



Policy paper

Youth Matters: State of the Nation (annexes)

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Applies to England

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Acknowledgements

This report was written by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) in partnership with young people. Much of this report also comes from an early interim report by a research group (referred to as “the research consortium”). They quickly gathered and analysed information from surveys and research, and qualitative research. The report uses their initial findings directly in many parts of this report and are very grateful for their thorough work. The members of the research consortium are: Savanta, My Life My Say and the #iwill Movement (Volunteering Matters and UK Youth) including their Youth Collaborators.

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The Back Youth Alliance for their work on the Rapid Evidence Review, the National Youth Sector Advisory Board for engagement, and the Network of Regional Youth Work Units who ran focus groups with young people to support this research.

Annex A: Glossary and abbreviations

- ABC1 socioeconomic group - those with parents who hold positions such as higher/middle supervisory, managerial and professional roles.
- Attainment gap - the differences in academic achievement between groups of people
- C2DE socioeconomic group - those with parents who hold positions such as manual, lower skilled roles, and those not working.
- DCMS - Department for Culture, Media and Sport
- Democracy cafés - youth-led focus groups focusing on the local area used to engage with young people to have their say as part of the National Youth Strategy
- Enrichment - 'Enrichment' involves activities that enhance an individual's learning beyond the core curriculum. These activities can complement the curriculum (co-curricular) by providing greater depth or opportunities to apply knowledge or skills learnt in the curriculum in real-world or practical settings. These activities can also be extracurricular, teaching knowledge and skills that go beyond the core curriculum, such as fostering critical thinking and problem solving, or stimulating

intellectual, emotional, and social growth.

- Generation Z (Gen Z) - the generation born in the late 1990s or the early 21st century, perceived as being familiar with the use of digital technology, the internet, and social media from a very young age.
- NEET - not in education, employment or training
- SEN/D - Special educational needs and disabilities
- Social action - activities undertaken in the services of others, to benefit the wider community, such as volunteering, fundraising and campaigning.
- Socio-emotional skills - A broad range of skills, amongst them the ability to identify and regulate emotions.
- Youth voice - youth voice can be defined as an umbrella term for a wide range of different activities that provide young people with the opportunity to meaningfully contribute to and influence decisions which impact them and their communities.
- Young people/youth - here defined as those 1 to 21 (up to 25 with SEN/D).

Annex B: Methods

DCMS commissioned Savanta and their consortium to collect and analyse data on young people: their needs and issues, what works well and not so well, challenges and solutions. As a part of the interim report from the supplier, DCMS received a report summarising findings from a Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA) they had conducted, regional Democracy cafés (9) and online focus groups (6), as well as survey findings from the national survey they conducted in England. This methods annex includes details of the data collection methods and analysis, as well as a final section on the policy engagement DCMS conducted, and the wider research included in this report.

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1. Rapid Evidence Assessment

The REA explored:

1. What challenges do young people face and what challenges are they expected to face over the coming decade?
 - a. We are particularly interested in, but not limited to, challenges that affect their physical and mental wellbeing, social emotional skills and development, education, employment, relationships, safety and community engagement.
2. How do these challenges differ by demographics/certain groups?
 - a. Why do young people face these challenges/why do they occur?
3. What are the potential solutions to the challenges identified?
 - a. We are particularly interested, but not limited to, solutions in relation to youth activities, services and support in a broad sense (including sport, art, culture, mentoring, youth clubs, enrichment, youth work, etc), the youth workforce and broad youth infrastructure

The desk research conducted draws on sources, including national surveys, academic studies, policy reports, and youth-led research, to provide a comprehensive understanding of young people's experiences, perspectives, aspirations, and challenges across the United Kingdom. This research aims to address several critical questions to inform an effective youth strategy, specifically focusing on priority issues such as the cost of living, education, mental health, and social inequalities that permeate all aspects of life for young people.

The study examines how these challenges vary by demographics, including age, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and geographic location. It also investigates the root causes and identifies potential solutions through successful case studies, expert recommendations, and innovative youth-led initiatives.

In total, 53 pieces of evidence were reviewed based on robustness, relevance, and youth perspectives, with higher-quality findings prioritised to construct a coherent narrative on young people's experiences and needs. To maintain rigour and

efficiency, each document was reviewed by a researcher who completed an objective scoring system. A selected number of documents were then independently assessed by a second researcher, and scores were compared and validated by a third researcher to confirm accuracy of scoring.

2. Democracy cafés and online focus groups

The Democracy cafés and online focus groups explored:

- 1** Your priorities/what's important to you
- 2** What makes you happy and why
- 3** The activities, clubs and spaces you engage with
- 4** Changes and transitions you've experienced recently
- 5** Difficulties and challenges in your life
- 6** Looking to the future

Fieldwork took place between 17 February and 12 March 2025.

Design

The supplier produced semi-structured discussion guides for the Democracy cafés and online focus groups. These consisted of a list of questions and suggested prompts in case participants did not respond spontaneously. The intention of the discussion guides was to provide an overall structure for the sessions, while also allowing participants the space to take the conversation in their own direction and, in doing so, reveal what is important to them.

The Democracy café discussion guides were the same for all nine events. The

online focus group discussions guides were slightly different for each cohort, with adapted, accessible language to ensure participants understood the questions.

Savanta and UK Youth ran a workshop with Youth Collaborators to gather their feedback on the discussion guides for the online focus groups.

Recruitment

My Life My Say conducted recruitment for the Democracy cafés, activating a wide-reaching youth network in the relevant regions. To ensure recruitment was representative and local to the relevant regions, recruitment through this network was favoured over social media. Focus groups were recruited primarily through local youth organisations, clubs and charities, and in some cases local schools, councils, scout groups, universities or the My Life My Say ‘Squad’ network.

Recruitment for the online focus groups targeted demographic groups that were underrepresented in the Democracy cafés and/or of particular interest to DCMS. Savanta commissioned one of its regular recruitment partners – Roots Research – to recruit participants.

Roots takes the following approach:

“Our database includes over 600,000 participants who have signed up to receive research opportunities from us. During the sign-up process we ask participants to complete both email and mobile verification steps. Once a project is commissioned, we search our entire panel for specific profiles based on the demographic parameters and/or previous application data relevant to the current project. Each project is posted on our website as an online application form and a link is sent to the relevant panel members to prompt them to apply. We also receive a fair number of applications from those who find the specific project through search engines or advertising and sign up to our panel for the purpose of applying to that specific project.

“We then review all applications and re-screen each eligible candidate over the phone to make sure all answers are accurate and they are engaged. Once a participant is booked on to a project we have a 3 step confirmation process which includes sending them a confirmation email which contains a ‘confirm’ button, calling each participants the day before their research to reconfirm their attendance and ensure they have all the relevant details ready, and sending a reminder text on the day. If we don’t hear back at any point in this process, we

assess the respondent's commitment and replace them if necessary."

Savanta/Roots applied the following hard quotas to the online focus groups:

- age
- SEN/D
- experience of the care system.

The following monitoring quotas were also applied to ensure a spread of participants:

- gender
- ethnicity
- location (urban/rural/coastal)
- experiences of violence or homelessness.

Fieldwork

Democracy cafés

Location	Date	Youth Collaborator moderation?	Number of participants
London	17.2.25	n/a	5
Birmingham	25.2.25	Yes	6
Newcastle	27.2.25	n/a	12
Blackpool	28.2.25	n/a	11
Hastings	3.3.25	Yes	5
Cambridge	4.3.25	Yes	6
Castleford	5.3.25	Yes	7
Kimberley	6.3.25	n/a	5
Exeter	7.3.25	n/a	6

Online focus groups

Cohort	Date	Youth Collaborator moderation?	Number of participants
Aged 10 to 12	6.3.25	Yes	8
Aged 13 to 15	7.3.25	Yes	8
SEN/D (younger – 10 to 15)	11.3.25	Yes	3
SEN/D (older – 16 to 25)	11.3.25		3
Care-experienced (younger – 10 to 15)	12.3.25	Yes	3
Care-experienced (older – 16 to 21)	12.3.25		5

UK Youth/Savanta decided to split the online focus groups for SEN/D and care-experienced young people into older and younger cohorts. This was due to ethical and practical concerns arising from the wide age-range in these groups (10 to 25 for SEN/D, 10 to 21 for care-experienced). It would not have been appropriate, for example, to have a 21-year-old discussing their experiences of care in the same space as a 10-year-old.

A researcher from Savanta was present in each Democracy café and online focus group to record the discussions and take notes. The notes focused specifically on observations that may not be apparent from reading the transcript alone; for example, if there was a dominant character in the group that affected the overall dynamics. These nuances are important to consider when analysing the data.

Data analysis

Savanta conducted rigorous analysis of the qualitative data. There were several phases to this process:

- 1 Coding. This refers to the process of labelling sections of a transcript (this could be a paragraph, a sentence, or a single word) with a word or short phrase that summarises its content.

- 2 Thematic analysis. This is an iterative process of identifying and analysing themes and patterns within the data, by allocating codes to themes and sub-themes. The themes broadly fitted into three categories: challenges, solutions, and needs/aspirations.
- 3 Incorporation of observation notes. Savanta attendees took ethnographic notes at each Democracy café and online focus group. These notes provided important context about group dynamics and other considerations that would not be clear from a transcript alone.

Savanta then organised these themes into the structure provided by DCMS, informed by its Evidence Framework.

There followed three workshops to discuss, challenge, and refine our analysis and interpretation of the findings:

- 1 Internal analysis session with the Savanta team.
- 2 Analysis/interpretation session with consortium partners (UK Youth, My Life My Say, and #iWill)
- 3 Analysis/interpretation session with Youth Collaborators.

3. National survey

Savanta ran an online survey between 3 March and 23 April 2025 among n=14,134 young people in England aged 10 to 21 (and up to age 25 for SEN/D respondents). Respondents over 16 years of age were recruited directly, and for those under 16 years of age, they were recruited via parents/guardians. A mixture of internal research panels and a separate open link to the general public were used to maximise the breadth of the research. A total of n=8,838 completes were achieved via research panels, and n=5,296 were achieved via the open link.

Quotas and weighting were applied to be representative of the population aged 10 to 21 in England by age, gender, region, ethnicity, SEN/D status and socio-

economic status. It should be noted that whilst weighting has been applied, results for the “Other” ethnicity group should be treated with caution due to low response rates and therefore sample size among this audience. The survey findings included are statistically significant at a 95% confidence interval.

The survey was designed and routed for two separate age groups of 10 to 15-year-olds and 16 to 21-year-olds (up to age 25 for SEN/D participants), to ensure maximum engagement and comprehension. While adjustments to design and accessibility were made throughout the research process, it is important to acknowledge potential limitations of online research. This includes requiring the consent of a responsible adult for those aged 10 to 15, as well as access to the internet and a computer or mobile device to complete the online survey.

Savanta is a member of the British Polling Council and abides by its rules.

Throughout the report, socioeconomic groups ‘C2DE’ and ‘ABC1’ are referred to. These social grades have been derived from the National Readership Survey (NRS). Social grade is assigned based on the occupation of the chief income earner in the household, usually a parent or guardian. Respondents were asked to indicate the job title and industry of their main household earner. Occupations are then matched to the appropriate NRS social grade using a standardised code frame derived from the NRS and relevant ONS (Office for National Statistics) classifications.

A table showing the social grade, description of the social grade, and typical occupations for this social grade can be found below:

Social Grade	Description	Typical Occupations
A	Higher managerial, administrative or professional	Company directors, doctors
B	Intermediate managerial, administrative or professional	Teachers, middle managers
C1	Supervisory, clerical, junior managerial, administrative or professional	Office clerks, shop managers
C2	Skilled manual workers	Electricians, plumbers

D	Semi-skilled and unskilled manual workers	Factory workers, cleaners
E	State benefit recipients, unemployed, lowest grade workers	Pensioners, long-term unemployed, students, casual workers

For analysis, these six codes were collapsed into the broader ABC1 (higher/middle supervisory, managerial and professional) and C2DE (manual, lower skilled, and those not working) groupings.

4. Wider evidence included

The wider evidence included in this report is based on existing evidence that the DCMS analysis team was made aware of due to engagement with the sector, or via their existing evidence base, or via desk research. DCMS have tried as much as possible to use findings that are focusing on England, but this was not always the case due to survey findings sometimes covering for example England as well as Wales. Sometimes the age range is also different from what the focus of the National Youth Strategy is, where this is the case, the team has done their best to always specify the age range so it is clear. An analyst has chosen, summarised, and quality assured the sources used.

5. DCMS policy engagement

DCMS policy engagement which fed into this report include:

- Regional Youth Work Units commissioned activity. Between January and early March 2025, the eight Regional Youth Work Units carried out a minimum of one focus group with young people and one with experts as part of our initial engagement phase with the youth sector. The RWUs that took part were:
 - Youth Focus North West (YFNW)
 - Youth Focus North East (YFNE)
 - Youth Focus West Midlands (YFWM)
 - Youth Work Unit Yorkshire and the Humber (YWUYH)

- East and East Midlands Regional Youth Work Unit (EEMRYWU)
- Youth Focus South West (YFSW)
- Youth Focus South East (YFSE)
- Partnership for Young London (PYL)
- Ministerial and official engagements with young people, including #iWill Ambassadors, National Citizen Service Youth Advisory Board, the UK Youth Parliament representatives and others at a local level
- Official engagements with youth sector experts, including the NYSAB and local councillors and heads of services
- Initial feedback (up until 28 March 2025) from those who have hosted conversations with young people using the session plan DCMS developed and circulated

6. A note on transparency and limitations

Please note that there are, as always, limitations to this study. The scope of the REA had to be limited based on year and a set of key inclusion criteria to ensure the findings could be received in time for the writing of this report. The evidence collated by DCMS was not collated in a systematic way (for example, with key search terms). The Democracy cafés and the focus groups engaged with many young people, but of course, many have not had their voices heard and other themes or different perspectives may have come through if more voices were heard.

In terms of ensuring the report is informed by the knowledgeable sector, as well as young people themselves, DCMS have ensured that the YSAG, EAG, YAG and Youth Collaborators had the opportunity to feed in. Both in terms of reviewing the ‘tone’ to ensure this report is accessible and readable to young people, as well as ensuring the findings are represented accurately.

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