



[Department
for Culture,
Media & Sport](#)

Research and analysis

National Youth Strategy Research Project: young person's report

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Applies to England

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Introduction and key findings

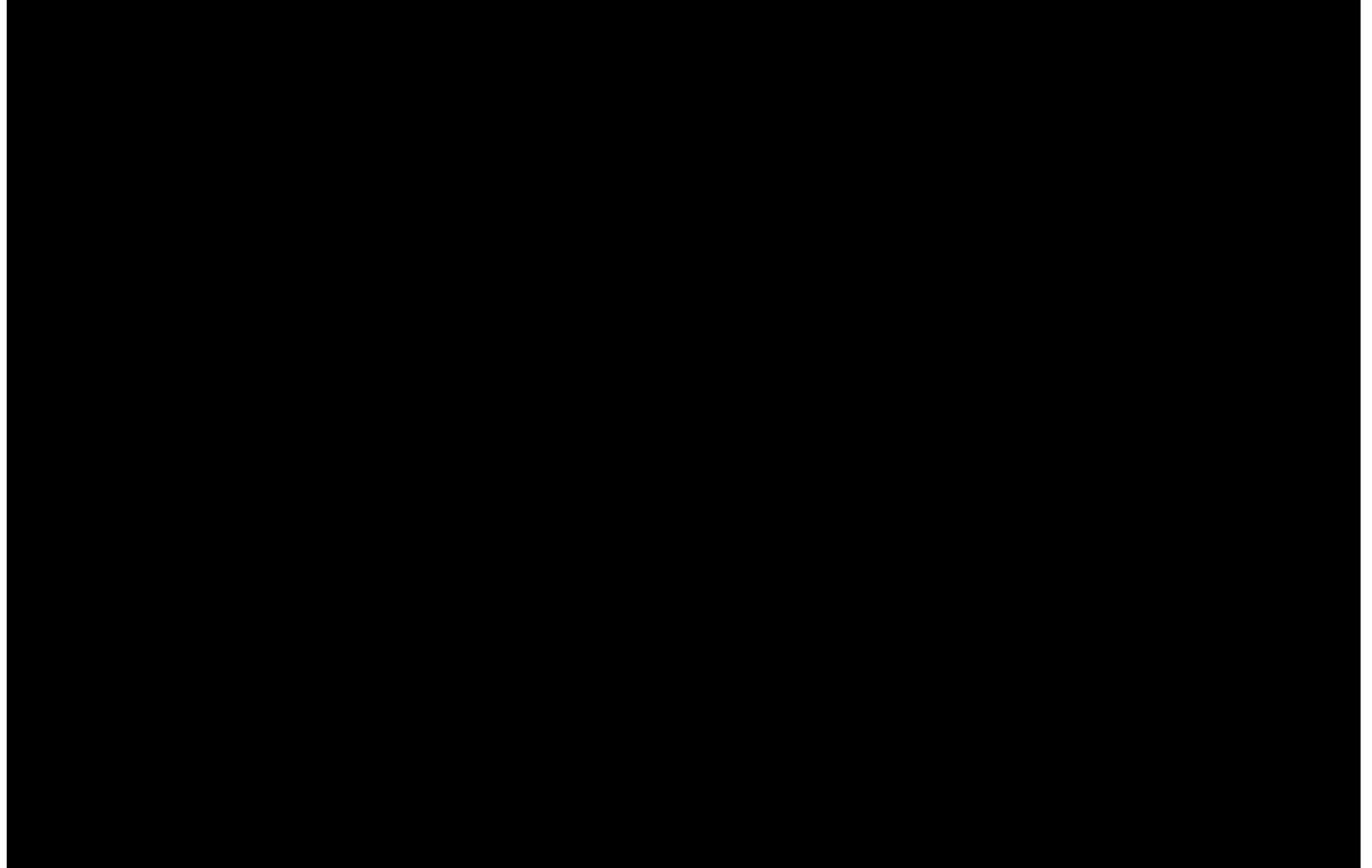
What's this report about?

This report is about what matters most to young people (aged 10 to 21 or up to 25 with SEND) in England, and the changes they want to see in the future. It's part of Youth Matters: Your National Youth Strategy, which aims to make things better for young people across England. We spoke to thousands of young people like you, both online and in person, and you may even have taken part yourself. You shared your biggest worries, your hopes, and what you think needs to change. This report highlights your opinions and the solutions you suggested.

Listening to young people

Our amazing [Youth Collaborators](#) from all over England helped to design this research. Then, over 14,000 of you took part in our survey and Express Orders, and more than 400 of you took part in focus groups and [Hack events](#) across the country to share your views and ideas for change.

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The main themes: what matters to young people

We grouped what we heard from young people like you under five themes, based on what you say is most important:

- 1 **Wellbeing:** Being healthy physically, mentally, and online.
- 2 **Community:** Feeling connected, included, and having spaces where you feel a sense of belonging.
- 3 **Skills and opportunities:** Learning life skills and getting ready for work.
- 4 **Safety and security:** Feeling safe and confident in your home, outside, and online.
- 5 **Youth voice:** Having a say in decisions that affect you and actually being listened to.

Your top priorities and concerns

Money and the future

- Worries about money are common, especially for older teenagers. Many of you say it's hard to see how to get by in the future, and you want schools to teach more practical money skills.

Community spaces

- Lots of you say you want more places like youth clubs or sports centres,

which help you meet other people, learn, and feel safe.

Mental health is very important

- You want better, easier access to help, especially in schools and your communities.

Skills for life

- You want learning to go beyond tests. Life skills like budgeting, job-hunting, and mental health support really matter to you.

Safety

- You're worried about being safe at home, outdoors, and online. You want more support and protection.

Having a voice

- You want to be listened to about things that affect your lives at school, in your town, and nationally.

You told us these problems are often linked to each other and are based on real experiences you face every day. These challenges are shaped by where you live, study and meet people. Even though many young people across England share these worries and hopes, you say the best changes often start in your own local area.

What happens next?

This report is a summary of a longer report which will help design Youth Matters: Your National Youth Strategy, so the government can focus on what matters most to young people and their ideas for a better future.

Feeling good physically, mentally and online

Why feeling healthy matters

Young people tell us that feeling healthy, both physically and mentally, is very important. They mention managing stress, confidence, feeling safe online, and doing things they enjoy as key to their happiness.

Worries about mental health

Lots of young people say they worry about mental health – a third (36%) say it is on their mind most days.

Older teens, especially girls and those with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), are most worried about it. Other things, like stress at school, money worries, or being unwell, can make mental health worse. Even younger children understand how important this is.

When we talk about

mental health

we mean the way your mind and emotions affect how you think and feel. Good mental health doesn't mean you're always happy- it means having the tools to cope with challenges and express how you feel in a healthy way.

When we say young people with

SEND

we mean a child or person that has a learning difficulty and/or a disability that means they need special health and education support, we shorten this to SEND.

37%

say feeling better mentally would improve their daily lives.

What would make the mental health situation better?

More adults to talk to

Young people want adults who listen and won't judge.

Support groups

Many want spaces to share feelings with friends and other people who "get it".

Help at school

Students say schools should have people trained to help, so no student is left alone if they need mental health support.

Faster help

Many have to wait a long time to see mental health professionals and want faster access to people who can help them.

Normalise getting help

Young people want it to be normal to ask for help, rather than feeling embarrassed.

Young people feel that all these changes need more money from the government, because current mental health services simply aren't funded well enough.

46%

say access to recreational and leisure activities would improve their day-to-day lives.

“[we should be] able to communicate through a range of methods depending on my mood (phone, text, in-person).”

Sheffield

“Shorter wait times for places like CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services) would help so much.”

Blackpool

Why don't all young people get the help they need?

Most 10 to 15-year-olds feel they could get help if they wanted, but older teens are less sure, and say it gets harder to find support after leaving school. Boys told us it can feel especially hard to speak out.

What about physical health?

Being physically active is another thing young people say helps them feel happy and healthy, especially for the younger people we spoke to (aged 10 to 15). Many say they want to do more activities like sports, games in the park, going to the gym, or joining dance or art clubs that are friendly and open to everyone.

What would help with physical health?

- **Lower costs**

Activities like football, gyms, and clubs to be free or much cheaper.

- **More spaces**

Places like parks, sports fields, and youth clubs matter to young people, but they also want more “mindful” or creative clubs too, like cooking, art, or yoga.

Being safe and happy online

Most young people use the internet every day and say they feel confident staying safe online. But confidence doesn't always mean they always manage to avoid online harms — some risks can be hard to spot, even for those who think they're aware. Managing screen time is hard for some, and young people with SEND are most likely to find it a challenge. Online bullying, negative content and social pressure can impact mental health. “Social media makes you feel like you have to be perfect”, someone told us in a focus group.

Even some who are not on social media yet say it worries them. Girls in one group wanted more lessons at school about online dangers, like hateful content.

“Take away social media for under 16s. I feel like I need it because everyone has it, but it can be so bad for us.

“Talk to teens about what's out there and how to deal with it.”

How does this all link up?

Young people understand that their body, mind, and online life are all connected. Bad days or bullying, both online and offline, can affect how they feel in all parts of their life. Support that considers the bigger picture and covers all parts of young

people's lives is needed to help them feel as happy and healthy as possible.

Belonging to your community

How young people feel about community and belonging

Young people say their local communities don't feel as strong as before. A lot more happens online now, but being online isn't the same as meeting people in real life. For many young people, they say this makes them feel lonely. Youth clubs and activities aren't as easy to find or get to anymore, and buses or trains often cost too much or don't run when needed. This creates real challenges for accessing activities and making new friends.

What do young people want more of?

Young people want more safe, easy-to-get-to places like parks and community centres. They'd also like more fun events nearby and cheaper transport, so it's easier to meet up and feel part of their community. These are the top requests from the survey:

29%
safe public spaces

29%
green spaces

26%

community events

26%

cheaper public transport

What's stopping young people from getting more involved in their local community?

- Young people can't find or access places to connect in person.
- They don't always know about or know how to get to services that are meant for them.

Young people want a say in youth services

More than just access to spaces, young people told us they want to shape and lead what goes on in their communities. Taking part in volunteering and social action – organising activities, supporting local projects and helping others – gives young people the chance to build stronger communities themselves. Young people want youth clubs and activities to be shaped by those who use them and say this would make them join in more and feel like their voices matter.

Getting around matters

Transport is a big issue. Young people say buses and trains are expensive, don't come often enough, or are hard to use. What matters most is being able to get to

the places and activities they enjoy. Cheaper bus tickets are the most common solution raised, especially for those living outside of cities.

“From my village to the nearest town, Ipswich, there are only about 4 buses per day and the prices of them are ridiculous. They cost £3, which is too expensive, and that’s only one way.”

Ipswich

“We also talked about public transport because it’s very expensive for those who have to commute to college every day, so we were saying that we think that it should be free for those are, like, commuting to education.”

Birmingham

Funding youth services

Young people, including primary school kids, say youth clubs need more money. Good youth clubs help with loneliness, mental health, and getting involved in the community. Young people also think there should be extra support for groups like those with SEND.

“For the mental health side of things, it’s a known fact that kids’ stress levels are slowly increasing across the country, which, obviously, isn’t good. A way that the government can help to sort this issue is to fund towards youth clubs for children, so they can socialise.”

Ipswich

What ideas do young people have?

Young people think there are 3 main solutions:

- 1 More money for youth services
- 2 Better, cheaper transport links
- 3 Services designed and led by young people themselves

Activities and spaces young people want

Young people often don't know what's available to do nearby. Awareness campaigns could help, showing where clubs are, what they offer, and who can go. Many don't realise that clubs offer sports, arts, and events free or at low cost. Young people suggest a wide range of activities and spaces:

What's your order?

Build

“More free recreational space for young people so they can do stuff for free because not everyone could afford to do stuff that they would want to do, and will likely lower crime rates because more recreation space would possibly make young people less bored so they would commit crimes.”

What's your order?

Create

“Youth hubs, same as they created children’s centres. Five aside football pitch, skateboard track, gym, coffee café.”

What’s your order?

More

“things to do in the community so [young people] are not hanging round in the parks. Youth clubs with videos games for groups to play.”

Make sure there’s something for everyone

Young people want different kinds of centres for different interests and needs. Some want quiet places, others want sport or music, and there should be spaces for people with SEND or who are neurodivergent.

“More youth centres can benefit a lot of youth today. Different youth centres for different needs, for different specialities, for different likes and dislikes. That’s what we need. Who remembers being young, going outside after school and there being a big youth bus? Because I do, it was very fun, and you went inside. For those few hours, you forget all your problems, you forget everything bad in life and you enjoy yourself with some random kids your age, but you have fun. Who wants that back? Who wants that brief moment when you can feel safe, supported and happy? That’s what we want. We want the government to bring more

youth buses, bring more youth centres.”

Birmingham

In short, young people want more funding, better transport, and services that include their ideas in their design. Making these changes can help young people feel happier, less lonely, and more connected to their community.

Preparing for life and work

Many young people are worried about jobs and what comes next. Finding work feels stressful, mostly because so many jobs want them to have experience already. Most young people also agree that school matters for getting a job but often think that what they learn in class doesn't include the skills they will need as an adult.

Why is it so hard to get a first job?

Young people talk about an “experience gap.” This means that they need experience to get a job, but at the same time need a job to get experience in the first place. This leaves many young people feeling frustrated.

Young people with SEND are particularly worried about work, because many jobs are difficult for them to get to or not designed properly for them.

What do young people want to change?

Young people have lots of ideas to solve the “experience gap”:

Starter jobs

Paid jobs for young people, with an adult to mentor them. These would fit around school and help young people get work experience early in their career.

“More vocational opportunities and starter jobs. With young people, when

they're looking for jobs, these jobs require experience. Even if they're normal waitressing jobs, it says it requires one year's experience, but where can you get that if you can't get a job in the first place? So, if you get starter jobs which are targeted towards young people from 16 to 18, so they can have a side job while they're in education with a mentor. If they have that little bit of experience, even if it's for a few months, you're more likely to be chosen to get on an actual job."

Manchester

Kickstart

Kickstart was a government scheme to help young people find jobs after the COVID-19 pandemic. It gave money to companies to create jobs for 16 to 24-year-olds who were out of work.

What's your order?

Life skills

"A subject that teaches you life skills from a young age like how to do taxes or how the government works etc."

Work experience

Bring back job schemes like Kickstart, and offer work experience in tech and coding rather than just things like building or plumbing. This would also make it easier for young people with SEND to take part in these opportunities.

Life skills workshops

Young people want to learn things like how to write a CV, do interviews and manage money, either at school or at youth clubs.

Are schools teaching the right things in the right way?

Many young people think schools care too much about exams and not enough about work or real-life skills like cooking and managing money. As part of this, some young people also feel like teachers don't really listen or understand what life is like for them.

“Teachers create an image of you in their head, but they don't actually know you, they just teach you a few hours every week.”

Sheffield

“Teachers see conversations as arguments. They shut you down and just don't talk to you like people. They don't actually want to figure stuff out with you, they just want to get it over with.”

Sheffield

Young people understand that teachers are there to teach school subjects, but they also think teachers could help them with life issues outside of school. Many feel they can trust youth workers and would like more people at school they can talk to when they need support.

29%

say having a trusted adult (who isn't their parent) to talk to would make daily life better.

“Youth workers are some of the only adults in our life who listen to us.”

Sheffield

What do young people think would fix this?

Young people say these ideas would make the biggest difference:

- A youth work qualification or training to help teachers and other school workers connect with students. If staff can better connect with and understand their students, they will be better positioned to teach them the skills they need to transition into life and work.
- ‘Core skills’ training to help students get the skills they need for jobs and adult life, to run alongside the usual school subjects.

What's your order?

Support

“More support in schools, so every student should have someone to talk to and not be shy if they need that support.”

Keeping safe and secure

Why is safety important?

Feeling safe means different things to different young people. It's about having enough money, feeling secure in your home, and being safe out and about where you live. Young people tell us these things matter, but also that it's hard to come up with solutions, especially for problems like money or housing.

Money worries: you're not alone

Lots of you said you worry about money. Even the youngest children notice when things get more expensive – older teens worry most, but even under-16s feel it. Many young people link money stress with thinking about the future, such as what comes after school and jobs.

41%

say money is a top worry in their day-to-day life.

26%

of 16 to 21s say more affordable housing is the change they want to see from the government.

How can money worries be fixed?

Lower costs

Most survey respondents (61%) say cheaper living costs would make life better. Even younger respondents (aged 10 to 15) choose this as their top answer.

Learning about money

Half (51%) of young people aged 10 to 15 say learning how to look after their money is in the top five things that would help them in the future. This includes how to budget, save money, and understand bills.

Other ideas to help include simply offering more activities that aren't too expensive, or events where you pay as much as you can to make sure fun activities are available for everyone.

A place to call home

Finding a safe and affordable place to live matters to young people.

Many young people worry about paying rent, while some say they even face homelessness.

More affordable housing is the change young people aged 16 to 21 most want to see from the government. This shows that as young people get older, finding a home becomes a bigger worry. However, young people find it difficult to suggest solutions because they have often never been taught about how renting or buying a home works. Many feel that schools should help young people understand things like mortgages and housing costs.

What's your order?

Setting up for

SUCCESS

“The National Curriculum has left us, and many more students, unprepared for life beyond school. We are still helpless when it comes to everyday skills, such as mortgages and taxes”

What does safety mean to young people?

Young people see safety in lots of ways. For some young people, safety means safer roads like having cycle lanes, crossing guards, and clear signs.

“We would love it if we could get a lollipop man or lady [school crossing guard] and we could get some bright, bold signs telling you where you can and cannot park. That would make a huge difference. There’s a lot of bikers around town and we think that it would be more safe because most people cycle on the road, so it would be more safe to have more cycle lanes for the bikers.”

Ipswich

For many young people, feeling safe also means being able to use parks and public spaces. In the survey, 40% of 10 to 15-year-olds said ‘safe parks and playgrounds’ are a top need for their neighbourhood. It is about both safety and having more places to go with friends.

Some talk about crime and harm in their own local community. Young people in Bristol want dangerous knives banned. In Birmingham, mental safety is the focus, and they want more education on spotting and escaping abusive relationships. In Blackpool, they want police to build positive relationships with young people through visits to schools, not just more patrols.

“There needs to be more education [...] to teach young people the first

signs of what to look for if someone is trapped in an abusive relationship.”

Birmingham

How can young people feel safer?

Young people want safer roads, better parks, more help spotting abuse, and police who listen and work with their communities. They say it helps to clearly define what ‘safety’ means so everyone can work toward the right solutions.

What's next? Your voice matters

Young people already have important perspectives on what needs to change. That's why having opportunities to discuss real-life issues and have opinions heard is so important. When adults listen, and when young people share what you need, everyone's safety and happiness can improve – at home, in schools, and across the country.

Having your say

Do young people feel listened to?

Many young people worry that important decisions are being made without listening to their views. Whether it's in their local area, at school, or for the whole country, it can seem like there's no easy way for young people to share their thoughts, and even when they do speak up, they feel their opinions often aren't taken seriously. As a result, important changes can feel like they just happen to them, rather than with them. This makes some young people feel powerless and less likely to get involved in their community or politics.

Survey results show that less than a third (31%) of young people feel like their voice

matters locally, and even fewer (26%) for decisions made nationally. Nearly half (49%) disagree that their voice matters at the national level. Some groups, for example girls, young people with SEND, and those from lower income backgrounds, feel even more left out and unsure how to get involved.

What makes it hard for young people to be heard?

Young people talked about 3 main barriers:

- 1 Where can I have my say? Young people want to have their say, particularly on local issues, but often aren't sure where or how to do it, especially in places where youth voices aren't usually invited.
- 2 Not knowing what's possible: If young people haven't been included before, or don't know much about how politics or local decisions work, it's even harder to get involved. For many, the Hack events were the first place they'd ever been asked for their opinion about their community.
- 3 Some groups feel less heard: For example, young people from small towns or villages, lower income homes, or with SEND are the least likely to feel like they know how to make their voice count.

What do young people want to change?

Young people who took part in the Hack events had several ideas for making sure youth voices are really listened to and respected:

- Feedback boxes: anonymous ways to share views with people in charge, such as local councillors.
- Youth involvement in decisions: letting young people have a say before important decisions are made in their area.
- Clearer accountability: making sure that adults show that they've listened and what has changed as a result, so young people know their opinions really matter.

- One key demand was that young people's ideas aren't watered down as they go up to the people who make the decisions. As one person said:

“Say someone said something good from this meeting that we've had today. It would go through tons and tons of layers, and by the time it got to the prime minister, even if it did, it would be a completely different thing. So, we need, you know, that our messages, when it goes through that, it stays the same.”

Ipswich

Some Hack participants also talked about the need to build confidence and remind all young people that their voice is important, even for those who might not usually speak up. As one young person put it,

“Children do have voices and they do know what they want.”

Ipswich

Finally, a lot of young people also said they want to be respected for the efforts they are already making. They want adults, especially those in charge, to see and recognise the positive work that young people already do within their communities, such as speaking at conferences or running projects that help other young people.

What would help more young people be engaged?

Survey results found that young people are much more likely to take part in their community if:

- they feel their voice is heard and matters in big decisions, and
- they know how to influence what happens.

These findings show that when young people see that speaking up actually makes a difference, they are more likely to get involved and try to help make their community better.

What's needed next?

Young people want to:

- learn how to make their voice count through better political and civic education at school and in the community
- have more chances to get involved and be asked for their views early, not as an afterthought
- see real proof that their voices are making a difference, with honest feedback from decision-makers

By making it easier and more meaningful for young people to speak up, and showing that their voices really matter, communities will be healthier, fairer, and stronger for everyone.

What does all of this mean?

This report is a snapshot of what life is really like for young people across England, based on what you and others said matters most. You spoke openly about your biggest worries, from coping with stress and mental health, dealing with money problems, finding safe spaces to go, having a say in decisions, and wanting practical help for life after school. You also showed us that these challenges are often connected, and that not having enough youth spaces or difficulty accessing support can make other problems worse.

You've made it clear that you want more than just promises or quick fixes. You want adults to listen, and act on what you say, making changes that actually help. That means better support for mental health and wellbeing, affordable places to live, safer communities and streets, and schools that prepare you for life with practical skills, not just test scores. You also want more places and opportunities to belong, have fun, and connect with others — especially spaces that are designed and led by young people like you.

Most importantly, you want to be involved in decisions that affect you, not just once in a while but all the time — at your school, in your local community and in national policies. Some of you, such as those with SEND or mental health challenges, need extra help to be heard and supported. You've asked for

feedback that shows your voice matters and evidence that adults are acting on your ideas, not just listening.

What happens next is important. Youth Matters: Your National Youth Strategy will use what you've said to make real changes, but you want regular chances to share your views and help shape the future. By putting your voices at the centre, England can become a fairer, happier, and safer place for every young person, including you.

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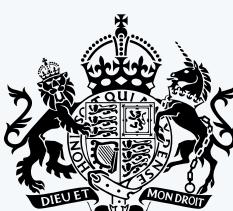
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