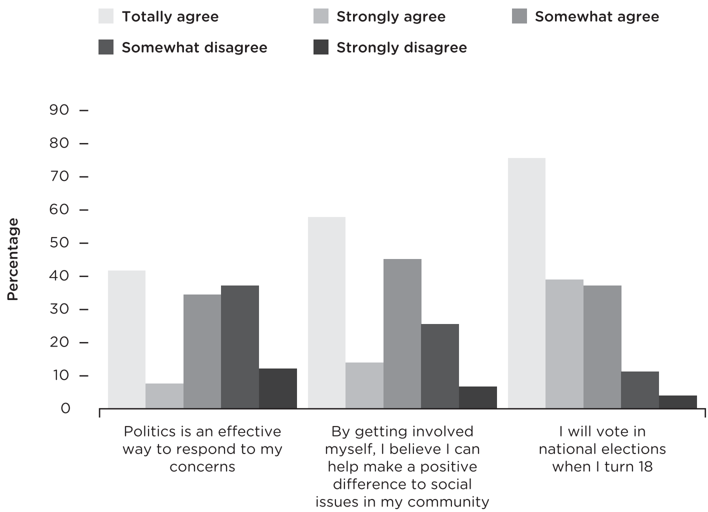


Source: Demos and Populus survey of teenagers, Dec 2013

Compared with the 80 per cent of teenagers who thought their generation was more interested in social issues than previous generations of teenagers, only one in three teenagers (35 per cent) thought that their generation was more interested in politics than previous generations of teenagers. Teachers agreed. Only one in five considered that 14- and 15-year-old teenagers were more engaged with politics than their generation was as teenagers, while just under one in three thought that 16- and 17-year-old teenagers were more engaged with politics than their generation was as teenagers (figure 8).

However, it is worth noting that disillusionment among young people towards politics is not necessarily as high as is sometimes assumed. Although half of teenagers do not consider politics to be 'an effective way to respond to' their concerns, almost two-thirds of teenagers thought they could make a positive difference by getting involved themselves (figure 10).

Figure 10 **Teenagers' views about political efficacy**



Source: Demos and Populus survey of teenagers, Dec 2013

Frequently cited recent research from the Hansard Society showed that only 12 per cent of 18–24-year-olds said they would definitely vote in an election if it were held tomorrow compared with 40 per cent of the total population.[54] Our research posed the question in a different manner and presents a more positive view. We asked teenagers whether they agreed or disagreed with the statement 'I will vote in national elections when I turn 18'. A significant majority (84 per cent) of 14–17-year-olds agreed that they would vote in national elections when they turned 18. This intention was highest among 15-year-olds (87 per cent) and lowest – although still quite high – among 16-year-olds (80 per cent).

This suggests that – despite some disillusionment – young people do not necessarily subscribe to the 'do not vote' philosophy of Russell Brand, as demonstrated in his interview on

Newsnight in October 2013.[55] Yet we know that the actual voter turnout among young people has been in decline since 1997 when it was 57 per cent, dropping to 40 per cent in 2001, 38 per cent in 2005, and then back up somewhat to 44 per cent in 2010.[56] Thus it seems that there are at best approximately 30 per cent of young people who intend to vote when they are teenagers, but do not actually end up voting in reality.

This could be because, when it comes time to vote, young people feel they do not know enough about the candidates to make a decision, or because they do not think their vote will make a difference. The most frequently mentioned reasons for not voting given by the teenagers in our survey were 'not knowing enough about politics to make informed decisions or an informed decision' (39 per cent) and feeling as if 'it doesn't change anything' (38 per cent).

These attitudes to voting were also reflected in our focus groups. Very few pupils knew how to describe what the concept 'politics' meant. Politics was often described as 'government' or 'how the country is run', or students mentioned specific politicians like 'David Cameron'. The students who were more engaged emphasised that politics is important because, as one student said, 'even if you don't understand… it does affects your life'. Even in the London school, where students showed considerable interest and confidence discussing social issues, there was little engagement with politics. None of the students considered themselves supporters of political parties, felt they knew much about politics, or posted anything political through social media. The biggest consensus was that no one would listen to their views anyway, people have been trying for years and nothing has changed and, as one pupil from a school in South Yorkshire observed about politics, 'it's all lies'.

Young people were more confident discussing social issues than politics. Pupils from the West Yorkshire school saw British society as 'unfair' and spoke about the need to address the lack of jobs, immigration, racism and integration (some for, some against). A few referred to the need to improve public services. Students from the London school were more confident in articulating what social issues mattered to them: more care for the elderly, provisions to combat loneliness, the need to embrace feminism and the need to integrate British society, one student arguing that 'more should be done in integrating people from different backgrounds'. The two most frequently cited role models were Nelson Mandela and Barack Obama, discussed below, which demonstrates that this generation is tolerant towards diversity and concerned about community cohesion. As we argue below in our recommendations, politicians need to recognise that young people are incredibly interested in and sometimes passionate about social issues; the key is to address this by persuading them to vote.

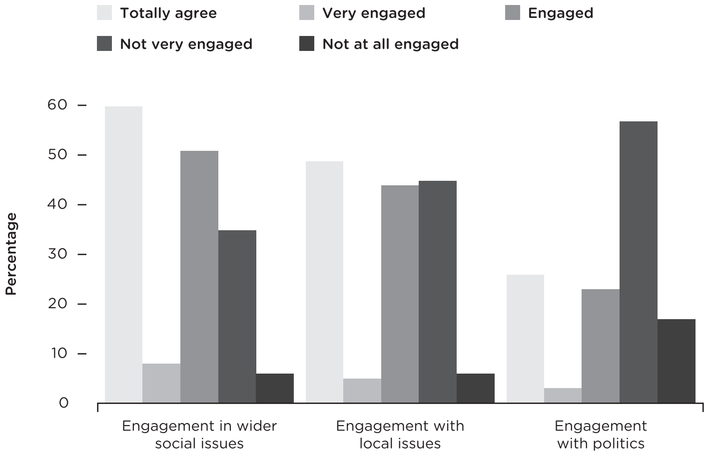
Teachers thought that teenagers were more engaged with social issues than with traditional politics (figure 11). Just under half of teachers thought teenagers are involved in local social issues and up to 60 per cent thought they engaged in wider and local social issues; about half this proportion thought teenagers engaged with politics. Almost 60 per cent of teachers reported that teenagers were 'not very engaged' with politics.

Teachers in our focus groups felt that students' lack of engagement with politics was due to a lack of confidence and students not feeling they were listened to or that their actions would make a difference. A teacher at one of our non-London schools said that 'the parental generation doesn't encourage young people' to get engaged in politics. On the other hand, in the London school, teachers spoke of how their pupils are engaged in wide-ranging social issues involving global human rights, education for women and water aid. As we argue below, encouraging young people to take part in volunteering and social action that is fun and of high quality could be an effective way of showing them that they do have a voice and can make a difference.

Comparing this generation to previous ones

In order to get a sense about how the current generation of teenagers compares with previous generations, we asked teachers to compare them on a series of attitudes and actions (figure 12). Again, our findings suggest that teachers view this generation as

Figure 11 **Teachers' views about teenagers engagement levels with social issues and politics**

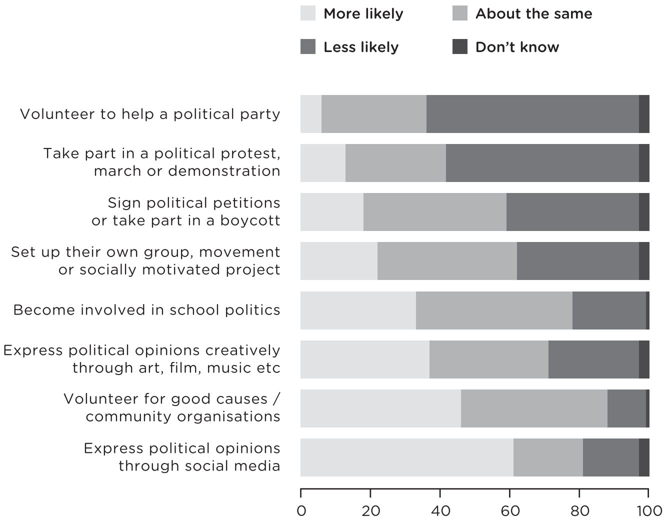


Source: Demos and Schoolzone survey of teachers, Dec 2013

being more likely to get involved in a range of civic activities, which does not include key traditional forms of political engagement. Indeed the only two activities that most teachers thought today's teenagers were less likely to do than those in the past was 'volunteer for political party' and 'take part in a political protest, march and demonstration'.

Yet, further mirroring the research into political engagement described above, teachers do not think young people are completely unengaged. In fact, teachers still view teenagers as engaged, particularly in those activities that can be accomplished through social media. For example, 59 per cent felt that the current generation was either more likely or as likely as previous generations to 'sign political petitions or take part in a boycott' and 62 per cent thought they were more likely or as likely to 'set up their own group, movement or socially motivated group'.

Figure 12 **Teachers' views about the current generation of teenagers at key stage 4 compared with their own generation at that age**



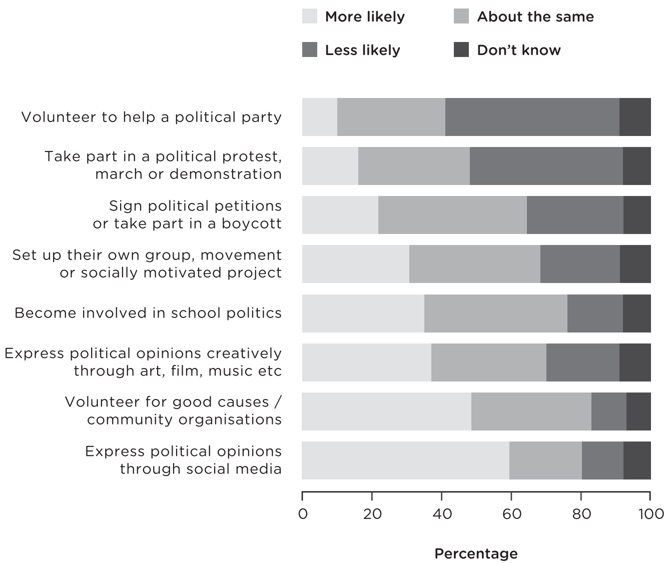
Source: Demos and Schoolzone survey of teachers, Dec 2013

Most surprising is the fact that teachers overwhelmingly thought that teenagers were more engaged in volunteering for organisations and good causes than their own generation was when they were teenagers: 88 per cent thought that current teenagers were more likely or as likely as previous generations to do so, with almost half of teachers saying they were more likely.

This is a strong endorsement of the view that the next generation could lead a revival of volunteering and active citizenship, and further underlines the findings from the 2012–2013 Community Life Survey showing substantial increases in formal and informal volunteering among 16–19-year-olds.[57]

The results were almost identical for teachers of students at key stage 5, except that teachers thought the older age group was more likely than their generation was to 'set up their own group,

Figure 13 **Teachers' views about the current generation of teenagers at key stage 5 compared with their own generation at that age**



Source: Demos and Schoolzone survey of teachers, Dec 2013

movement or socially motivated project' (31 per cent more likely versus 23 per cent less likely) (figure 13).

These findings suggest that although young people are not engaging with traditional forms of political engagement, they are using alternative means to express themselves and engage with the world around them. The two most prominent ways of doing this are by using social media and through social action or volunteering (discussed below). However, young people are also expressing their social consciences through their choices as consumers and in their ambitions for their future careers.

Before discussing how young people are using these new forms of engagement, in the next chapter we look at the social issues they are particularly concerned about, and the people they are most likely to look up to.

4 Issues facing teenagers and who they look up to

The world that today's teenagers face is a contradiction of unprecedented technological access and innovation and real challenges around an 'hourglass' labour market, looming fiscal problems tied to an increasingly older population and higher education and housing costs.

Changes to the labour market as a result of technology and globalisation are hitting young people the hardest. According to the most recent OECD figures, youth unemployment in the UK rose from 13.6 per cent in December 2007 to 20.9 per cent in March 2012.[58] Similarly, data from the ONS showed that the percentage increase in unemployment between the beginning of 2009 and the end of 2013 was more than twice as high among 18–24-year-olds as the rest of the working age population (20 per cent compared with the national average of 7.1 per cent).[59]

Demos showed in its report *Youth Labour's Lost* that the youth unemployment rate has actually been rising in the UK since 2004 and has been around twice as high as that for the rest of the working age population for the past two decades.[60] Recently it has grown even more: in autumn 2011 it was around three times higher than that for the rest of the working age population.[61] Unemployment among the younger generation is particularly concerning as the impacts on income and skills development are likely to be longer lasting.[62]

This rise in youth unemployment is largely due to increasing numbers remaining in education (which reduces the total number who are economically active) as well the UK's changing industrial profile. Over the past 30 years, craft-based manufacturing industries in the UK have declined and service and financial sectors have increased. Before the 1980s, craft-based manufacturing industries provided good, liveable incomes for relatively medium to low skilled workers. The labour market in the UK is now more reminiscent of an hourglass, with jobs clustered at the high and low skilled ends of the spectrum, and very few employment opportunities in the middle – jobs in administration and skilled trade.[63]

This has created greater competition among young people for educated, elite jobs, but it has also put strains on young people who do not wish to be academic, but are forced to stay in education for longer in order to compete. Wallerstein et al argue that this has brought increasing alienation and disillusionment to those who are not at the top of academic competition.[64]

Moreover, just as education is becoming ever more important in a highly competitive labour market, it is also becoming increasingly expensive. Thus, many young people face a difficult decision when considering higher education: attend university and take on debt with no guarantee of employment afterwards, or face competing in a labour market where university degrees are often the baseline criteria for job applicants. While there has been a rise in the number of apprenticeships and alternatives to university in recent years, issues around higher education, debt and the labour market will continue to dominate headlines, particularly for younger generations.

The other most commonly discussed issues facing the next generation have to do with the fiscal crisis related to an increasingly older population that is living for longer. According to recent reports there will be at least 600,000 people turning 65 every year until 2016. Pensions Minister Steven Webb has said that 'people are now living long, healthier lives and most 65-year-olds can expect to live until their late 80s'.[65] Consequently more people will claim pensions, placing greater pressure on the shrinking younger generations to provide it.[66]

Young people are also bearing the brunt of declining incomes. Between 2008 and 2012 there was a 12 per cent decline in the median income for those in their 20s, while pensioners experienced an increase in their incomes. In an analysis for Ipsos MORI, Howker and Malik comment, 'it is not the rich who are getting richer so much as the old who are getting richer while the young are getting poorer'.[67] According to a 2012 report by the

Intergenerational Foundation, the younger generation will have to work longer hours and pay higher taxes, and will receive a much smaller pension.[68]

While journalists, politicians and academics frequently mention these issues, we wanted to explore the extent to which they are also at the forefront of young peoples' minds. Indeed, our research shows that getting a job and living costs are of greatest concern to teenagers, but many young people said they were concerned about bullying, image pressures and crime.

The highest levels of concern for teenagers were unemployment and access to work (43 per cent), living costs (34 per cent), bullying (28 per cent), crime (27 per cent) and student debt (23 per cent) (figure 14), with notable differences across the different age groups. Younger teens were more likely to cite concerns over bullying and image pressures, while older teens were more worried about unemployment and living costs.

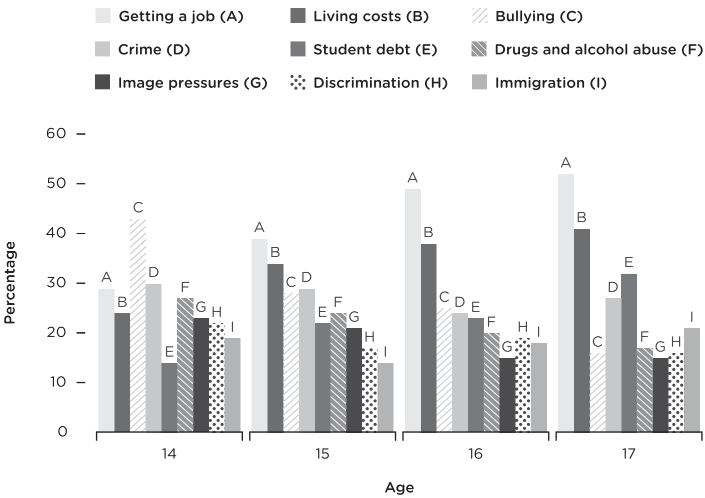
Bullying and image pressures

While social media are enabling young people to be more connected it is also increasing pressure on them to look and act a certain way. It is providing a whole new space in which bullying and image pressures have become magnified.

Bullying was the biggest concern among 14-year-olds, with over 40 per cent citing it as a top three concern, followed by crime and getting a job. Image pressures and drugs and alcohol abuse were also more likely to be cited by 14-year-olds than other ages.

The charity Childline recently raised concerns over a significant increase in cyberbullying. Childline reported 4,507 cases of cyberbullying in 2012–13 compared with 2,410 in 2011–12, as well as an increase in self-harming and depression among young people. According to Peter Wanless of the NSPCC, children today are much more likely to face issues around depression, self-harm and bullying than the primary issue for previous generations – protecting children from abuse from strangers.[69] As a result, there has been an increase in focus on cyberbullying in schools and by a range of charities, but more

Figure 14 **The top social issues that concern teenagers according to teenagers aged 14 to 17**



Source: Demos and Populus survey of teenagers, Dec 2013

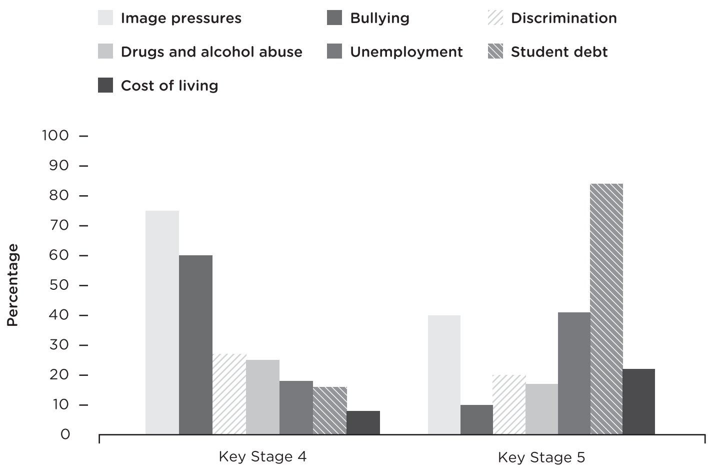
needs to be done to understand the phenomenon and how best to tackle it.

Getting a job and living costs

As teenagers grow older, concerns over getting a job, living costs and student debt steadily increase, with around 50 per cent of 16- and 17-year-olds citing getting a job as their number one concern.

These trends could suggest that teenagers get more confident and secure in themselves as they grow older, but become less secure about the future they have to face when they leave school. It could also be that the latter concerns are simply foremost in their minds at that age: 16- and 17-year-olds may still face pressures over bullying, their image and drug taking, but these issues take a backseat compared with unemployment, student debt and high living costs.

Figure 15 **The top social issues facing teenagers at key stages 4 and 5 according to teachers**



Source: Demos and Schoolzone survey of teachers, Dec 2013

A survey by the Prince's Trust Youth Index recently underlined the severe impact that long-term unemployment is having on the mental health of young people in the UK. Based on interviews with over 2,100 16–25-year-olds, the survey found that 40 per cent of young people who were unemployed were suffering from mental illness as a direct result of unemployment. Long-term unemployed young people were twice as likely to say that they had nothing to live for and twice as likely to be prescribed anti-depressants as unemployed young people.[70]

Perhaps not surprisingly, teachers' views about the issues facing teenagers generally mirror those of teenagers themselves. Teachers view image pressures and bullying as the biggest issues facing students at key stage 4 (ages 14 and 15). They overwhelmingly considered student debt to be one of the biggest issues facing students at key stage 5 (ages 16 and 17), with unemployment and image pressures tied for the second biggest concern for this age group (figure 15).

The findings from our focus groups also suggest that young people are concerned about immigration and integration, particularly in the northwest of England. Confronted with these issues, we wanted to know to whom young people looked for inspiration and guidance.

Who do teenagers look up to?

It is often assumed, based on stereotypes, that the current generation of teenagers is obsessed with celebrities and sports stars. In order to test this assumption in an open response question we asked teenagers who in the public eye they most respected and looked up to. Our results show that British teenagers are most likely to look up to inspirational leaders and celebrities who use their fame to promote good causes.

Overall, Nelson Mandela was by far the most cited individual, followed by Barack Obama and David Beckham. While a quarter of teenagers mentioned celebrities, such as singers, actors, TV presenters, comedians and footballers as their role models, nearly two-thirds of them did not cite any celebrities at all. Moreover, the celebrities who were cited were primarily those who have used their fame to back worthwhile social causes. For example, the actress Jennifer Lawrence was often cited because she promoted a healthy body image and David Beckham was described as being a family man alongside his thriving career. Teenagers cited a wide variety of other role models, including politicians, royals, parents, teachers, entrepreneurs and people who do something worthwhile for society. Perhaps most interestingly, one in five teenagers said they had no role models at all and often stated that they did not admire celebrities.

5 New forms of engagement – social media and social action

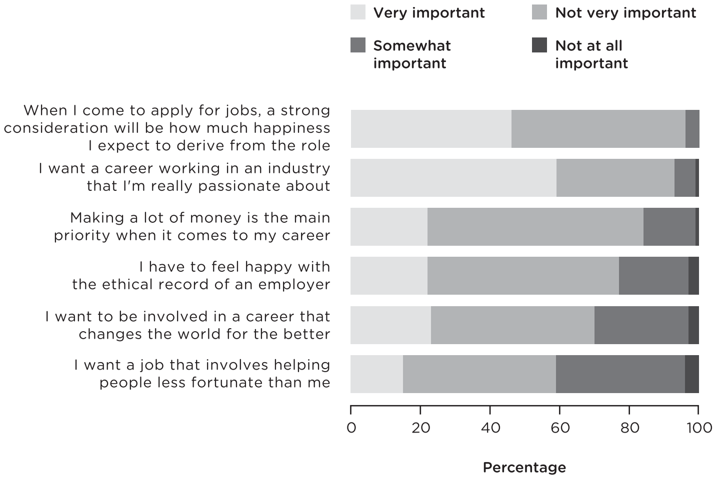
In this chapter we outline the new forms of engagement that young people are using to become engaged in civic and social issues. The two most prominent means are through social media and direct social action or volunteering. However, like their fellow cohorts in Generation Y, teenagers today are also still using their consumer and career choices to reflect their social conscience.

Generation X was the first generation to register a noticeable shift towards ethical consumerism, evidenced in the environmental and fair trade movements. This trend was continued by many in Generation Y and it seems today's teenagers are continuing down this road. Our survey found that a majority (61 per cent) of today's teenagers consider a company's ethical record and reputation before buying a product or service. This underlines how engrained social and community conscience is within Generation Y and teenagers specifically, and contradicts perceptions that teenagers are apathetic and selfish.

Attitudes to career and work

We also wanted to explore the attitudes of teenagers towards their future careers (figure 16). Those in Generation Y are notable for their desire for careers that they are passionate about and which are ethically good for society, in addition to being well paid and secure. The attitudes of teenagers conform to these views: 96 per cent of the respondents to our survey said that 'how much happiness they expect to derive from their role' was important to them. The second most important consideration for teenagers was whether the industry they were working in was something they were passionate about. Concerns over cost of living mentioned above appear to underline a sense of

Figure 16 **Young people's priorities when applying for jobs**



Source: Demos and Populus survey of teenagers, Dec 2013

pragmatism and concern for money among young people, but nonetheless, significant majorities of teenagers say it is important that they are happy with the ethical record of the employer (77 per cent), that their career helps change the world for the better (70 per cent) and that it helps people less fortunate (59 per cent). While girls were more likely to display these lofty aspirations, the majority of boys were found to feel similarly.

Our focus groups on the other hand suggest that the rise in the cost of education and living, combined with high levels of unemployment, might make the next generation more pragmatic and similar to older generations in valuing job security most.

Across the three focus groups, over half of the students knew what they wanted to do in their career and approximately two-thirds of the students said they wanted to go to university. This wish was highest among girls at the independent girls school and lowest in the local-authority-maintained school in South Yorkshire. Approximately a quarter of the students overall said they wanted to take an apprenticeship instead of going to university.

Across the groups, money and enjoying the job were the two most quoted important factors. Students at both the local-authority-maintained schools mentioned money first and enjoyment second, but girls at the independent girls school placed enjoyment first and mainly mentioned money on reflection.

Most students agreed that doing something of value to society would be desirable and some mentioned this possibility after some reflection, but this was not an immediate reaction. In most cases the students acknowledged that they would prefer a job that was of value to society, but recognised that getting a good job was hard enough and this might not be essential to them, potentially reflecting an increasing pragmatism in the face of a difficult labour market.

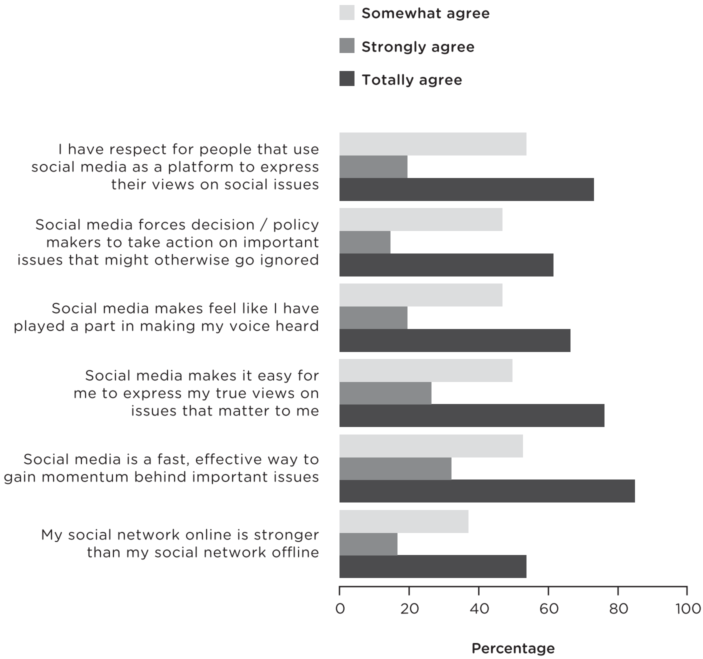
Generation C – new forms of engagement

The research in this report suggests that although Generation C are less likely to participate in traditional politics, they are not apathetic or uninterested. Our research suggests that they are increasingly looking to new ways of engaging with politics and social issues through social media and volunteering.

The growth of social media for social action

We noted above that the single biggest influence on the attitudes and actions of today's teenagers compared with previous generations is the fact that they have grown up their entire lives with the internet and social media. They are 'digital natives', and unlike older generations do not think there is a hard and fast distinction between the 'online' world and the 'offline' world. For them, these two forms of engagement are seamlessly intertwined. The ubiquity of technology and social media is giving rise to many of the issues concerning young people the most – discussed below – such as bullying and image pressures. But it is also giving young people the opportunity to learn more about the world around them, connect with people with similar

Figure 17 **Teenagers' views about social media**

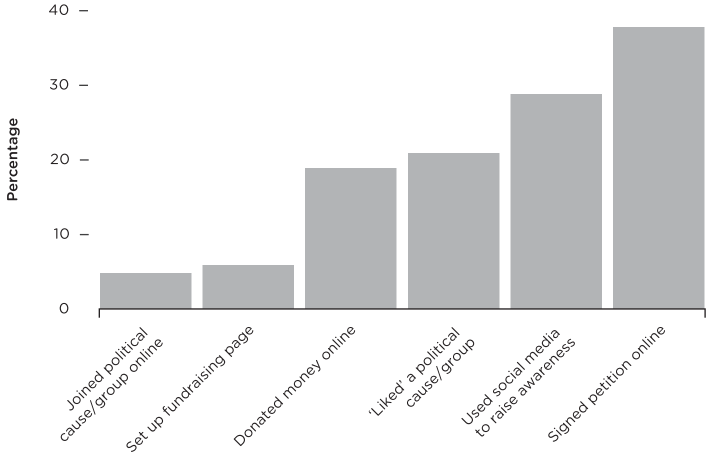


Source: Demos and Populus survey of teenagers, Dec 2013

interests, and become involved in volunteering and other initiatives.

Our research suggests that there is high recognition of the potential to use social media in this way among both teenagers and educators. For example, as figure 17 shows, the overwhelming majority of teenagers see social media as integral to expressing one's views, gaining momentum behind an issue and forcing decision makers and policy makers to pay attention. Moreover, almost three out of four teenagers (71 per cent) think that social media are just as important as more traditional ways of raising awareness of social issues when they want to express their views.

Figure 18 **The extent to which teenagers used social media to engage with social issues in the past year**



Source: Demos and Populus survey of teenagers, Dec 2013

Similarly, 84 per cent of teachers said they thought that the new networks and forms of engagement provided by social media are or can be just as effective as traditional forms of engagement (eg joining a political party or voting).

Our survey revealed that substantial numbers of young people use social media to become engaged with social issues. Figure 18 shows that 38 per cent of those we surveyed said they had signed a petition online, 29 per cent had used Facebook or Twitter to raise awareness of a cause, 21 per cent had 'liked' a political cause or group that they agreed with, and 19 per cent had donated money online (eg through the JustGiving website). As a study by NCS shows, young people are more likely to respond to online sources than other age groups; 46 per cent of those donating to charity are influenced by an organisation's website, social media campaigns and other online material, compared with the average of 39 per cent.[71]

Teachers are also noting this type of engagement among their students. Over half of teachers (57 per cent) reported that they noticed teenagers using social media to become involved in politics and good causes.

This trend will continue to grow among these teenagers as they grow up and take a more active interest in social issues through social media at university and beyond, and in the next generation of teenagers as social media become further embedded into their lives, school and politics. Organisations that work with young people have to recognise the importance of social media to inspire and encourage young peoples' engagement with social issues and make sure they are keeping pace with this rapidly moving environment.

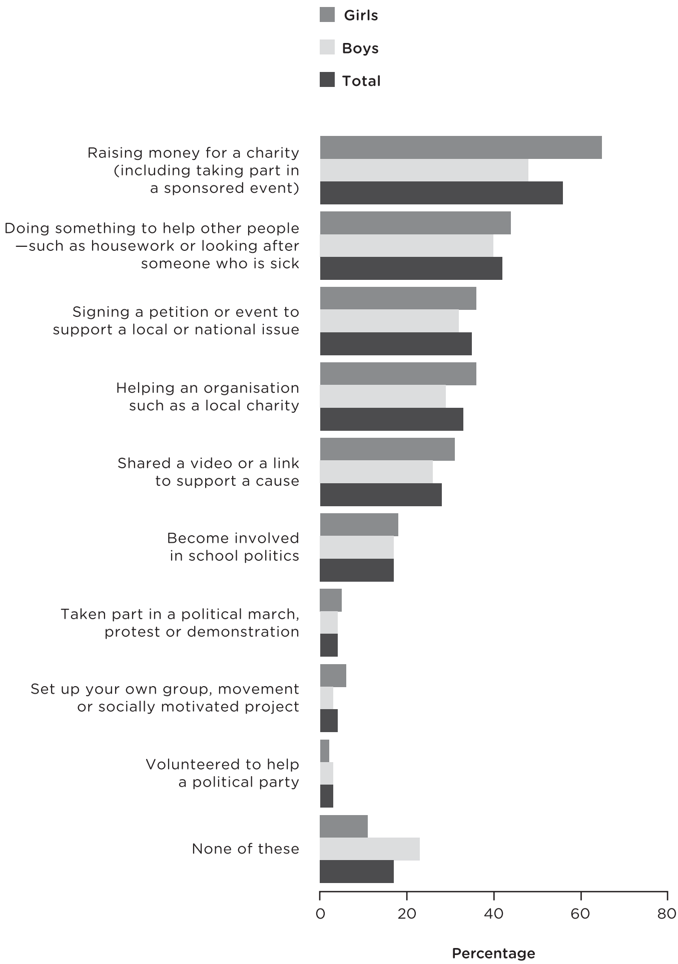
Social action and engagement offline

While our research suggests teenagers make substantial and increasing use of social media for social action, it also reveals that teenagers still engage with social issues more offline than online. This should be encouraging for those who are concerned about social engagement shifting exclusively to the online world, where such engagement is seen to be more passive (for example, clicking 'like' or forwarding a petition as opposed to committing to volunteer for a six month period or campaigning door to door). Indeed, previous Demos research suggests that online political engagement is often closely tied with offline political engagement.[72]

Teenagers in our survey reported significant levels of engagement with social issues offline. For example, over half reported raising money for a charity, while a third said they had signed a petition or participated in an event to support a local issue and a third said they had helped an organisation such as a local charity (figure 19).

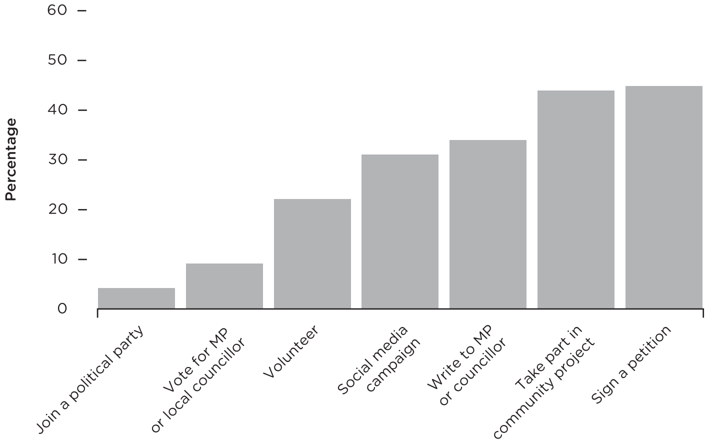
Across all of these measures, girls were more likely than boys to report engagement. For example, 65 per cent reported raising money for a charity compared with 48 per cent of boys.

Figure 19 **Activities teenagers have taken to tackle or raise awareness about social issues**



Source: Demos and Populus survey of teenagers, Dec 2013.

Figure 20 **Actions teenagers would take to change their local community**



Source: Demos and Populus survey of teenagers, Dec 2013

Making a difference in one's community

We asked teenagers whether they thought they could influence things for the better in their community and what was the best way to do this. The top three actions considered the most effective to change something in their local community were 'sign a petition' (45 per cent), 'take part in a community project' (44 per cent) and 'write to your local MP or councillor' (34 per cent) (figure 20). Again, these responses suggest that teenagers are not completely eschewing traditional politics to have positive impact.

Yet, when asked to choose from a list of organisations or individuals that make a positive change in their communities politicians were the least likely to be mentioned (10 per cent), and charities and social enterprises were the most popular (60 per cent). Businesses and campaigners were also viewed more favourably than politicians, with approximately one in three teenagers citing these groups as having the most positive impact.

Perhaps most importantly, almost two-thirds (64 per cent) of teenagers felt that by getting involved themselves they could make a positive difference to social issues in their local community.

In other words, although they still recognise the validity of traditional methods of civic engagement (such as writing to an MP), today's teenagers are more likely to see charities and social enterprises, alongside their own actions, as the most effective means of having positive impact in their local community, rather than to rely on politicians.

Volunteering and social action

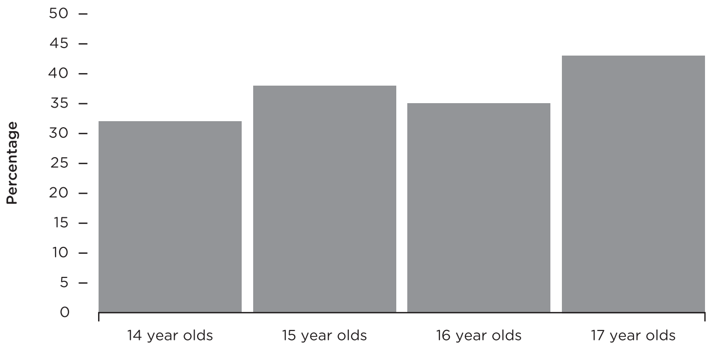
As noted above, the latest Community Life Survey showed a substantial increase among 16–19-year-olds for both formal and informal volunteering between 2010-2011 and 2012-2013.[73] We therefore wanted to ask the same question in our survey to see if our survey showed similar levels of volunteering.

Across our sample, 37 per cent reported volunteering either formally (through an organisation or group) or informally (on their own) in the past year. The breakdown of volunteering rates across each age can be seen in figure 21.

These percentages are lower than those found in the 2012-2013 Community Life Survey because of methodological issues and the different age ranges tested (14–17 in our survey compared to 16–24 in the Community Life Survey).[74] However, levels of volunteering reported in our survey are higher than the most recent estimates Demos cited in *Service Generation* for teenagers undertaking social action (29 per cent).[75]

There was a significant gender difference for volunteering rates with 45 per cent of girls reporting volunteering compared with just 31 per cent of boys. Of those who did not volunteer, one in three (34 per cent) said they did not have enough time, one in four (25 per cent) said they lacked awareness about opportunities, and one in ten (11 per cent) said none of their friends volunteered. However, our survey showed that three out

Figure 21 **Volunteering rates among 14–17-year-olds broken down by age**



Source: Demos and Populus survey of teenagers, Dec 2013

of four teenagers (76 per cent) said they would be interested in social action and volunteering if they were offered the opportunity to get involved.

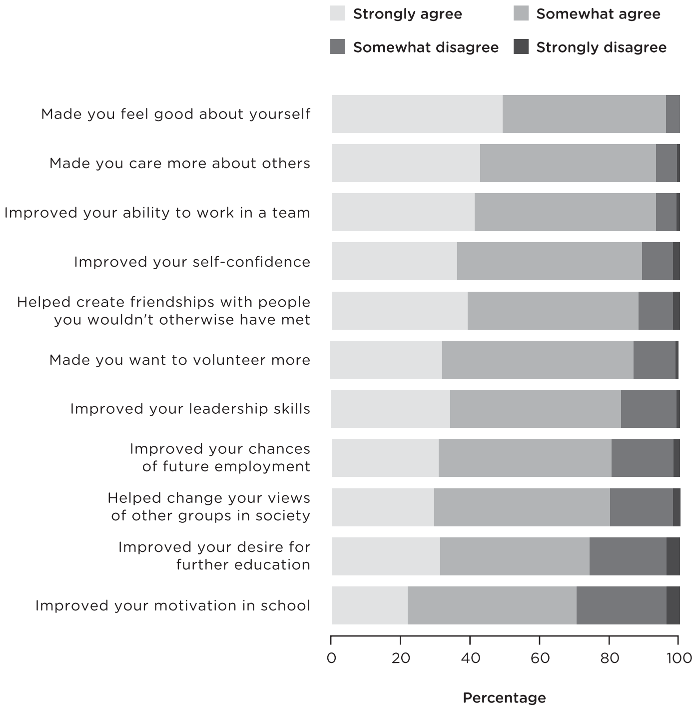
The benefits of volunteering

Our survey adds to the huge body of evidence showing that young people who take part in volunteering report significant benefits (figure 22).

Not only did volunteering make teenagers feel good about themselves and care more about others but it also helped them build skills that are valuable in the labour market (ability to work in a team, increased self-confidence and leadership skills) and increased their motivation at school and desire for further education.

Our survey suggests that teenagers' experience of volunteering encouraged social mixing and cohesion, by changing their views of other groups in society (79 per cent agreeing with this statement) and helped them to create friendships with people they would not have otherwise met (86 per cent agreeing).

Figure 22 **The benefits teenagers have reported after taking part in volunteering**



Source: Demos and Populus survey of teenagers, Dec 2013

These positive findings mirror those from the recent 2012 NatCen evaluation of NCS. The evaluation compared NCS participants with a control group and found that volunteering improved the participants' skills in various ways: leading a team (+17 per cent), confidence when explaining new ideas clearly (+17 per cent), confidence when meeting new people (+13 per cent), and confidence when trying new things and putting forward ideas (+8 per cent). The influence of volunteering on cohesion and social mixing was marked: nearly all (95 per cent of) participants said they met people they would not normally mix with when they volunteered and over 80 per cent said they felt more positive towards people from different backgrounds after volunteering. The evaluation also noted positive impacts on participants' future appetite for helping out in their local community, and feeling positive about whether they could change things for the better in their local community by getting involved and campaigning.[76]

In the West Yorkshire and London schools where we ran focus groups, the students were very engaged in their communities through volunteering, via the school and independently (almost all in those groups had done so in the past year). Students at the South Yorkshire school were less engaged in their communities through volunteering; this seemed to be because of a lack of awareness and opportunity rather than a lack of empathy. Indeed one pupil referred to the lack of advertisements and promotion of social action activities. South Yorkshire pupils showed similar levels of compassion but thought they had not been given enough opportunities to participate in social action.

All the students said they would be happy to take part in volunteering activities (and those who had done so said they enjoyed it), but suggested that there was not always an opportunity to do so or they lacked awareness about these activities. One student from the independent girls school said, 'People don't see the opportunities, they don't have time and it doesn't fit in with their lifestyles.' Girls at the London school confidently advocated one benefit of social action by saying that participation 'boosts self-esteem', but one pupil spoke for many when she commented, 'When a politician endorses something it makes me less likely to do it.'

Most pupils thought that they usually needed to feel a personal relation to the cause and that if it was either something they had had personal experience of (eg a relative dying of cancer) or something that was very gripping and clearly affects a lot of people (eg common illnesses or humanitarian tragedies like Syria) they would be more likely to get involved.

Active citizenship and social action in schools

Schools and colleges are one of the main sites for teenagers volunteering and being encouraged to volunteer and take part in social action. Some schools provide social action activities and opportunities themselves, but in the main they should be a key site for encouraging social action and advertising opportunities to get involved with other organisations, rather than directly delivering activities in an already crowded curriculum. This depends on the extent to which the ethos of active citizenship and social action is embedded within schools and colleges. We asked teachers in our survey and focus groups how much focus their school placed on social action and volunteering, whether they saw the same benefits from volunteering as teenagers did, and whether they thought that schools should be doing more to support and encourage teenagers to take part in social action and volunteering.

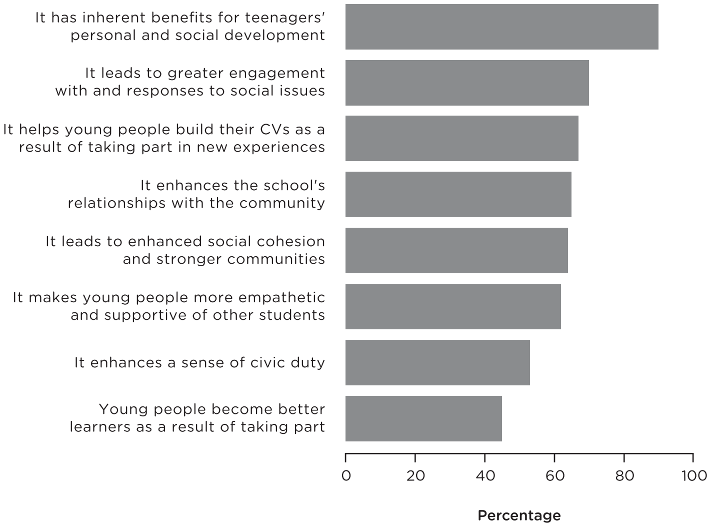
We asked teachers to rank the emphasis their schools placed on 'active citizenship' and encouraging students to take part in volunteering or social action in the school or community on a scale from 1 to 10, with 1 being 'no emphasis' and 10 being 'very strong emphasis'. Two-thirds (68 per cent) said their school promoted a strong sense of active citizenship (a score of 6 or higher), and 26 per cent of teachers gave their schools a score of 9 or 10, suggesting a remarkably strong emphasis on active citizenship. However, a large majority (91 per cent) said they would welcome more support for their students to participate in social action and over one in three (35 per cent) expressed a strong desire for more support.

The benefits of active citizenship according to teachers

Like the teenagers, the overwhelming majority of teachers saw a range of positive benefits from encouraging teenagers to take part in social action or volunteering, and almost half of them thought that it made young people become better learners as a result (figure 23).

These views were mirrored in our focus groups. All the teachers felt that civic engagement and volunteering were incredibly valuable to students and that it was very important for

Figure 23 **The benefits of social action and volunteering according to teachers**

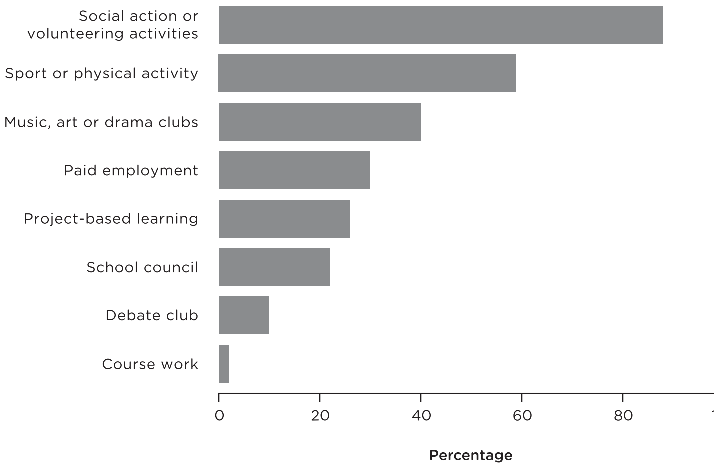


Source: Demos and Schoolzone survey of teachers, Dec 2013

the school to participate in them. The London school has high levels of engagement, and teachers at the other two schools felt that the main obstacle to increasing the amount of volunteering and engagement was lack of time and staff capacity to drive it. One teacher in Barnsley stressed the importance of the school reaching out to engage: 'It's important that we're not insular… [in order to] help [students] grow.'

They also felt that the young people are engaged organically and just see it as part of life. They reckoned they probably were loyal to or protective of their friends and family, for example, and might help neighbours, elderly relatives and so on much more than they talk about. They do not see this as 'social action'.

Figure 24 **Activities that teachers think help to develop character in teenagers**



Source: Demos and Schoolzone survey of teachers, Dec 2013

Building character through social action

There has been increasing focus in recent years on the concept of character skills or virtues. The ability to delay gratification, devote oneself to a task, demonstrate empathy and compassion, lead others, work well in a team, and stick to commitments are virtues that research shows are correlated with a range of positive outcomes including wellbeing, educational attainment and success in the labour market.[77]

These 'soft skills' and attitudes are increasingly as important to employers as academic qualifications, but the CBI has recently argued that schools are not well designed to help develop these character skills and virtues among young people.[78] Instead, the evidence suggests that taking part in social action or volunteering can be effective at helping to develop these characteristics in young people. The teachers in our survey also believe this.[79] They overwhelmingly selected social action or volunteering out of a list of activities as most effective at building character among teenagers (figure 24).

Nearly nine in ten (88 per cent) of teachers in our survey believe that social action or volunteering is the most beneficial activity for their pupils in improving their soft skills and building their characters. The second most beneficial character-building activity was sport or physical activity, cited by 59 per cent of teachers. Only 2 per cent of teachers regarded coursework as one of the three most beneficial activities towards building the characters of their pupils.

Recommendations

Our research suggests that with the right support the next generation can become confident and active citizens with the motivation and know-how to effect real and lasting change. To facilitate this and capitalise on the positive trends in Gen C's views and behaviour, which we outlined above, Demos makes the following recommendations.

Establish a new narrative

The findings of our research provide the basis for a new narrative about young people to describe the next generation, which is more positive and more in line with reality than media stereotypes. Research into media representations of young people shows that most stories about them are negative, often involving sex, binge drinking and anti-social behaviour. While this is perhaps inevitable because of the nature of media reporting, our research shows that teachers and teenagers believe that this negative portrayal is having a detrimental impact on how young people engage with the world around them. Teenagers also believe that it is damaging their chances in the labour market.

Teachers had significantly more positive views about teenagers than the media have. They can thus be powerful advocates in presenting a new narrative that encourages and champions young people. Politicians can also help to shift the narrative by frequently and consistently highlighting the positive actions and attributes of the next generation, rather than simply and lazily confirming some people's worst stereotypes.

Given its primary role in forming public opinion, those in the media in particular need to recognise the impact that consistently negative reporting is having on young people, and to think of ways to help contribute to a more positive narrative that is accurate and optimistic. One way to do this is to give more young people a platform and voice on media and social issues, as the *Evening Standard* has done. It has run a number of campaigns aimed at helping young people to succeed. The Dispossessed Fund and Ladder for London campaigns in particular have consistently highlighted how young people from disadvantaged backgrounds have incredible amounts of motivation and skills and can succeed spectacularly once they are given support, training and opportunities.[80]

Social action for all

Our research shows that volunteering and social action can hugely improve teenagers' confidence, motivation and personal development. The evidence also suggests that social action can help to reengage young people with the political process and build skills that will help them compete in a competitive workplace.

Many young people are already taking part in social action, and see this as an effective and immediate way to have a positive impact in their communities. This is partly because greater prominence has been given to the concepts of 'social action' and 'national service' in recent years. NCS for 16-year-old school leavers was launched by the Government in 2010, and in 2013 some 40,000 16–17-year-olds took part. Other social action programmes have been launched or expanded in the UK in recent years, including City Year, vInspired and Free The Children. Organisations and charities like the Citizenship Foundation, the Duke of Edinburgh's Award, Scouts and Girl Guides have been delivering social action in the UK for years.

Yet, the number of young people taking part in social action is still unevenly spread throughout the country. While many of these organisations deliver social action outside the classroom, partnerships with schools are critical to ensure that young people are aware of the opportunities available. Although many schools have embraced social action, not all have the capacity to do so. This is where programmes like NCS, Scouts, Girl Guides and the range of organisations operating under the Generation Change umbrella have a role to play in providing opportunities for high quality, accessible and universal social action across the UK.

All of these organisations are key partners in the recently launched campaign Step Up To Serve, which aims to double the quality, quantity and frequency of youth social action in the UK by 2020. All three political parties have supported Step Up To Serve, and it is vital that they, as well as schools and charities, continue to engage with these initiatives across the country to ensure that ambitious targets are set and achieved. In particular, in the run up to the 2015 general election, all three major parties should commit to ambitious levels of central government investment in social action in their election manifestoes.

Social action and citizenship in schools

Our research shows that a large majority of teachers believe that volunteering and social action provide a range of benefits for young people. It also shows a large majority of teachers want more support students to take part in social action in their schools.

A number of schools across the UK have already embraced the concept of social action. Many primary and secondary schools – both local-authority-maintained and academies – make citizenship, volunteering and practical service a core part of their ethos, for example, at the primary level, working with organisations like the Citizenship Foundation and Free the Children. However, more needs to be done to encourage and support *all* schools to embrace and deliver social action opportunities.

Recently, as part of the Step Up To Serve campaign, Ofsted pledged to ensure that schools are assessed on the extent to which they provide opportunities for young people to involve themselves in social action and volunteering. It is to be hoped that this will help to ensure that primary and secondary school heads and principals pay heed to the benefits that taking part in social action can have for their pupils, and their responsibility to ensure that the young people are being educated to be active and responsible citizens.

Crucially, government and local authorities need to ensure that schools have enough support to deliver these opportunities. Schools and teachers are already under huge amounts of pressure to raise educational attainment levels, and simply telling them to do more without providing additional support is not enough. Previous Demos research suggests that this support can be effectively provided through partnerships with external organisations that are already delivering social action opportunities, like NCS or Citizens UK.[81] For example, Bethnal Green Academy partnered with London Citizens to deliver the CitySafe campaign. As part of the campaign, students and teachers receive training and support to lead a community-wide engagement that involves businesses, charities and the police to help improve safety in the local area around the school.

International experience suggests schools should be given more support to offer social action opportunities and further debate and consideration needs to be given to embedding social action into the school curriculum. The experience in Canada – and more recently in Scotland – where social action has been integrated into the curriculum suggests that this can lead to high levels of engagement, with both young people and teachers recognising the benefits.

While the value of embedding social action into school curriculums should be explored, it is important to stress that there are also compelling arguments that social action should take place primarily outside the school environment and in local communities. This is because non-formal learning provides a whole range of skills that are better developed outside the classroom, and it helps to ensure that young people taking part have unique and different experiences and do not end up associating social action solely with school. Yet, supporting social action within and outside the school environment should not be seen as mutually exclusive. The more opportunities young people have to engage in social action, the better.

Social action and employability

In today's workplace, employers value employees who are flexible, entrepreneurial and comfortable working in teams with people from different backgrounds. The CBI's Education and Skills survey consistently shows that employers value 'soft' skills in young job seekers over or in addition to academic qualifications.[82] Our survey and evaluations of programmes like NCS show that social action activities that are of high quality and challenging can help endow young people with the attitudes and soft skills that employers value. Recent evidence from Americorps in the US based on a ten-year survey found that volunteers had a 27 per cent higher likelihood of finding a job after being out of work than non-volunteers. The effect was stronger for those without school qualifications or from rural communities.[83] Furthermore, the Step Up To Serve campaign team calculated that social action participants within programmes similar to ones offered in Australia and France could be as much as three times more likely to secure full-time employment afterwards.[84]

On the back of this research, some employers have begun giving more attention to the importance of social action in recruitment. Companies like O2, Centrica and Linklaters, and organisations like the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) and CBI, have made pledges to promote social action in support of the Step Up To Serve campaign. These pledges will help more young people take part in social action, and raise the profile of social action within the private sector as a valuable form of non-formal learning and skills development. Many employers are also committed to employer-supported volunteering programmes, providing employees with 'volunteer days' and offering other incentives to help achieve their CSR aims in this regard. Yet, more needs to be done to encourage employers to create a culture of volunteering across their organisations, and in particular to recognise the benefits of employer-supported volunteering from a human resources perspective of skills and continuing personal development. They should also give greater consideration to how social action activities can be integrated into apprenticeships.

Generation Citizen politics

As Universities Minister David Willets has argued, politicians need to find a way to speak directly to young people about the issues they care about.[85] To do this, government and politicians need to give greater recognition to the mechanisms that the next generation are using to express their voice and make positive changes in their communities. Our research suggests that this includes everything from participating in social action and volunteering, to being involved in youth-led charities and political forums like the UK Youth Parliament, to participating in a variety of social media campaigns. All of these new forms of expression and engagement offer avenues for politicians to engage with young people through the methods that they believe will have greatest impact.

Yet, while these new methods of engagement need to be given greater weight, the fact remains that voting and registering to vote is still the primary way in which citizens can ensure that their voice is heard. In recent weeks, one statistic in particular has been making the rounds as evidence of young people's disillusionment: according to the latest Hansard Society's political engagement audit, only 12 per cent of 18–24-year-olds said they would definitely vote if an election was held tomorrow, compared with 40 per cent for the population overall.[86]

Our research suggests a more optimistic picture. Among the 14–17-year-olds in our survey, 84 per cent said they intended to vote when they turned 18. They are not acolytes of the Russell Brand 'don't vote' school. Yet, at the same time, with the youth vote declining for the past three elections there remains a disconnect between the expressed intention to vote and the reality of getting to the voting booth.

Thus, more needs to be done to ensure that young people are registering to vote and understand the importance of doing so. Our research suggests that participating in social action can help bridge this gap and potentially motivate young people to engage in traditional politics. All three political parties emphasise the importance of being an active citizen, whether called social action by the Conservatives, community organising by Labour, or pavement politics by the Lib Dems. Moreover, all three political parties have united to express their support for the

Step Up To Serve campaign. With the 2015 election approaching, it is now time for the three main political parties to demonstrate their endorsement of social action by committing to ambitious levels of support and central government investment in youth social action.

There also needs to be more investment and support for campaigns to get young people to register and vote. This can partly be done by making effective use of social media. Campaigns like Rock the Vote in the US and Bite the Ballot in the UK have been effective at communicating to young people the importance of voting and registering to vote, in part through their use of social media. Demos' Centre for the Analysis of Social Media is currently exploring new technologies and approaches to use social media as a means of getting people with traditionally low levels of turnout to register and vote in the European elections. If successful, these approaches could be explored to target young people in the UK. Young people themselves make the most effective advocates for such campaigns: the *Kenny Report II: Is 'Politics' for young people?* by Kenny Imafidon is one compelling example.[87]

There should also be consideration of other more radical reforms, such as lowering the voting age to 16, which Demos has called for in the past.[88] Andrew Adonis has recently argued that lowering the voting age should be accompanied by integrating registering to vote with voting – schools should be sites of voter registration as well as voting itself – and the importance of voting should be emphasised in schools and colleges through the citizenship curriculum. He said young people should be given easy access to register and even cast their vote in schools and colleges.[89] There is controversy about whether the voting age should be lowered. On the one hand, recent evidence from Austria – which lowered the voting age to 16 in 2007 – suggests that lowering the voting age could lead to young people being more interested in politics than they are currently.[90] And yet on the other hand the majority of the public – including young people themselves – are not in favour of lowering the voting age.[91]

In conclusion, the next generation of teenagers already has the potential to lead a revolution in active citizen engagement.

These teenagers are presenting their pro-social proclivities in ways that may not cohere to older generations' notions of active citizenship, but nonetheless suggest they have a strong moral compass and desire to make positive impacts in their communities. By all accounts they are doing this despite facing a number of difficult challenges ahead. It is time that we as a society recognise this and give credit where credit is due, and support where support is needed. Our future depends on it.

Technical appendix

Our research in this report comprises three elements:

- a Demos and Populus survey of teenagers between the ages of 14 and 17 years old (n=1,000) in England and Northern Ireland
- a Demos and Schoolzone survey of teachers and deputy heads (n=500) across the UK
- three focus groups with 14–17-year-old teenagers and three focus groups with teachers carried out in three schools recruited specifically for this research

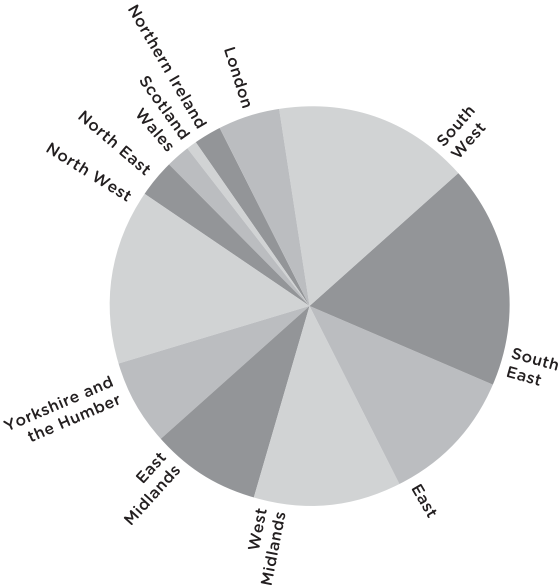
Survey of teenagers

Demos commissioned Populus Data Solutions to undertake the survey of teenagers. The survey questions were designed by Demos with input from Populus Data Solutions. The survey was a bespoke survey and parental approval was sought and obtained for young people below the age of 16. The survey sample was designed so that gender and regional demographics were broadly representative of the teenage population.

Survey of teachers

We surveyed 500 teachers and school deputy heads across the UK using the polling organisation Schoolzone. In this short annex to the report, we describe the demographic characteristics of the schools where our respondents teach and the background characteristics of the respondents themselves.

Figure 25 **Breakdown of teacher respondents to survey by geographical location of school**

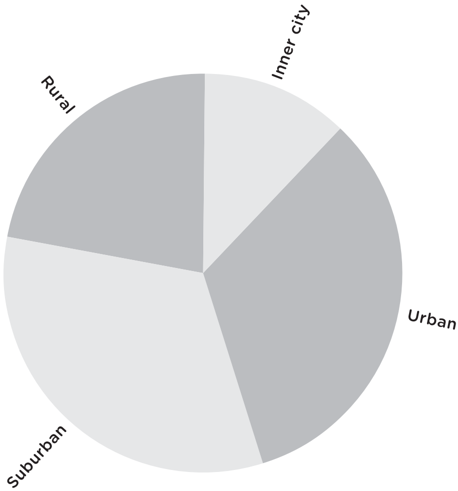


Regional spread of schools

Our survey of teachers covered a fairly even spread of schools from across the UK (figure 25). The regions with the largest number of respondents were the South East (18 per cent), the South West (16 per cent) and the North West (14 per cent) of England. Just 5 per cent of the respondents are based in London schools.

Just over half (55 per cent) of teacher respondents teach in suburban or rural schools, while 45 per cent teach in schools located in inner city or urban communities (figure 26).

Figure 26 **Breakdown of teacher respondents to survey by whether school is in a rural or urban area**



Type of school

Teachers from academies were the most likely to respond to our survey, followed by teachers in local-authority-controlled schools. No teachers from the free schools to which we sent the survey responded (figure 27).

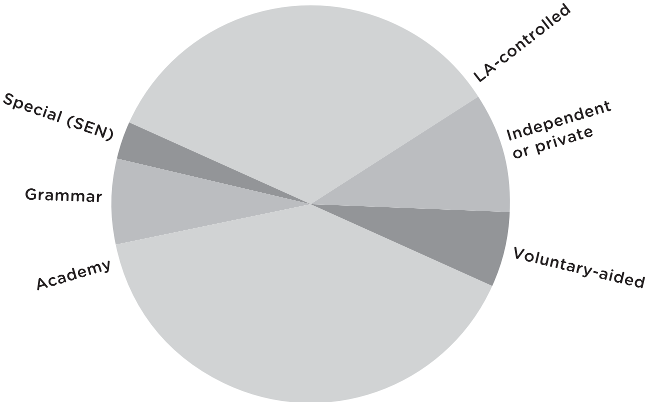
The proportion of students on free school meals in schools

Most teacher respondents (61 per cent) come from schools with 20 per cent or less students on free school meals. One in ten (11 per cent) of respondents teach in schools with 40 per cent or more students on free school meals (figure 28).

Teacher respondents' roles and subjects taught

A third of the respondents to our survey are classroom teachers, while 42 per cent are subject coordinators or heads of department. Just 7 per cent are heads of year and 12 per cent are deputy heads or in the senior management team (figure 29).

Figure 27 **Breakdown of teacher respondents to survey by type of school**



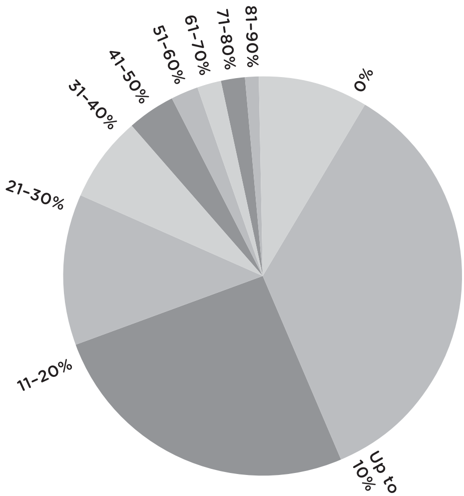
We also broke down the teacher respondents by their subject speciality:

- 19 per cent of respondents teach English
- 11 per cent teach history
- 10 per cent teach mathematics
- 19 per cent teach various science courses (biology, chemistry, physics)
- 2 per cent teach citizenship

There was significant overlap in the number of teachers teaching students in key stages 3–5:

- 81 per cent teach key stage 3 students
- 92 per cent teach key stage 4 students
- 71 per cent teach key stage 5 students

Figure 28 **Breakdown of teacher respondents to survey by proportion of students on free school meals at school**



Teacher respondents' age and number of years teaching

We asked teacher respondents to compare the current generation of teenagers with their own generation when they were teenagers. We therefore asked respondents how old they are and how long they have been teaching. Approximately a quarter of teachers are in the Baby Boomer generation, approximately two-thirds are in Generation X and one in ten is in Generation Y (figure 30).

Almost two-thirds of our sample (64 per cent) had taught or worked in schools for 11 years or more, while 27 per cent had taught for between six and ten years. Only 8 per cent of our sample had taught for five years or less (figure 31).

Focus groups

Demos recruited three schools to agree to take part in focus groups in December 2013. We recruited schools on account of

Figure 29 **Breakdown of teacher respondents to survey by teacher roles**

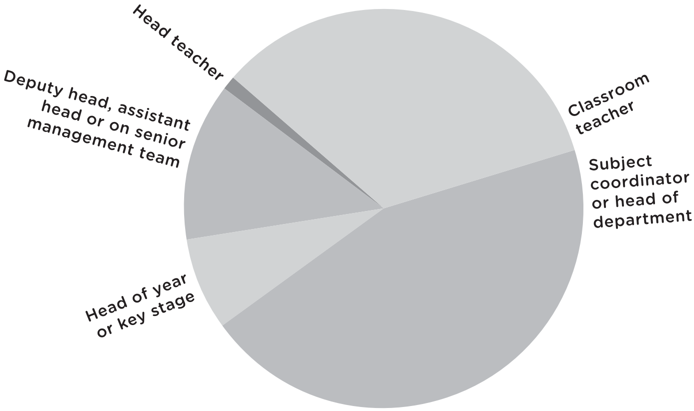


Figure 30 **Breakdown of teacher respondents to survey by age**

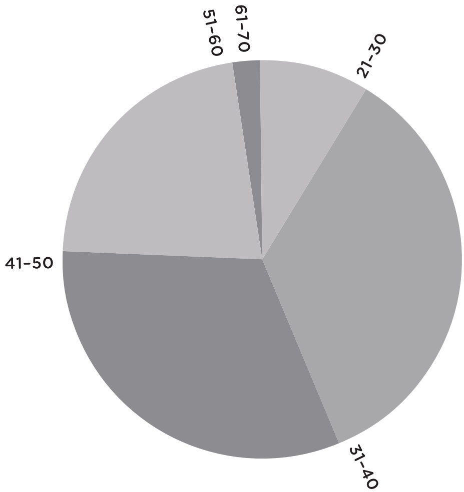
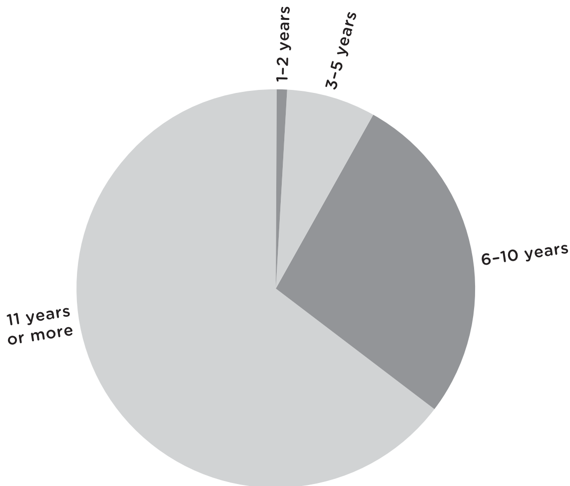


Figure 31 **Breakdown of teacher respondents to survey by number of years as a teacher**



their previous relationship with Demos and with the advice of organisations like the Future Leaders Trust, Teach First and The Challenge. We wanted to obtain a regional mix (one London school and two non-London schools), local-authority-maintained schools versus academies, and different levels of engagement in social action and volunteering. To meet this last criterion, we recruited one school which had high levels of NCS engagement with the assistance of The Challenge.

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Every 15 to 20 years a new generation emerges. As the last of Generation Y moves into adulthood we are on the cusp of a new generation materialising. This report presents the first detailed look at the last cohort of Generation Y, young people between the ages of 14 and 17, to determine what we can learn about the next generation to come.

Headlines often focus on the difficult future that the next generation are facing; a future clouded by a competitive and fast-changing labour market, increasing housing and education costs, and new pressures from social media. Yet, instead of taking to the streets in anger, our research suggests that many young people are having a positive impact through social enterprise, social media and volunteering. Teachers, who know young people better than most, describe them as 'caring', 'enthusiastic' and 'hard-working' and believe that teenagers today are more likely to volunteer for good causes and set up their own group, movement or socially motivated project than previous generations.

This report calls for a new narrative around today's young people. Teenagers and teachers believe that too often policymakers and the media paint an unflattering portrait of teenagers. Four out of five young people feel that this impacts on their ability to get a job. Our research suggests that teenagers are motivated to make a difference in their community but the tools they use and the approach they take is different from those of previous generations. They value bottom-up social action and enterprise over top-down politics. The report calls on policy makers to recognise these new forms of activism and engagement and ensure that all young people in the UK have an opportunity to take part in high quality social action.

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