

Youth Voice Census 2022

Briefing Pack

Youth Employment UK is an independent, not-for-profit social enterprise founded in 2012 to tackle youth unemployment.

As experts on youth employment and unemployment, we are ideally placed to understand the complex landscape facing young people, employers, and policymakers.

We are actively tackling youth unemployment by

- Giving young people a voice on the youth employment issues that affect them
- Supporting young people with the skills and careers support they need to progress
- Supporting employers to develop and be recognised for their youth friendly employment practice
- Connecting young people to Youth Friendly Employers
- Providing expert insight across all youth employment policy areas

What is the Youth Voice Census?

The Youth Voice Census is the biggest collection of youth voice and insights in the UK. It provides a unique understanding of the experiences young people are having in the systems around them, how they are doing right now and how they are feeling about their future.

Now in its 5th year, the Youth Voice Census provides us with a repository of information for young people in education or training, looking for work, in work or those currently not engaging with these systems. It gives invaluable insight into how young people feel about several issues including where they live, and the ongoing impacts of COVID-19 and gives them the space to share their insight into what could work more effectively for them.

This information provides us with the chance to explore how the things young people can not control (including their race and ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, Free School Meal status, Care experience and more) are impacting what they are receiving today and their perceptions of how these factors will affect their future.

This year 4,083 young people completed the Youth Voice Census, our largest number of responses to date. Young people were more vocal than ever before, using our free text commentary boxes to share their views; good and bad, ideas and plans for the future too.

We increased the age range for this year from 14 - 24-year-olds to 11 - 30-year-olds to reflect the additional services Youth Employment UK offers but also to acknowledge the challenges young people are facing from 11 and up to 30.

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Methodology

The 2022 Youth Voice Census was open from 31st March to 31st May, this year's question set was expanded to include the voices of young people aged 11 - 30 (from a target age range of 14 - 24 in previous years).

The survey structure had a core question set for all respondents; the results of these questions were weighted and reflect young people aged 11 - 30 in England.

In addition to this core question set we included short, non-required question sets allowing us to explore areas such as T levels and Kickstart in more detail. Whilst some of the supplementary questions were not able to be weighted we have included them to showcase how young people in our network are experiencing these areas right now.

This year we have supplemented the quantitative Census responses with a series of in-person qualitative interviews. Supported by Nando's we visited restaurants in Birmingham, Corby, Darlington, Liverpool, London and Newcastle.

Key Findings

There are four key findings from this year's report which are set out in this briefing pack.

1. Mental health emergency
2. Difference is the disadvantage
3. Unprepared for the future
4. Quality of Work: Employers and opportunities

Each key finding is explored with the current landscape for each area. At the end of this briefing pack you will also find a set of recommendations and further ways that you can support the youth employment issues presented today.

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Key Finding 1 - Mental health emergency

Young people are in crisis - and that well-documented mental health crisis is escalating in its severity. Young people are anxious, worried, depressed and feeling that their lives are out of control right now, with compounded fears for their future.

Whilst we expect and account for some level of concern and discomfort around key transition points, this year's Youth Voice Census findings are a warning that young people are absolutely overwhelmed by these moments and choices, more than ever before and at an even greater scale. The additional stressors of Covid 19, the cost of living and the uncertain political landscape here and further afield are building such high levels of anxiety and fear in our young people that even a small step forward or decision point can be debilitating.

28.5% of young people told us that they had 'social, emotional and mental health challenges, in addition throughout the free text commentary boxes, young people continued to link back to their feelings of anxiety and mental health challenges more than we have seen before.

Loneliness and friendships:

Young people told us that they were lonely and had concerns about making and keeping friends at every age and stage. Social connections had been lost during the pandemic and young people were worried about being able to build relationships.

Self belief is at an all-time low:

- Young people were at least 10% more likely to state that they are 'not confident' or 'not confident at all' in their self belief and related skills than all other skills, with 36.6% of those in education scoring this way and 29.8% aged 19 plus
- 31.2% of young people in work struggle with their wellbeing

In education:

- The effects of Covid 19 are staying with young people; 52% of those in education feel that their education has been disrupted 'a lot' or a 'great deal'
- 49.1% of respondents thought that exams and assessments impact their mental health negatively, and those with protected characteristics feel this more acutely

Barriers to work:

- 51% of young people looking for work thought their anxiety was the biggest barrier to accessing work, 32% thought that mental health challenges were their biggest barrier.
- For those looking for work Covid 19 had the biggest impact on their mental health with over half (52.6%) stating that their mental health had been impacted 'a lot' or 'a great deal' and 42.1% saying that their motivation to apply for opportunities has been impacted 'a lot' or a great deal'
- Young people currently in work told us their biggest barrier to accessing work had been anxiety (52%).

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Landscape - Mental health emergency

There is increasing demand for mental health services for young people, the number of referrals to CAMHS/CYPMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services/Child and Young Person Mental Health Services) hit over 760,000 in the year 2020/2021. Young people in need of this support are also struggling to get it, only 24% of referrals during this period were seen within 4 weeks with 38% of referrals being closed before contact was made.

The number of young people aged 18 and under accessing mental health services in May 2022 was just under 690,000 up from 573,000 in March 2021. The number of young people accessing CAMHS/CYMPHS was up 24% in 2021 on 2020, with the 2020 figure up 44% on 2019. These figures tell a story of increasing demand for mental health services for young people, however, they only paint part of the picture. These figures fail to include those young people who are too old to access CAMHS/CYMPHS (over 18 in most local authorities) and those young people who may be experiencing ill mental health but have not been referred to the relevant services.

The NHS Long Term Plan published in 2019 set out to provide schools and colleges with NHS-funded Mental Health Support Teams to support mental health provision for young people still in education. So far there are 287 mental health support teams that are operational covering over 4,700 schools and colleges and 26% of pupils in schools and learners in Further Education. The NHS long-term plan also pledged to create a new approach for young adult mental health services to ensure people aged 18-25 would be supported in their transition to adulthood. An update on this has not yet been presented.

These plans and measures are only seeking to support those young people who are in education. Young people in employment, currently unemployed, and those who are NEET are being missed. Mental health support for these young people must be accessed through adult mental health services, which has been expanding under the IAPT (Improving access to psychological therapies program) but is not necessarily catered to young people who are at a key transition point in their lives.

For young people in work, there is no statutory guidance for employers concerning the mental health support they should be providing their young workers. The only existing protections come under The Equality Act, through which any employee may request reasonable adjustments to their working practices or environment if their mental health problem has lasted more than 12 months or is likely to.

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Key Finding 2 - Difference is the disadvantage

Being young is seen as a disadvantage by all respondents but there is more nuance and concern as we explore the experience of young people with protected characteristics, carers and care leavers.

Overall young people with protected characteristics, carers and care leavers were more greatly impacted by change and uncertainty. At every stage of their journey, and when we explore the ongoing impacts of covid 19 young people with protected characteristics, carers and care leavers were always more likely to feel that they have been (or will be) impacted most negatively. Self belief, confidence and staying positive scores were more likely to be at least 10% lower too.

There are not enough spaces and places for young people to be themselves:

In their local area:

- Young people with protected characteristics, carers and care leavers were around 20% less likely to feel safe in their local community and the most likely to feel 'very unsafe' in their local area.
 - The biggest concerns were from those with English as a second language for whom only 24% felt safe where they lived, and for transgender and unsure/questioning respondents, there was a lot of fear about being able to go out alone in their local area.

In education:

- Black, Black African, Black British or Caribbean respondents were over 3 times more likely to say they did not feel welcome in their secondary school.
- Those with additional needs were 22% less likely to feel welcome in their secondary and straight or heterosexual respondents felt 20% more supported than other groups.

Space and places:

- Groups with protected characteristics are less likely to have quiet places to study.
- 18.9% of young people in work and who are required to work from home do not have the space to do so, a further 8.1% do not have the required internet or data to work from home.

Looking for work:

- Young people with protected characteristics, carers and care leavers were less likely to be confident that there are quality jobs available to them. With a difference of around 15% for different groups.
 - We see the largest differences for transgender respondents (by 25%) and for Black, Black African, Black British or Caribbean respondents who were at least 10% more likely than any other race or ethnicity to not be confident in accessing quality work.

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Landscape - Difference is the disadvantage

Young people are nearly three times more likely to be unemployed than the rest of the population, the latest Office for National Statistics (ONS) Labour Market Data shows the unemployment rate for 16-24-year-olds was 10.4% vs. 3.8% for all ages.

In the academic year 2020/21 51.9% of all students completing GCSE English and Maths achieved a grade 5 or above, compared to only 21.1% of Irish Traveller students and just 9.1% for those from Gypsy/Roma backgrounds.

Young people from economically disadvantaged backgrounds fare less well in education and earnings. The ONS found that by the age of 30 an individual's level of highest qualification varied significantly depending on background. 16.2% of young people who had received free school meals had achieved a Bachelor's Degree compared to 28.2% of other state school students and 57.3% of independently educated students. By the age of 30 those who had received free school meals earned an average annual income of £17,000 compared to £22,700 for those who did not receive FSM and £33,000 for those who attended an independent school.

The average attainment 8 score for young people in care was 21.4 in 2019 compared to 50.1 of all other pupils. In addition 41% of care leavers aged 19-21 years are not in education, employment, or training (NEET), compared to 12% of all 19- to 21-year-olds.

The disparity in educational outcomes is also evident for people with a disability, 24.9% of disabled people aged 21 to 64 had a degree as their highest qualification compared with 42.7% of non-disabled people. Young people with a disability also face greater challenges when it comes to seeking employment. 2019 ONS data revealed that roughly half of disabled people were in employment (53.2%) compared with just over four out of five non-disabled people (81.8%).

The *Broken Ladders* report by the Runnymede Trust and the Fawcett Society found that 61% of Black women felt they needed to change themselves to fit in at work. The report further found that 37% changed their language or the words they use to fit in, 26% changed their hairstyle and around one in five (22%) felt like they needed to change their name.

The gender pay gap continues to disadvantage young women, the Young Women's Trust *Just Getting By: Young Women's Trust annual survey 2022* found young women aged 18-29 earned 22% less than their male peers in 2021.

A 2020 Stonewall Report, *Shut Out*, found that young people who were LGBTQ+ face specific challenges in the transition from education to work, including homophobic, biphobic and transphobic discrimination, and a lack of support and inclusion in education, training and work.

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Key Finding 3 - Unprepared for the future

Whilst so much has changed in recent years the challenges young people are facing around preparing for their future have remained the same.

Young people who are still in school and those who are looking for work are looking for the same types of help and support, despite a potential 19-year age gap. Critically this type of support has been consistently called out for and yet we are seeing very little to no evidence that the call is being answered.

Confidence

- 51.5% of young people aged 19 plus were confident they would be able to progress into a good job.
- 28.7% think employers are supportive of hiring young people
- 14.2% of respondents were confident or very confident that there are quality jobs available in their local area.

Work experience

- Young people in work cited one of their biggest barriers to accessing work for them had been work experience (45.2%)
- Over half of young people looking for work think their biggest barrier to work will be a lack of work experience (56%) and only 36% of young people in education have access to work experience.

Job preparation

Confidence in applying for work and passing interview and selection processes is down this year.

- 44.6% think they could write a CV
- 38.7% could prepare for assessment centres
- 46.9% could prepare for an interview
- 41.5% feel confident they are prepared to start employment

Skills for life and work : the big mismatch

When we asked young people in education what skills they thought were important for work they said that all the skills listed would be important to employers. This is different to previous years where most respondents selected just a few skills, choosing all skills, signals a lack of confidence in understanding the skills they need for their futures.

For those aged 19 plus 57% thought they understood the skills employers were looking for, they rated listening, communication, self management, motivation and teamwork as the most important skills employers look for. They rated themselves most confident in listening, digital skills, literacy skills, problem solving and organisation.

Young people aren't feeling prepared for life outside of education; they do not feel that they have the tools to manage finances, look after themselves or support their mental health and wellbeing.

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Landscape - Unprepared for the future

The current guidance for schools, sixth form colleges and further education colleges on careers education and guidance follows the Gatsby Benchmarks. These benchmarks establish the statutory provision that education providers should provide to their learners.

The Careers and Enterprise Company are responsible for measuring how education providers are meeting the Gatsby Benchmarks. Their 2020-2021 review found that, on average, colleges and schools across England were meeting only half (3.9) of the 8 Gatsby Benchmarks. 36% of schools and colleges in England were achieving benchmark 6 (providing experiences of work) with 57% partially achieving this benchmark and 7% not achieving.

The Department for Education's Employer's Perspectives Report found that 65% of employers valued work experience as significant or critical compared to 46% for academic qualifications. Research from Lloyds Bank Group/IPSOS MORI found that digital skills are in shortage, finding that around 11.7 million people aged 15 and above across the UK lacked the 'essential digital skills' needed to work online.

Youth Work in all its forms can often act as a bridge for young people to support their personal, social and career development. In September 2021 the National Youth Agency (NYA) and YMCA authored a report - Time's Running Out - which explored the level of cuts that have been delivered across the youth sector and the impact of those cuts on providing quality support to young people in their communities. The report identified that 4,500 qualified youth workers have been lost from frontline youth services, and there at least 40,000 adult volunteers have left or are leaving the youth sector.

In 2022 the government reduced the investment into the National Citizen Service in 2022/23, down from £158.6m in 2019/20. Designed specially for 16 and 17 year olds, the NCS exists to engage, unite and empower young people, building confidence and skills for their future.

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Key Finding 4 - Quality Work: employers and opportunities

Accessing quality work locally is a problem repeated this year and travel and location are becoming bigger issues for young people finding and keeping work.

When young people are in good quality work they can be themselves, they believe they are building useful skills for the future and they are happy in their job.

What do young people want from an employer?

- Paying fairly, offering training and development and having a good reputation were the three most important qualities young people looked for from employers.

What stops young people applying for jobs?

- Low pay and being frequently met with entry level roles with person and qualification requirements that were attainable for them are the biggest factors that stop young people applying for opportunities

For those currently in work:

- 56.3% of young people think they are paid fairly for the work that they do
- 59.9% agree that they have been given enough training to do their job well
- 50.4% rated their induction as good

There is more to do in supporting employers to be more youth friendly both in how they recruit young people and in how they retain them too. We have to start with an understanding of where young people are right now, be transparent about the jobs being recruited for and understand where better line management training and support can ensure young people, and the businesses they support, thrive.

Landscape - Quality Work: employers and opportunities

In the August release of Labour Market Statistics by the Office for National Statistics 618,000 16-24-year-olds were not in education and were economically inactive between April and June 2022. In addition, NEET data released in August 2022 reveals there were 711,000 16-24-year-olds who were not in education, employment or training.

The UK is experiencing a skills shortage with employers unable to find workers with the right skills to fill vacancies. Job vacancies in the United Kingdom reached record levels sitting at over 1.2million since September - November 2021 (ONS).

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The Department for Education's Employer Skills Survey in 2019 found that nearly a quarter of all vacancies were skills shortage vacancies. At the same time as a growing skills shortage, employers and public investment in skills has been falling. The DfE Employer Skills survey also highlighted that only 61% of employers had arranged or funded training in 2019, the lowest proportion since 2011.

The number of apprenticeship starts has fallen over the last five years. In the year 2015-2016 there were just over 509,000 apprenticeship starts in England, in the year 2020-2021 this had fallen to just over 321,000, a fall over nearly 188,000. The portion of apprenticeship starts by those under 19 has also fallen from 1 in 4 in 2015/16 to 1 in 5 in 2020/21 whilst those aged 25 and over made up just over half of all apprenticeship starts in 2020/21.

The National Minimum Wage rates show the difference in pay between the age ranges with those over the age of 23 entitled to nearly double the hourly rate of those aged 19 and under or those doing apprenticeships (£9.50 vs. £4.81). In the tax year 2019 to 2020 the median income before tax for those under 20 was just £16,000 whilst those aged 20-24 fared slightly better at £19,300 whilst all other age ranges, including those 75 and over, had median incomes over £20,00, with 35-54 year olds averaging over £30,000 per year.

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Recommendations

Champion:

- youth voice by making youth voice consultation a statutory requirement in key national and local government policy areas including education, health, youth services and welfare
- mental health services by ensuring that existing commitments to extending CAMHS to those aged 25 and under, Mental Health Support Teams in Schools and investment in Mental Health services is delivered in full and at pace
- the Good Youth Employment Charter as best practice for youth-friendly employment
- evidence-based policy making by reviewing what works in supporting young people into employment

Change

- the systems supporting young people to ensure they are fair for all and compensate those with protected characteristics
- the way that schools are held accountable for meeting the Gatsby Benchmarks by making them a key measure of performance alongside exam results and OFSTED gradings
- Pupil Premium by extending support to post-16 settings – ensuring effective targeting towards those most in need and covering engagement, targeted academic and practical learning support; and careers counselling
- funding levels for youth services to ensure that all local authorities can deliver the services the young people need in their communities
- how young people who become NEET or who are NEET are identified and supported to avoid long-term unemployment and economic inactivity

Connect

- young people with quality education and training options in their local areas, ensuring adequate provision at Level 2 and below for those who need additional support. This should include a review of the use of the Apprenticeship Levy to support youth employment
- the curriculum and education more directly with the skills and jobs needed and now and in the future so young people are prepared for the challenges they may face
- young people with opportunities for good quality work in their local areas
- government departments and local authorities through a Youth Employment Commissioner to create a joined-up approach to tackling youth unemployment.

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How else you can support young people

Sign and support The Good Youth Employment Charter

The Good Youth Employment Charter has been developed in collaboration with a range of youth employment experts and young people including The Youth Employment Group. It aims to provide a framework to support, inspire and recognise all those employers who are committed to providing good quality opportunities to young people.

Support, join and recognise the Good Youth Employment Charter as the standard for youth-friendly employment in the UK.

Join and support the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Youth Employment

Support the work of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Youth Employment in:

- Promoting youth employment in all its forms
- Promoting the role of young people within the economy
- Ensuring young people's voices are heard
- Highlighting the need for quality opportunities
- Sharing best practice in youth employment.

We invite you to join the APPG for Youth Employment and attend all future events and inquiries.

Support the work of the Youth Employment Group

The non-funded Youth Employment Group is a policy group co-chaired by Youth Employment UK, Youth Futures Foundation, Prince's Trust, Impetus, Institute of Employment Studies and Learning & Work. It was set up to help the government avoid a mass youth unemployment crisis in the light of COVID-19. It's had incredible success in working with the Department of Work and Pensions, Department of Education and local government.

Recognise and support the Young Professional

The Young Professional is an online training course developed by Youth Employment UK helping young people to build the skills, knowledge and confidence for their futures.

You can find the full version of the 2022 Youth Voice Census and an online version of this document with full bibliography online from the 6th September via www.youthemployment.org.uk or contact info@youthemployment.org.uk

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