



MAKING UP FOR LOST TIME

UNDERSTANDING YOUNG PEOPLE'S
HOPES AND EXPECTATIONS AS WE START
TO MAKE UP FOR LOST TIME

Research undertaken by Rachael Saunders and Funbi Akande for
Speakers for Schools and YouGov.

Report written by Rachael Saunders.

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SPEAKERS
for schools



FOREWORD BY ANDREW LAW

CHAIR OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES FOR SPEAKERS FOR SCHOOLS

There can be no doubt that young people have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic and the true long-term impact of the last 18 months on the so-called Covid generation has yet to be fully determined.

Disruption to education, uncertainty around exams and prolonged periods away from school and friends have created an incredibly challenging set of circumstances where young people have experienced more than simply a loss of learning. Reduced opportunities

for personal and social development mean that young people have been left feeling isolated and unsure of their futures, with the prospect of a huge mountain to climb and no guarantee of support from either government, employers, or wider society to help them on their way.

The gaps between the most and least privileged young people in our society have never been more evident. Listening to young people – particularly those who have been the most negatively affected – to first fully understand their predicament, then offer tangible support in a joined-up way has never been more

crucial. The findings from this research report by Speakers for Schools document an evidence of need that compels action, and requires policy makers, business leaders and support agencies to start working together in earnest to address.

Andrew Law
Chair of the Board of Trustees

FOREWORD BY JASON ELSOM

CEO OF SPEAKERS FOR SCHOOLS

Young people have always been at the centre of what Speakers for Schools do. We help young people from state schools and colleges to access opportunities that would otherwise be beyond their reach to help them achieve their potential.

For many of these young people, a bad situation has been made worse by the pandemic. In the last 18 months

our services have created a lifeline for tens of thousands of young people trying to take positive action to navigate a very uncertain future and gain meaningful insights and experience of the real world of work.

The findings from this research report tell us that we are on the right path, but there is still a huge amount of work to be done. To advance the social mobility of young people in the UK, we need to ensure that they continue to have a voice, and that politicians, employers and support agencies all play

their part to ensure the success of our future workforce.

Jason Elsom
CEO of Speakers for Schools



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BRINGING YOUNG PEOPLE'S VOICES TO THE FORE

Amidst the debate about how we support young people following the pandemic, we have heard from government, experts and parents, but we have not heard enough from young people themselves about their needs, hopes and expectations.

They know that they need academic support to help make up for lost time along with mental health support and inspiration for the future. They told us that work experience is vital, and they were very clear about what great work experience looks like – in the right sector, interactive, hearing from senior leaders as well as more junior role models, including the ability to learn and practice essential skills, and with content they can relate back to what they are learning in the classroom.

Government and businesses need to fully recognise what young people have lived through and the significant challenges ahead, not just in school but as they look to transition into the world of work. Our research tells us that businesses and politicians each understand that they have a real role to play – but aren't equipping

young people with the opportunities and tools they require to get back on track. There is an empathy gap, an aspiration gap – but there are simple steps that can be taken to narrow it.

This report forms the first part in a series of research that Speakers for Schools intends to publish with the aim of elevating the voices of young people and putting their views directly in front of business leaders and policy makers.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THIS REPORT INCLUDE:

OUR TOP 4 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE GOVERNMENT:

- 1 Support schools with the mental health and wellbeing, academic and extra-curricular resources that they need to help young people recover from this extraordinary time of pandemic.
- 2 Make it easier for employers to provide great work experience placements – publish statutory guidance on safeguarding, for in-person and virtual placements.
- 3 Work with careers agencies, devolved governments and employers to establish a common understanding of what great work experience looks like, with young people's voice, ambitions, hopes and needs at its heart.
- 4 Back essential skills, and the widespread adoption of the Skills Builder Universal Framework.

OUR TOP 4 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR BUSINESS LEADERS:

- 1 Target disadvantaged communities and the young people that need it most by working with us to prioritise providing support to high need schools and high need individuals.
- 2 Use young people's insights and feedback to keep improving the work experience opportunities you offer.
- 3 Offer work experience placements at scale and proportionate to your company's size – a minimum should be one placement per year for every ten people you employ, if we are to reach our targets.
- 4 Support teachers, lecturers and careers leaders with insights into your business, so they can support more young people in understanding the industries and careers out there.

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METHODOLOGY

We partnered with YouGov in May/June 2021, to ask 2,113 young people aged 11-19 from across the UK about their priorities as we recover from the pandemic. Simultaneously we polled 100 MPs and 100 business leaders, to compare their perceptions of young people and the support they need post-pandemic.

While the data pointed to a series of common themes and trends, we wanted to delve deeper and so undertook thirteen semi-structured interviews throughout the month of June with a representative group of young people aged 14-19 who had undertaken work experience with us over the course of 2020-2021. The insights from those interviews, illustrated by direct quotes from the thirteen young people we interviewed, form much of the substance of this report.

The focus of our research is to amplify young people's voices. Those young people need business and politicians to

back them up – our polling is intended to set out the current state of play, so we know where we are building from.

The recommendations for action have been formulated in collaboration with the young participants, employers, and with key policy stakeholders.



WHAT WAS YOUNG PEOPLE'S EXPERIENCE OF EDUCATION DURING THE PANDEMIC?

 **Key finding:** Educational support for young people varied hugely.

The young people we spoke to all had to deal with extraordinary uncertainty and change in their education and school life through the course of the pandemic.

Remote learning was new to both teachers and young people, and the young people we spoke to had very different experiences. The support they were offered varied hugely, from a regular schedule of remote lessons and tasks to one young person who just received a safeguarding call each week, with no other contact from school at all.

There were some difficult times, especially to do with motivation. It's very difficult to study, you know, a couple of metres from your bed.

– Joshua, 17, Darlington

I didn't have anything specific to do throughout the whole lockdown period. So, I tried looking ahead at... curriculum... at subjects I was interested in... The school didn't follow up with any work or anything apart from... calling us every week for safeguarding purposes.

– Laila, 17, Manchester

My school did a fantastic job... the pandemic made me realise how I was able to cope, just teaching these concepts to myself, and learning here on my own.

– Madison, 15, Somerset

The January lockdown was difficult for everybody. Just trying to learn, over a computer screen, was difficult. And then everyone just started turning their cameras off, and it just felt like we were getting so behind.

– Gracie, 17, Antrim

The first lockdown was less organised... but then when the second lockdown came, I was like, okay, this is not working... so I allocated the amount of time I was supposed to have for each subject, and allocated breaks to help myself feel better.

– Vrinda, 15, Brent

 **Key finding:** Lockdown disruption had a significant impact on young people's mental wellbeing.

Each of the young people we spoke to faced challenges in lockdown, and all showed remarkable resilience and creativity in developing solutions.

Not knowing whether exams would go ahead, together with the uncertainty around how exam results would be determined, had a significant impact on young people's wellbeing, and shaped their opinions of decision makers.

In terms of examinations and grades it was very, very messy. And I would say that I very much struggled with that... how unstable it was... and it was changed about a week before, which I know myself and others really, really struggled with.

– Joshua, 17, Darlington

Basically, after my mocks in January time, we went into lockdown, which really stressed me about because they didn't give any information about our GCSEs. I was really uncertain. And I would say that was one of my biggest fears: what's going to happen?

– Joyce, 16, Merton

Not knowing what was going to happen to us was even more pressure because we were trying to do everything. And then we found out exams were being cancelled and that was what's going to happen to us next. And then we had mocks and my mocks were very, very long... It was sad. It was stressful.

– Sophia, 15, Bristol

This uncertainty and instability provided the context for one of the polling questions we asked, about what support young people thought would help them make up for lost time.

WHAT SUPPORT DO YOUNG PEOPLE THINK THEY NEED TO MAKE UP FOR LOST TIME?

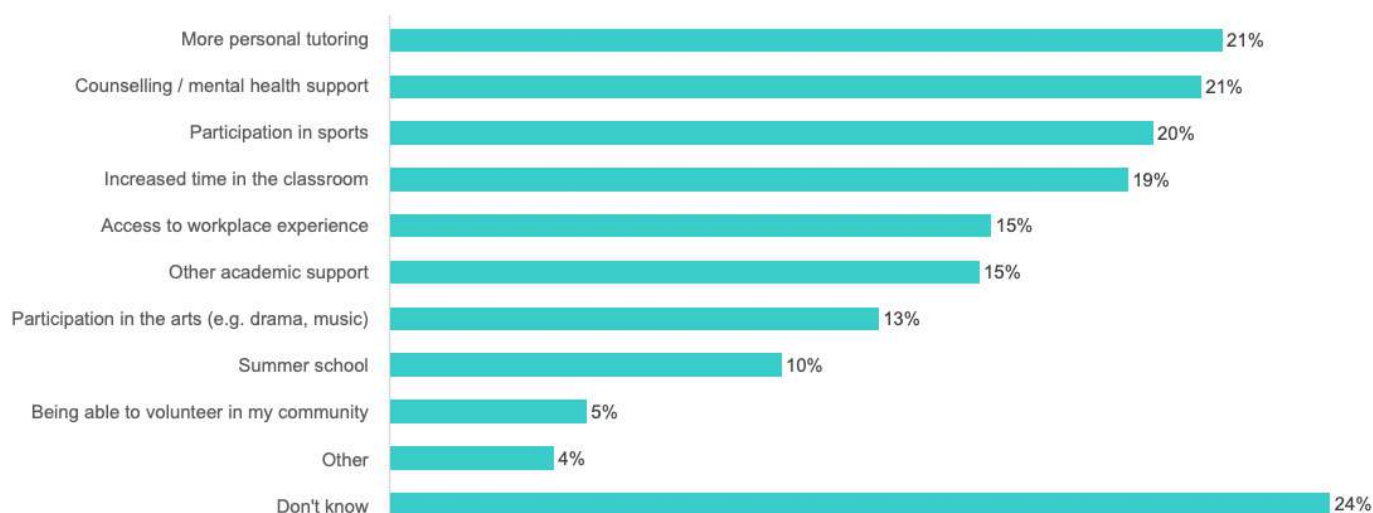


Key finding: Support for young people needs to address more than just academic learning loss.

Our YouGov polling found that tutoring, mental health support, sports and work experience were all important to young people when thinking about what would help them make up for lost time.



Now, thinking about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Which of the following, if any, do you think would best help you to make up for time lost due to the pandemic? Please select up to three.



In the interviews, each of the young people recognised the difficulty of balancing a range of priorities following the pandemic. On the one hand, they desperately want to address their obvious learning loss and make sure they have all the knowledge and skills they need to progress in life, while on the other they also strongly feel the need to spend time outside of the classroom, catching up on the other aspects of life that they have missed.

I would say tutoring, definitely. Because when I talked to my friends, I found the areas I did not understand were different to other people. So, if it was personalised to me, I could make up that time.

– Joyce, 16, Merton

I'm not as supportive of summer school because I think only for my year, we've just had a most horrible two years of our lives at the moment and we just kind of feel we're just completely done with it, and we just want it to be over.

– Sophia, 15, Bristol

Students have fallen behind so greatly due to the pandemic... they probably should invest more in tutors. Students thrive better if they have support. More support from teachers, and parents, as well as mental health charities, that would definitely help.

– Raina, 15, Enfield

We've gone through a whole pandemic... we can't just be bounced back to normality within a month or two.

– Sana, 15, Lancashire

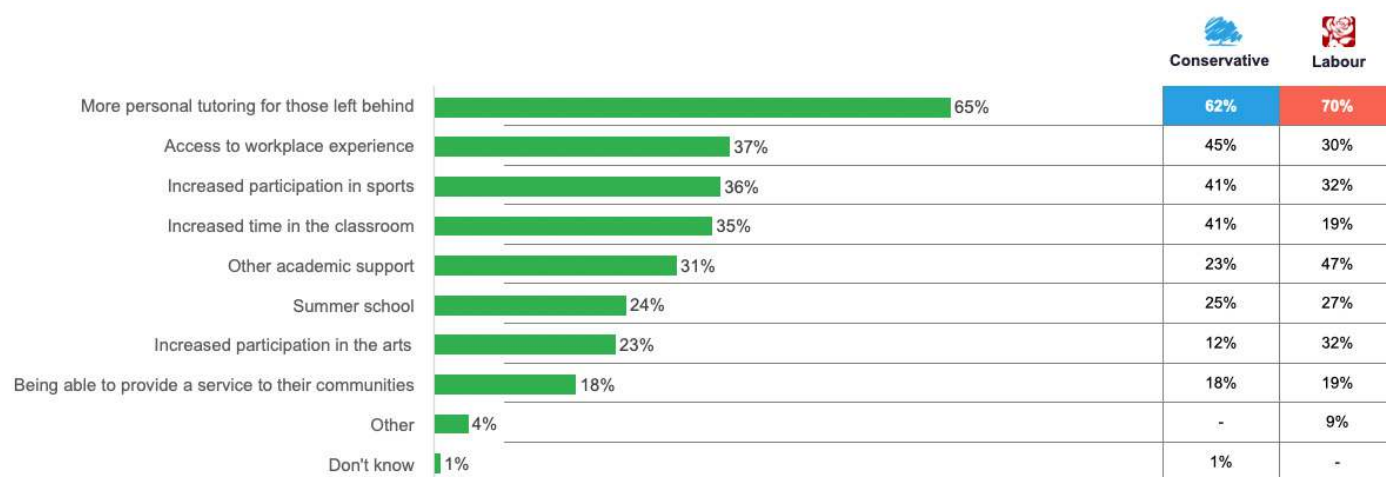
WHAT SUPPORT DO MPs AND BUSINESS LEADERS THINK YOUNG PEOPLE NEED TO MAKE UP FOR LOST TIME?

 **Key finding:** Young people, MPs and business leaders all regard work experience as a vital catch-up activity.

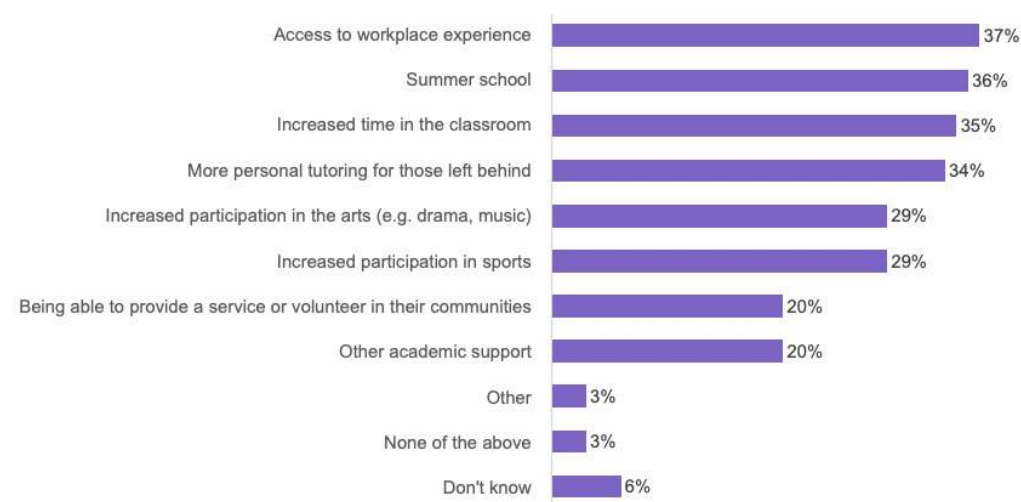
Our YouGov polling revealed that MPs see more personal tutoring as the most important catch-up activity for young people following the pandemic, and that they see access to work experience as the most important extra-curricular catch-up activity.

Our polling also revealed that business leaders see work experience as the most valuable catch-up activity of all for young people and work experience is consistently one of the two highest priorities for 16-19-year-olds in terms of catch-up activities following the pandemic.

 **Now, thinking about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on young people. Which of the following, if any, do you think would best help young people to recover from the effects of the pandemic?**



 **Now, thinking about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on young people in the UK. Which of the following, if any, do you think would best help young people to recover from the effects of the pandemic?**

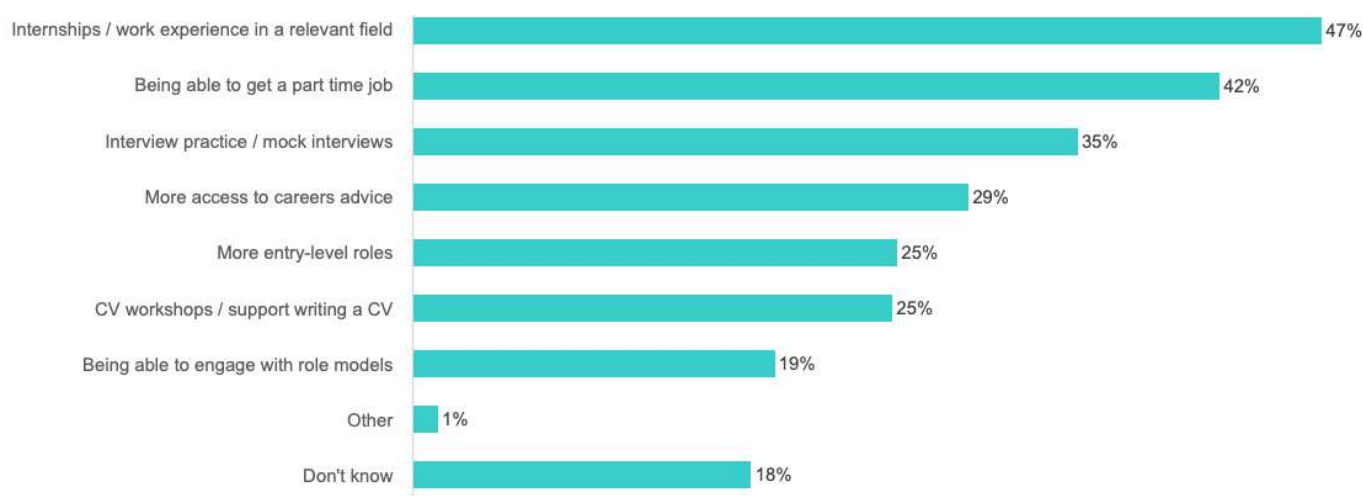


WHY IS WORK EXPERIENCE A PRIORITY FOR YOUNG PEOPLE?

 **Key finding:** Young people see work internships/work experience as the most important way to improve their confidence in their future career prospects.

The reason why young people consider work experience as such a key priority is perhaps explained by the fact that they also ranked it as their number one choice for ways to improve their confidence in their future career prospects.

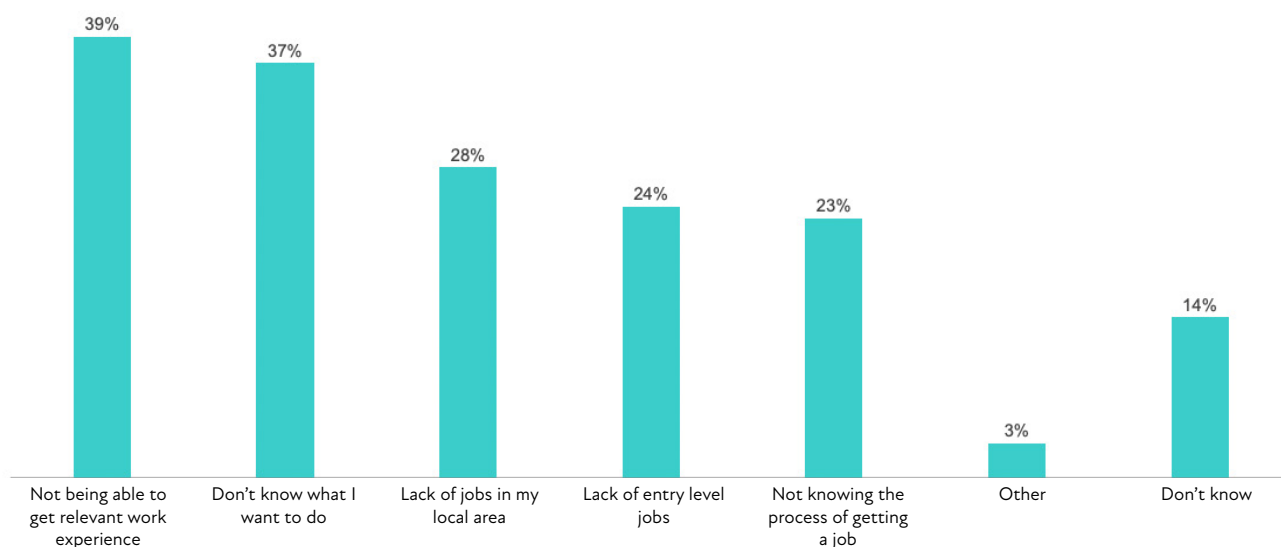
 **When thinking about your future career, which of the following, if any, do you think would be most helpful in improving your confidence? Please select all that apply.**



 **Key finding:** Young people see not being able to get relevant work experience as the biggest barrier to their future career success.

Significantly, our YouGov polling also found that young people perceive not being able to secure relevant work experience as one of the biggest barriers to success in their future careers, a finding which further serves to emphasise the value that young people place on work experience for becoming career ready.

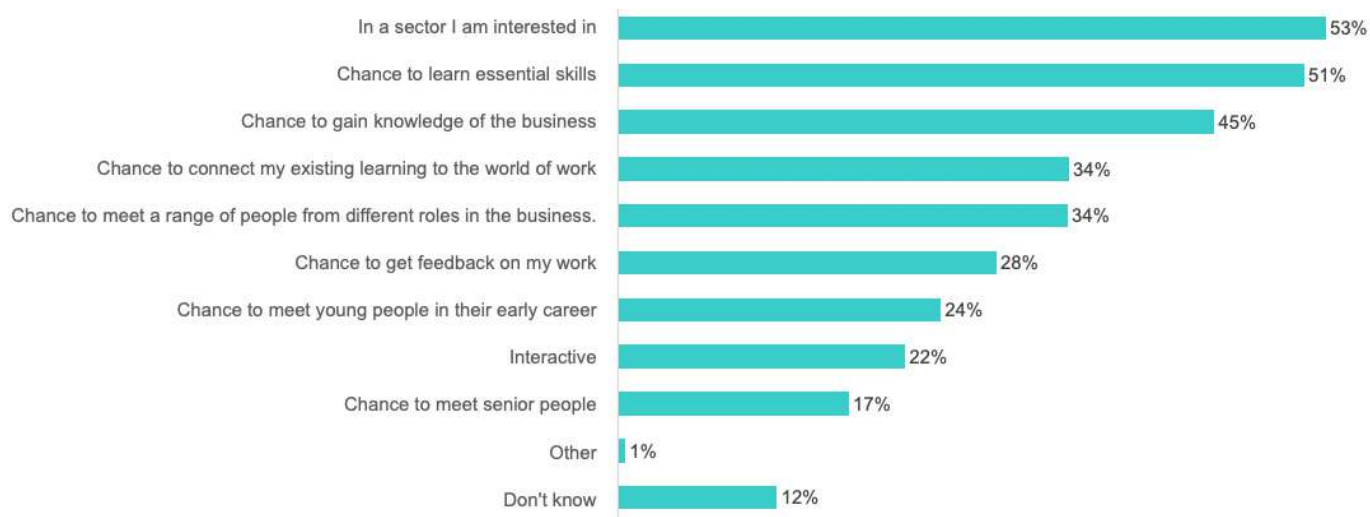
 **Which of the following, if any, do you think are the biggest barriers to success in your future career? Please select all that apply.**



 **Key finding:** Young people want to secure work experience in a sector they are interested in.

Our polling also told us what young people want from their work experience. Securing work experience in a sector they are interested in is vitally important, closely followed by having the chance to learn essential skills. They also attached importance to having the opportunity to meet a range of people from the business, having the chance to learn what an organisation does, and connecting their learning to the world of work.

 **Now, thinking about work experience in the future. Which of the following, if any, do you think are most important when getting work experience? Please select all that apply.**



The young people we interviewed gave a very similar range of reasons why work experience was really important to them:

 **Key finding:** Young people see work experience as vital way to improve their ability to make informed career choices.

They told us that work experience helped them make decisions about their future career.

The work experience I did with Speakers for Schools was a civil engineer work experience. It was actually really good. It was a project about the restoration of the town hall in Manchester...

It helped me.... decide what I want to do at university... I think it would be helpful to have more work experience on different sectors of engineering. Like I was interested in bio medical engineering and bio mechanics, and it's difficult to find work experience in those because it's so specialised.

– Raina, 15, Enfield

I've got this passion to go into medicine. And then during the pandemic, seeing how responsible doctors were, and people in all forms who were in the medical industry, made me feel even more, this is an amazing industry to get into.

– Sana, 15, Lancashire

The Speakers for Schools virtual [work experience], I did it in the Easter holidays... it was a great insight into what my future career could look like... it was about Tesco finance... now I've seen how many people have gone into getting the jobs they have right now, and there is not just one way.

– Vrinda, 15, Brent

 **Key finding:** Young people see work experience as a chance to apply their classroom learning to the real world of work.

It helped them see the connections between what they learnt in the classroom, and the world of work, which for some of the young people we spoke to also increased their motivation to study, and renewed their hopes and ambitions for the future:

Definitely doing the work experience has been amazing because I found out how the subjects I like fit into... engineering.

– Sophia, 15, Bristol

Well, I took a lot away from it, especially the new technologies, and in physics, we have to write a report on something we're interested in. We chose to do it on kinetic flooring, which was mentioned on this work experience, and I've just finished it, and the teacher is really impressed.

– Thomas, 17, Lincolnshire

So, what made it a good work experience was that we're able to talk to the people that run it, they step back and let us do a project as well as a few talks about the company, different sections... We actually met people that were leaders of the company, and we presented our redesign to them... they were just normal people. They weren't some big-headed boss or anything... and on the other side young and aspiring people, talking about how they were planning to improve the company in their own way with new technologies and stuff... It makes you think actually learning is something I need to go back and commit to.

– Thomas, 17, Lincolnshire

The first lockdown I found quite good... and then came the November one... I got quite stressed and a lost motivation to, kind of um, get up and go... and that's when I found the... work experience... and that kind of kick started everything back up again. And now I'm super keen to get into engineering... the long-term aim is to just get involved with the environment and sustainability and... save the planet.

– Thomas, 17, Lincolnshire

 **Key finding:** Young people see work experience as a valuable opportunity to develop essential skills.

It also enabled them to develop the essential skills they need to succeed and thrive.

A huge focus on transferable skills, for me, that I can use... broader skills that I can use when applying to other jobs as well.

– Joshua, 17, Darlington

... having that insight into, like, how a business works... to meet new people... developing your skills networking, ... learning different skills that you wouldn't necessarily have in a classroom... more public speaking or teamwork.

– Raina, 15, Enfield

When you volunteer, you get into a situation where you've got to have the confidence, being able to speak to people... having the personal confidence in yourself that I can help others as well as help myself at the same time, which I think is really helpful.

– Sana, 15, Lancashire

 **Key finding:** Young people value the importance of getting feedback during their work experience.

And they hugely valued the opportunity work experience gave them to receive individual feedback on their work.

Being able to get feedback on your work and doing briefs and doing projects... I've done three so far and each of them have given you a brief, and at the end of it you have to present to senior executives and show them what you've done. It's good to get feedback because I've known how to improve and develop my skills.

– Sophia, 15, Bristol

WHAT OTHER SUPPORT DO YOUNG PEOPLE THINK THEY NEED TO OVERCOME BARRIERS AND SUCCEED IN THEIR FUTURE CAREERS?

The young people we interviewed also talked to us about the additional support and advice they need to feel confident about their futures.


 **Key finding:** Young people need support to catch up on their careers education to help them prepare for their next steps.

Some of the young people described other careers education opportunities that would usually have happened, but which they have missed out on this year.

... more careers advice and then knowing where to start with A levels and what to do to get the career you want... I'm quite concerned I haven't got the right work experience for what I want to go to uni for ... even school geography field trips haven't happened, so I can't put that on my personal statement. Normally there would have been mock interviews, where you come in dressed really formally as well, and you have an interview... and they tell you, like, whether you would have got the job or not. So, we haven't got that experience, which every year before us has.

– Gracie, 17, Antrim

As well as reduced opportunities for general career advice, the young people interviewed also felt that there are other specific barriers which affect some young people.

 **Key finding:** Young people do not always see people like themselves represented in senior roles and positions.

Joyce spoke about her own experience of race as a barrier:

The only thing that concerns me, is because I come from an ethnic minority, being a black girl... it kind of scares me in a sense, because I don't see many black people in big roles or positions, and it's hard to try and relate to someone who's not of your race or you don't see anyone of your race. And if you want to go to Oxford, they have a programme for those that come from ethnic minorities, but you don't see anyone that's come from that.

– Joyce, 16, Merton

 **Key finding:** Young people need more information about the post-16 options available to them.

Sana spoke about access to information about post-16 options as another potential barrier for young people:

There's not much communication between the high school and colleges... I feel like having more knowledge about a place where you're going to go for two years would be amazing.

– Sana, 15, Lancashire

While talking around the topic of careers education in schools, the young people we spoke to gave a selection of recommendations for how their careers education could be improved.


RECOMMENDATIONS FROM YOUNG PEOPLE FOR HOW CAREERS EDUCATION COULD BE IMPROVED

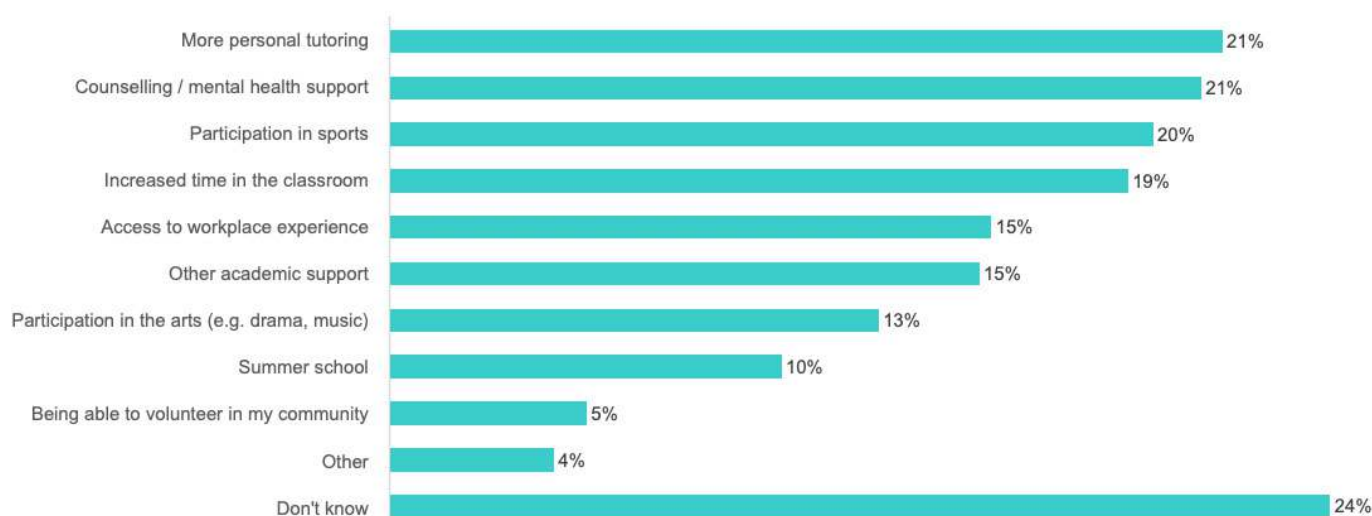
- Opening work experience up to Year 9 (in England) and equivalent year groups in the devolved nations.
- Making the application process easier, especially for younger children.
- A combination of online and in-person work experience, so you have a rounded view of what it would be like to work there.
- Access to a mentor or early career role model to talk to and get information on what you need to do to get into the career.

WHY IS WELLBEING A PRIORITY FOR YOUNG PEOPLE IN MAKING UP FOR LOST TIME?

When asked what they felt are the best catch-up activities to help make up for lost time following the pandemic, counselling/mental health support and more personal tutoring came out as a joint first priority for the group of 11-19-year-olds surveyed.

 **Key finding:** Getting counselling/mental health support is as important to young people in making up for lost time as addressing their learning loss with more personal tutoring.

 Now, thinking about the impact COVID-19 pandemic. Which of the following, if any, do you think would best help you to make up for time lost due to the pandemic? Please select up to three.



 **Key finding:** Young people struggled to access mental health support during the pandemic.

When we had the opportunity to ask the young people we interviewed their own thoughts and feelings about how young people's mental health had been affected by the pandemic, they provided some interesting insights:

I would say the main issue is mental health, definitely, and there's quite a lot of stigma around that.

– Raina, 15, Enfield

... mental health... should be a massive focus, especially with students that were in lockdown during examinations... different options to suit as many people as possible... mental health support is quite surprisingly scarce, especially for the under eighteens, which I really, really struggled with.

– Joshua, 17, Darlington

Focussing on mental health a lot... I think it's really important that we focus on it, because we've lost so much time... I was feeling very lost... and I was seeking counselling, and it was because no one was reaching out to me.

– Sophia, 15, Bristol



Key finding: Young people's wellbeing has been negatively impacted because they have missed out on so much.

As well as commenting on mental health more directly, others also mentioned how delays and missed milestone events had resulted in a negative impact on their wellbeing:

Everyone has missed out on birthdays, like celebrating all these things, we're all really behind, we can't drive, I probably won't be driving until January, which is a lot later than I expected... we all planned to be driving by this summer so we could spend the summer together, and that hasn't worked out.

– Gracie, 17, Antrim



Key finding: Young people felt let down and not heard by decision makers.

The uncertainty that young people experienced over the period of pandemic, and their views on the role of decision makers, also had a real impact on their mental health and wellbeing. Every young person we spoke to reflected on this.

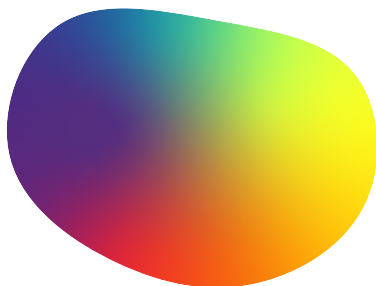
Part of the challenge was how they felt about exams and teaching and learning. This is closely connected to their hopes for their own futures, and their views about how business can help and support them to move forward.

When they (politicians) were making decisions about whether to keep young people in school... and young people were really speaking up about that, and education ministers just weren't listening.

– Gracie, 17, Antrim

I didn't feel like we were represented very well, especially the, you know, the human people and kids that have worked so hard to have their education and to have the grades... we feel quite misrepresented.

– Joshua, 17, Darlington

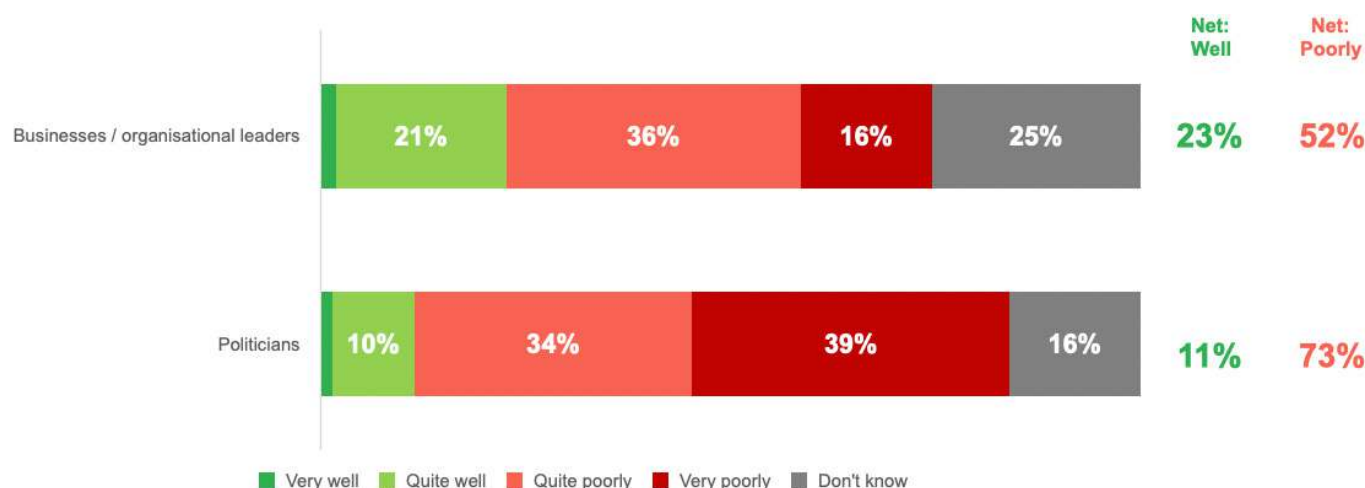


HOW DO YOUNG PEOPLE SEE BUSINESSES AND POLITICIANS?

A large proportion of the young people we polled believe business and politicians have a poor understanding of their needs, hopes and aspirations.

 **Key finding:** Young people feel especially let down by politicians following the pandemic.

 In general, how well or poorly do you think business leaders and politicians understand the needs, hopes and aspirations of young people in the UK like you?



Our polling revealed that over half of young people surveyed think business leaders have a poor understanding of their needs and almost three-quarters of young people think that politicians have a poor understanding of their needs.

This perception that politicians don't understand young people was also particularly apparent when we talked to our interviewees. Their answers indicated that their trust in the government has been seriously affected by the way that education and exams were handled.

I think the government in general have been quite stupid over the pandemic... like they used the virus to get at each other.

– Thomas, 17, Lincolnshire

Acknowledgement and support is really, really not there considering the levels of impact. It's really, really hard. I personally really, really felt the impact, and... so much to do with stability... and a lot of that comes down to the government, the government haven't acknowledged and said look, this was our doing, we're sorry... they've not taken responsibility for the impact it's had.

– Joshua, 17, Darlington

It's difficult to put any trust in the government, especially when it comes work to work and things like that, which is why I personally focus more on... finding my own way, because there doesn't seem to be very much support at all.

– Joshua, 17, Darlington

I feel like in every single student there is this frustration like built up inside of them and it's like panicking, so panicky, GCSEs or A levels, whatever they're doing, it's like, you still need to put in the work, but you have half the time to do it in. And regardless of what you do and how much support you provide, it's never going to be the same... and they [politicians] don't understand that effect, I think.

– Vrinda, 15, Brent

We need to focus on... exams are important... but focus on what students are feeling rather than the overall picture. Focus on individuals, not the collective alike... like I think the main focus right now is to get life back to normal, but nothing is ever really going to be normal anymore.

– Vrinda, 15, Brent

They... didn't think about how we learn, how we missed almost a whole year of learning, but they still expected us to sit exams. And I don't think they have got any opinion from a young person... I found that a bit shocking.

– Joyce, 16, Merton

 **Key finding:** Young people feel business leaders have a responsibility to support them.

The young people we interviewed also had strong feelings about the role that business leaders should play in helping to support their future ambitions as part of the post-pandemic recovery.

Well, obviously business leaders do have responsibility towards society and young people because in the end we are the future of the workforce, right?

– Vrinda, 15, Brent

I feel like there is a lack of acknowledgement for what young people have been through, from government and from employers. I am really frightened how our year group and other examination groups aren't going to be seen as equally as other examination groups who have done their exams. That is quite worrying... for me it is mainly just acknowledging that we're going to have opportunities as well.

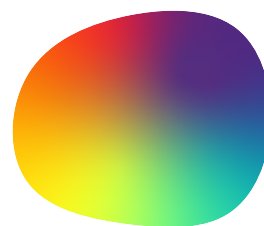
– Joshua, 17, Darlington

So for me, somebody who is at the top of a company, even the CEO for example, for them to turn around and say look, we acknowledge what's going on... and actually that shows to me... that yeah, I do still have an opportunity, and.. I still can get valuable work experience and get jobs.

– Joshua, 17, Darlington

I remember going to one work experience and they did... a presentation and everyone was very open about themselves and how they've been feeling... it was like, how can we help other people?

– Sophia, 15, Bristol

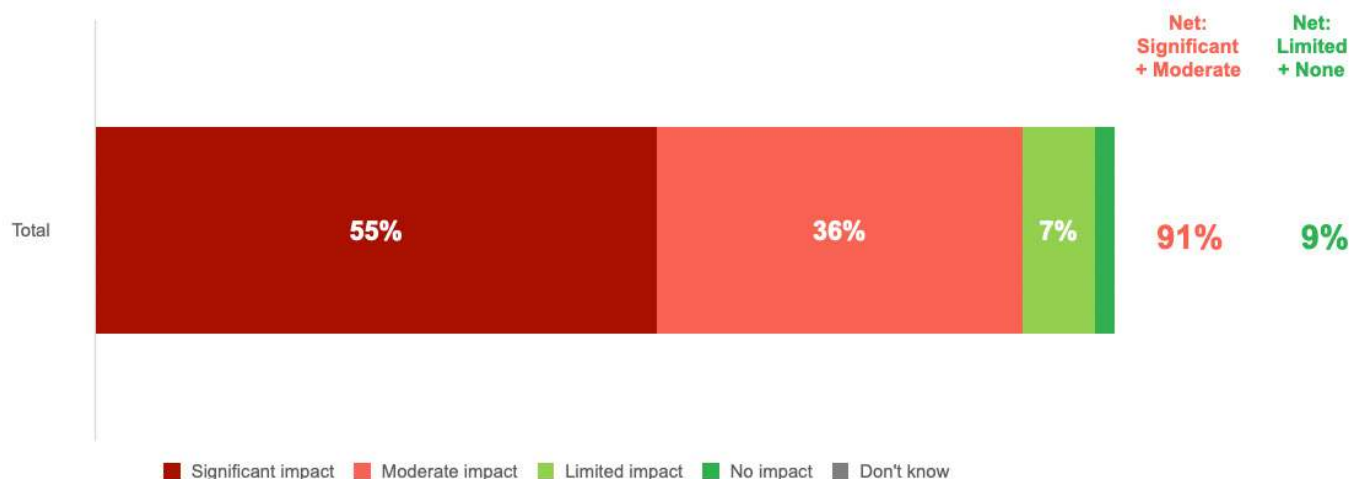


WHY ARE THERE GAPS IN THE PERCEPTIONS OF YOUNG PEOPLE, POLITICIANS AND EMPLOYERS?

Key finding: 91% of employers and 95% of politicians we polled recognise young people have been moderately to significantly impacted by the pandemic.

According to our poll, nine-tenths of business leaders believe the pandemic has had a moderate to significant impact on young people.

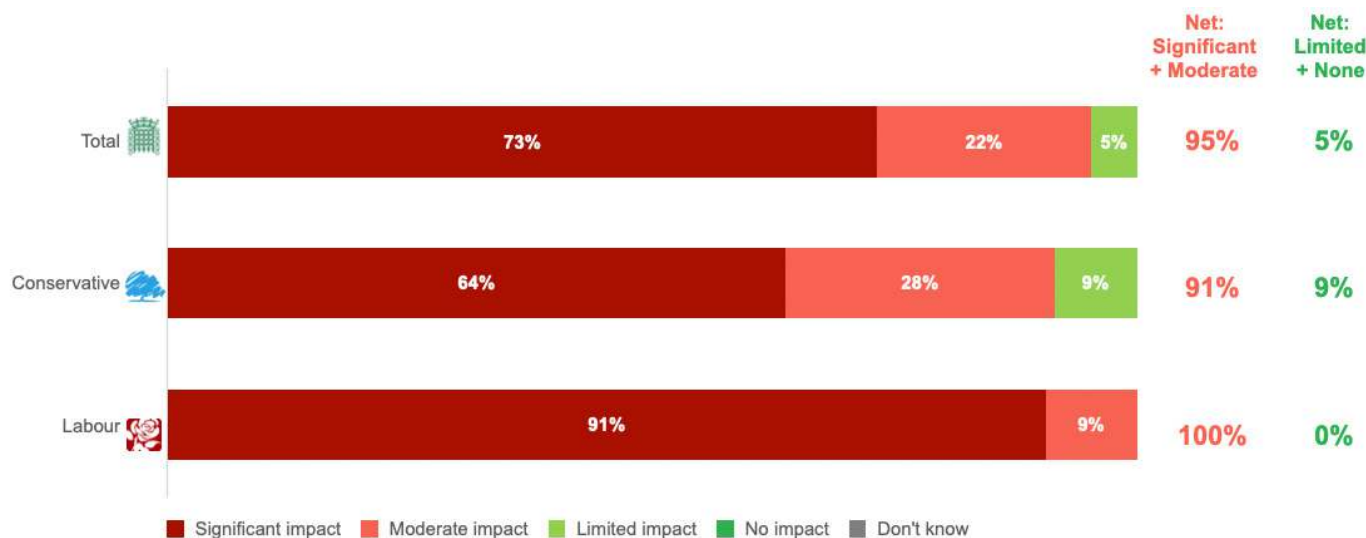
? In general, how well or poorly do you think you understand the needs, hopes and aspirations of young people (i.e. those aged 18 and younger) in the UK?



Key finding: 18% more politicians than employers view that the pandemic's impact on young people has been significant.

Our polling revealed that almost three-quarters of MPs say the pandemic has had a significant impact on young people whereas just over half of employers think the same.

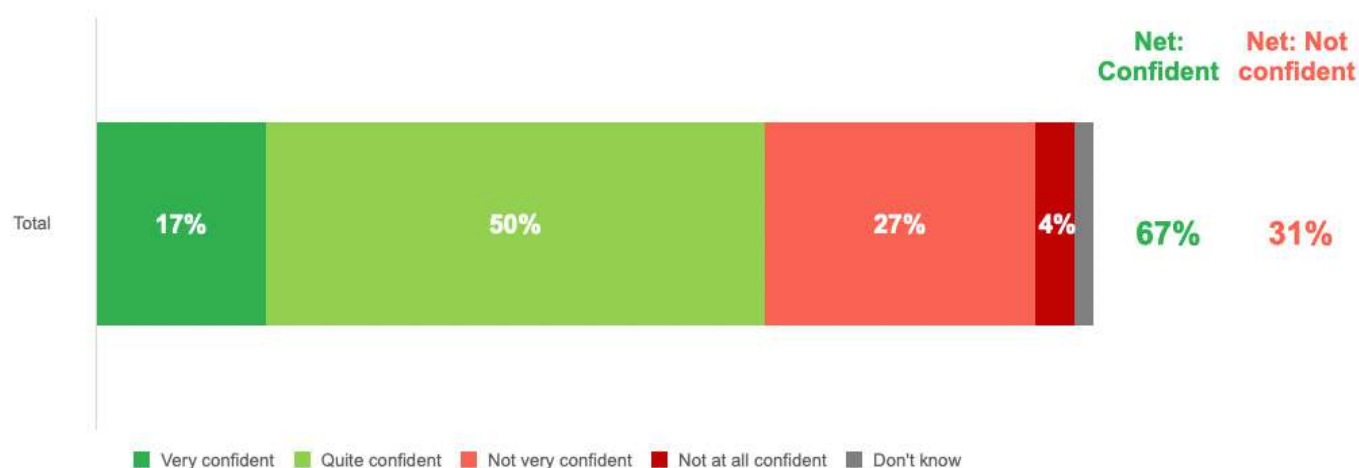
? How significant an impact, if at all, do you think the COVID-19 pandemic has had on young people?



Our poll also revealed some interesting results regarding how well employers and politicians understand young people versus young people's own perceptions.

Key finding: Two-thirds of business leaders say they are confident they understand the needs, hopes and aspirations of young people in the UK, but less than quarter of the young people we surveyed agree.

? In general, how well or poorly do you think you understand the needs, hopes and aspirations of young people (i.e. those aged 18 and younger) in the UK?



However, of the employers polled, although 67% of business leaders are confident in their understanding of the hopes, needs and aspirations of under 18s, this is keenly at odds with the views expressed by the young people surveyed, which indicated that only 23% agree that employers understand their hopes, needs and aspirations well.

EMPLOYERS



of employers are confident they understand the hopes, needs and aspirations of young people under the age of 18.

YOUNG PEOPLE

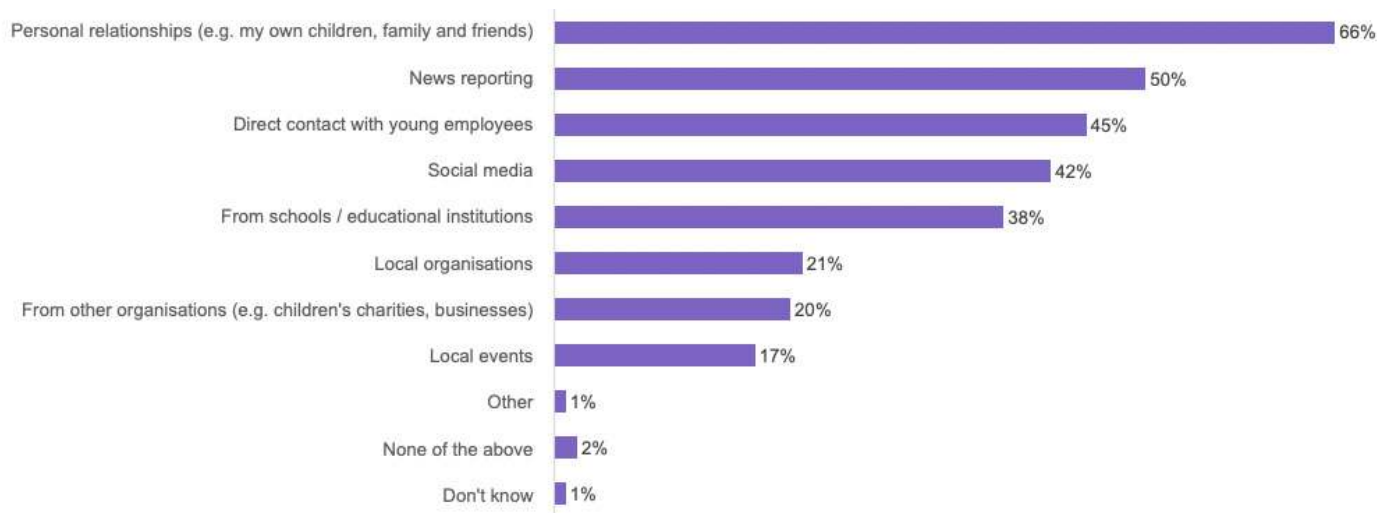


of young people aged 11-19 feel that businesses understand their hopes, needs and aspirations well.


This disconnect is perhaps best explained by the fact that 66% of the business leaders we polled gain their general insights into under 18s from their own personal relationships with friends and family, which means that their insights are less likely to be in tune with the experiences of young people in wider society.

 **Key finding:** Most business leaders draw on personal relationships for their general insights into under 18s.

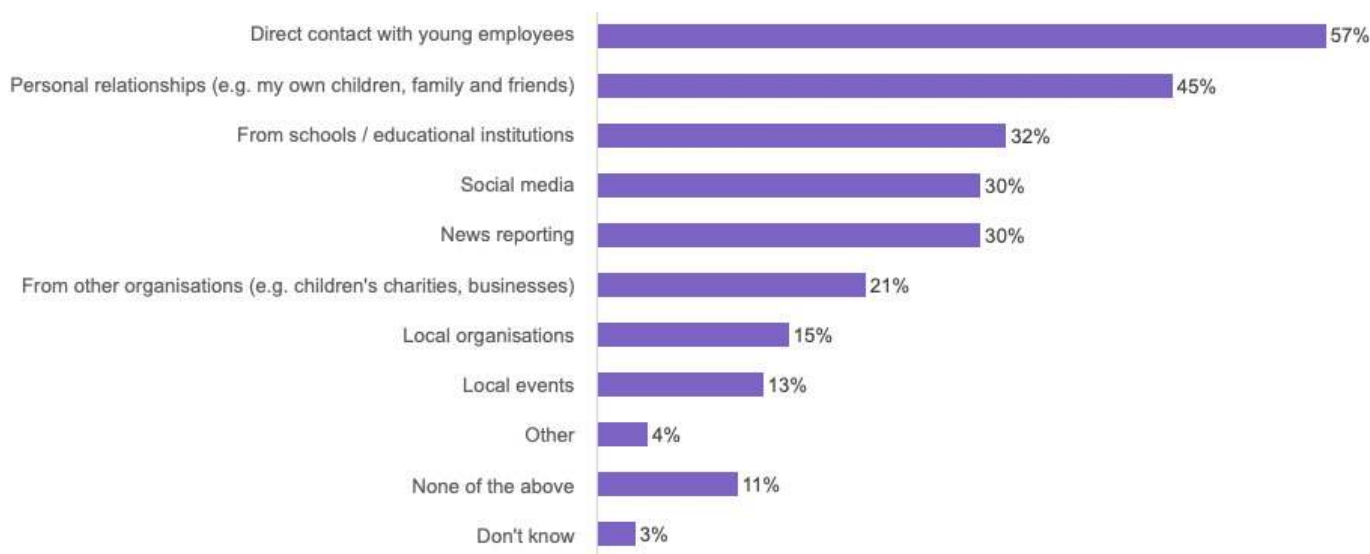
 How, if at all, do you hear about the needs, hopes and aspirations of young people in society in general? Please select all that apply.



And when it comes to hearing about the needs of young people in relation to their business, many of the employers we polled rely most heavily on direct contact with young employees with a significant proportion (45%) also relying heavily on personal relationships with friends and family.

 **Key finding:** Most business leaders draw on direct contact with young employees and their personal relationships for their insights into young people in relation to their business.

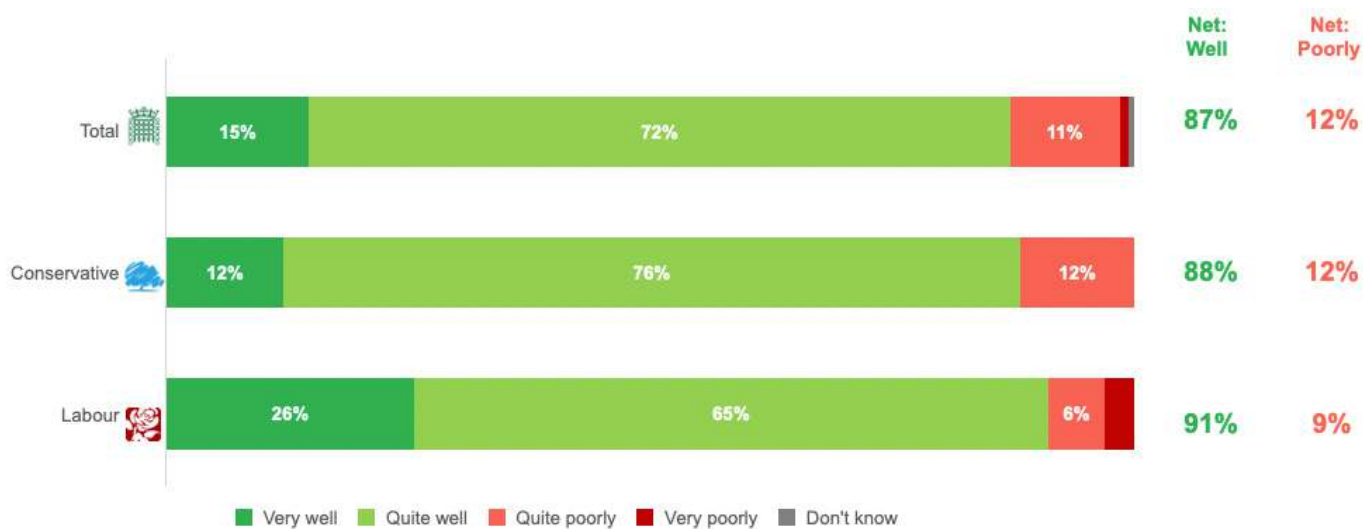
 And how, if at all, do you hear about the needs, hopes and aspirations of young people as they relate to your business? Please select all that apply.



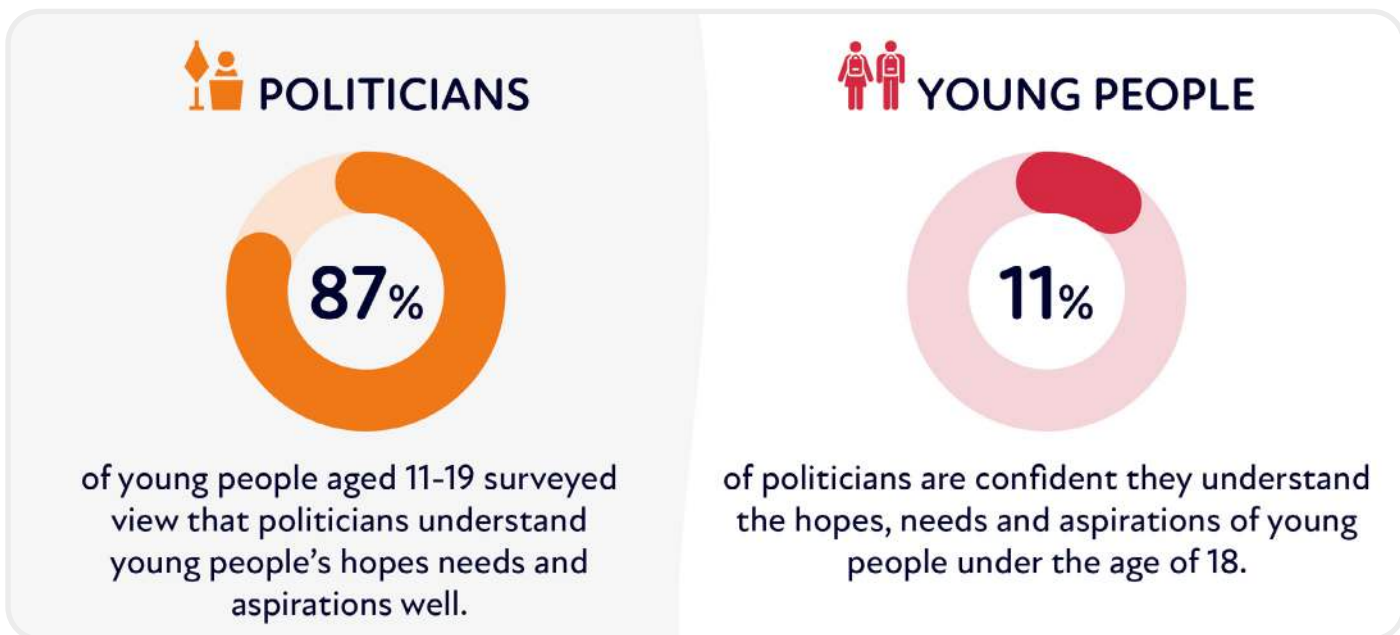
It is a similar story when it comes to politicians.

Key finding: Around nine-tenths of MPs say they are confident they understand the needs, hopes and aspirations of young people in the UK, but only around one-tenth of the young people we surveyed agree.

? In general, how well or poorly do you think you understand the needs, hopes and aspirations of young people (i.e. those aged 18 and younger) in the UK?



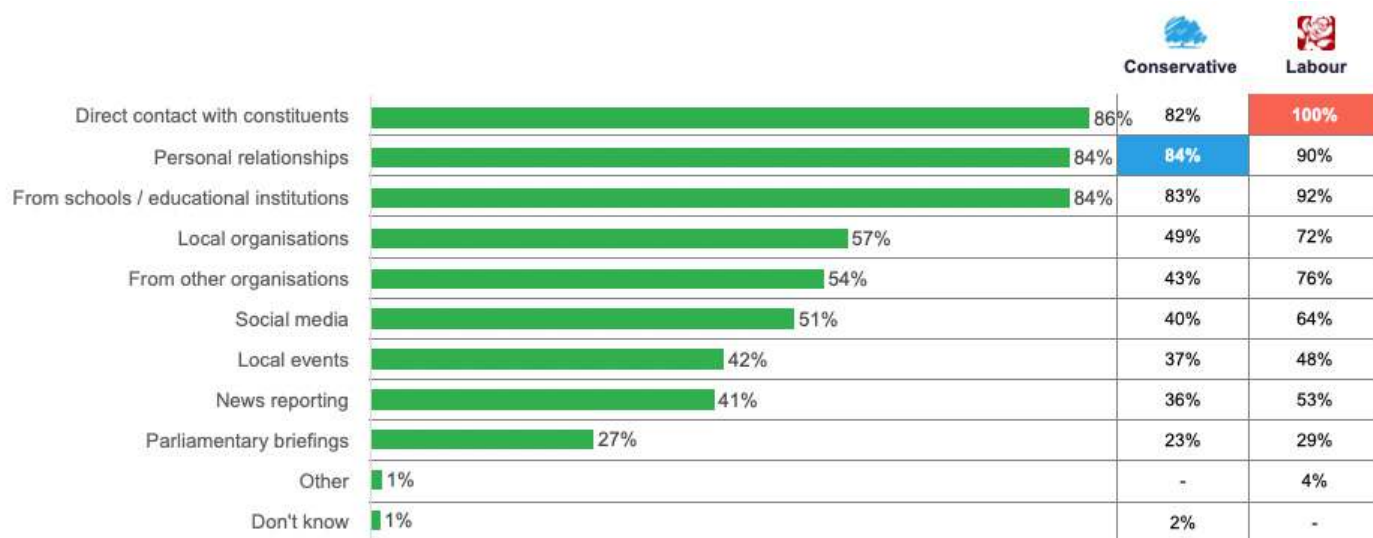
In percentage terms this equates to 87% of the politicians we polled thinking they understand young people well whereas a mere 11% of young people surveyed agree.



This disconnect is most likely because 84-86% of politicians gather their insights into young people from family, friends, schools or contact with constituents, which strongly suggests they need to expand their frame of reference and seek insights from outside of their traditional networks.

 **Key finding:** Most politicians draw on relationships with family, friends, schools and direct contact with their constituents for their general insights into under 18s.

 And how, if at all, do you hear about the needs, hopes and aspirations of young people in society? Please select all that apply.



As recovery plans are put in place, it is important that employers and politicians understand not only that these disconnects exist, but also what they need to do to make sure that the views of young people are properly represented.



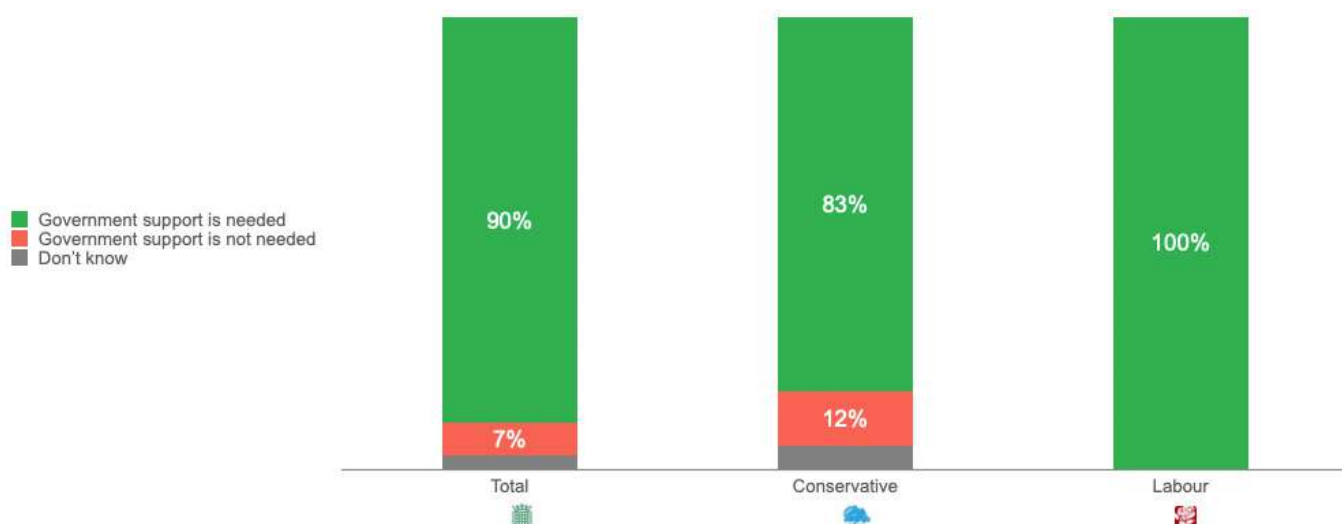
WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR HELPING YOUNG PEOPLE MAKE UP FOR LOST TIME?

Clearly, young people cannot recover from the pandemic and make up for lost time unaided. Our findings from our interviews with young people have already indicated that young people consider that politicians and employers both have significant roles to play in supporting their post-pandemic recovery.

But who do politicians and business leaders see as being responsible?

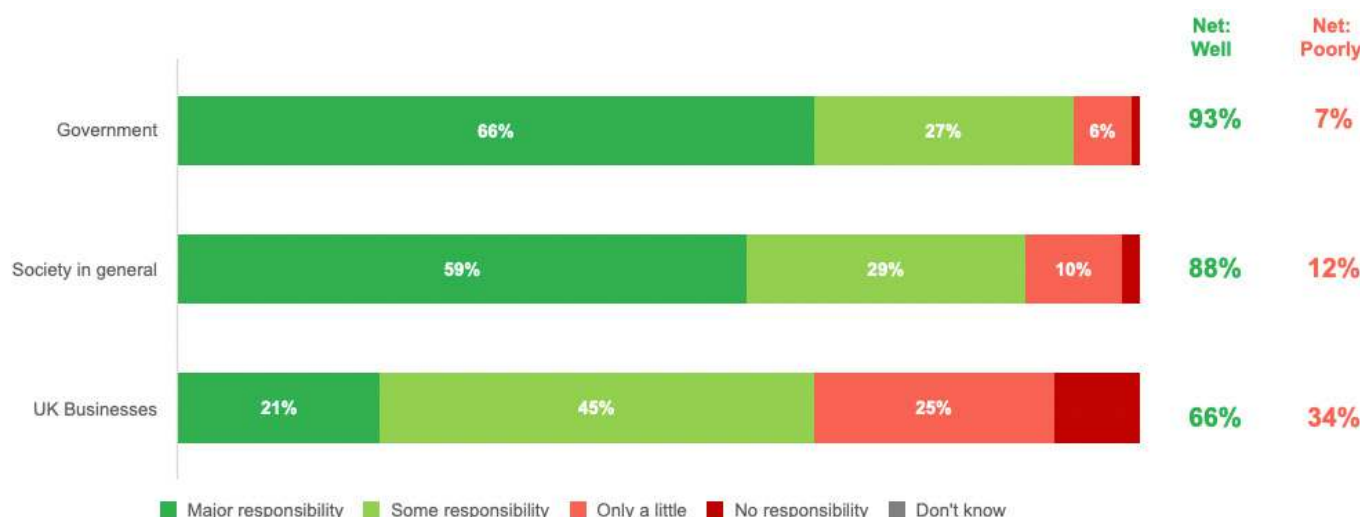
Key finding: Nine-tenths of MPs surveyed believe government support is needed to help young people recover from the pandemic.

? Do you believe government support is or is not needed to help young people make up for time lost during the COVID-19 pandemic?



Key finding: Business leaders believe the government hold the most responsibility for helping young people make up for lost time.

? When thinking about helping young people make up for time lost due to the COVID-19 pandemic, do how much responsibility, if any, do you think each of the following groups have?



Key finding: Politicians and business leaders agree the government has the most responsibility for helping young people make up for lost time.

Our YouGov poll revealed that politicians and business leaders shared the opinion that the bulk of the responsibility for helping young people with their post-pandemic recovery falls to the government.

HOW CAN WE BUILD ON THE AREAS WHERE THERE IS A CONSENSUS?

We have already seen how our findings support the value young people attach to accessing work experience to improve their confidence in their future careers, develop their essential skills and increase their understanding of the world of work.

We have also seen how our findings indicate that MPs and business leaders are also hugely supportive of work experience as a means of helping young people make up for lost time following the pandemic.

However, our findings have also demonstrated that access to work experience is a problem.

WHAT IS HOLDING UP PROGRESS?




Employers and politicians need to support young people aged 16-19 by ensuring that work experience is available and accessible to help support their endeavours to make up for lost time.



UP TO 55%

of 16-19-year-olds viewed not being able to access work experience as the biggest barrier to success in their future career.

There are still too many young people who cannot get the placements they want and deserve.

 **Key finding:** More must be done by employers and politicians to improve access to work experience for young people across the UK.

During the academic year 2020-2021, Speakers for Schools worked with their growing network of employers to successfully offer over 56,000 virtual work experience placements for young people. And we have ambitions to upscale our activities to support 1 million unique young people by the end of the 2022-2023 academic year.

OUR CHARITY'S AIM IS TO SUPPORT 1 MILLION UNIQUE YOUNG PEOPLE BY THE END OF ACADEMIC YEAR 2022-2023

To achieve this objective and offer the number of work experience placements for every young person at the quality they deserve and need, we will need to look beyond our existing networks and resources for help.

We cannot achieve this objective alone. We will only succeed in our endeavours if it becomes a shared objective that multiple organisations and agencies work collaboratively towards together.

 **Key finding:** Speakers for Schools can play a part in helping employers and politicians to support young people with improving access to high-quality work experience.

We invite the government, employers, schools and colleges, partner organisations and policy makers to work with us to provide better access to the opportunities that young people deserve, and that we all need, to build a successful future workforce.

CONCLUSION

From our research we know that young people want access to high-quality work experience – and our research also tells us that MPs and business leaders support this call in theory.

Still, we know from [The Careers and Enterprise Company Annual Report 2019-2020](#) that only 55% of schools in England are meeting Gatsby benchmark 6, which means that there are still significant numbers of young people who do not get the opportunity to undertake even one work experience placement.

This has to change.

The young people we interviewed told us remarkable stories of their resilience and efforts to adapt throughout the pandemic. Joshua had hoped to do a tourism apprenticeship, but when the industry was seriously affected, he found a new route, with a college course and a part-time job. Joyce couldn't do her usual athletics so went running with her mum instead.

These young people, and very many others, have adjusted to extraordinary circumstances, dealing with uncertainty and change in their education, as well as substantial changes to their home life.

When they tell us, so clearly, that what they need is great work experience, alongside the academic and wellbeing support that is also so vital, we must listen.

The trust gap that we have identified, between young people on the one hand, and business and politicians on the other, is unsustainable and must be addressed.



WHAT CAN POLICY MAKERS AND BUSINESS LEADERS DO TO SUPPORT THE MANDATE WE HAVE ALL BEEN GIVEN?

Our research gives our charity, policy makers and business leaders a clear mandate: show young people we understand what they have been through, listen to their concerns, and create the opportunities and the support they need to create a bright future.

We urge policy makers and business leaders to lend their support in several ways.

OUR TOP 4 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE GOVERNMENT:



- 1 Support schools with the mental health and wellbeing, academic and extra-curricular resources that they need to help young people recover from this extraordinary time of pandemic.
- 2 Make it easier for employers to provide great work experience placements – publish statutory guidance on safeguarding, for in-person and virtual placements.
- 3 Work with careers agencies, devolved governments and employers to establish a common understanding of what great work experience looks like, with young people's voice, ambitions, hopes and needs at its heart.
- 4 Back essential skills, and the widespread adoption of the Skills Builder Universal Framework.



OUR TOP 4 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR BUSINESS LEADERS:

- 1 Target disadvantaged communities and the young people that need it most by working with us to prioritise providing support to high need schools and high need individuals.
- 2 Use young people's insights and feedback to keep improving the work experience opportunities you offer.
- 3 Offer work experience placements at scale and proportionate to your company's size – a minimum should be one placement per year for every ten people you employ, if we are to reach our targets.
- 4 Support teachers, lecturers and careers leaders with insights into your business, so they can support more young people in understanding the industries and careers out there.

To discuss how you can contribute to helping Speakers for Schools achieve their aim to support 1 million unique young people by the end of academic year 2022-2023, please contact the author of this report:

Rachael Saunders, Policy Director at Speakers for Schools.

APPENDIX

TIME PERIOD COVERED BY OUR RESEARCH

In our polling and interviews we refer to the period of the pandemic. For the purposes of this report this should be understood as March 2020 to June 2021.

Schools and colleges closed to some pupils in late March 2020, and there was a phased reopening in June of the same year in England and Wales with schools and colleges in Scotland and Northern Ireland reopening in August. There was then a second lockdown for schools from 5th January 2021, with secondary schools and colleges reopening from 8th March in England, after the Easter holidays in Northern Ireland, and with a phased reopening from 15th March in Scotland and Wales.

These periods of school closures are referred to by many of the young people we spoke to.

KEY TO BAR CHARTS DOCUMENTING FINDINGS FROM OUR YOUNGOV RESEARCH

In our YouGov poll, we gathered input from young people, MPs and business leaders. For the purposes of this report, we have included a series of bar charts to visually demonstrate many of the findings. For clarity we have colour-coded the bar charts to differentiate between the inputs from the different contributing groups.

Findings from YouGov poll for group 1 – based on the input of 2,113 young people aged 11-19 – are depicted in **turquoise**.

Findings from YouGov poll for or group 2 – based on the input of 100 MPs – are depicted in **green**.

Findings for YouGov poll for group 3 – based on the input of 100 business leaders – are depicted in **purple**.



KEY TO INPUTS FROM OUR 13 INTERVIEW SUBJECTS

In our interviews with young people that followed the YouGov poll, we spoke with Gracie, Joel, Joshua, Joyce, Laila, Madison, Megan, Raina, Sana, Sophia, Thomas, Vrinda and Pedro.

First Name	Gender	Ethnicity	Company	Region	Age
Gracie	Female	White - British	British Airways	Antrim	17
Joel	Male	Would prefer not to disclose	Kainos	Enfield	14
Joshua	Male	White - English	British Airways	Darlington	17
Joyce	Female	Black African/ Caribbean	Caxton Associates	Merton	16
Laila	Female	Would prefer not to disclose	NG Bailey	Manchester	17
Madison	Female	Would prefer not to disclose	University of Derby	Somerset	15
Megan	Female	White - Welsh	University of Derby	Isle of Anglesey	18
Raina	Female	Asian / Asian British	Victrex PLC Online	Enfield	15
Sana	Female	Asian / Asian British	DXC Technology	Lancashire	15
Sophia	Female	Mixed/ Multiple ethnic backgrounds	Morgan Sindall Construction	Bristol	15
Thomas	Male	White - English	East West Rail Company	Lincolnshire	17
Vrinda	Female	Would prefer not to disclose	Tesco	Brent	15
Pedro	Male	Would prefer not to disclose	British Airways	Warrington	17

IDENTIFYING THE KEY FINDINGS FROM OUR RESEARCH

Our research revealed many significant insights. For clarity we have highlighted the key findings by adding this symbol 