

Unfairytails

co
op

Rewriting the story
to create a fairer future
for young people



Unfair TALKS



INTRODUCTION

Rewriting the story to create a fairer future for young people.



KEY FINDINGS

No Filter Futures.
The unfiltered views of young people.



ABOUT PAC

Creating opportunities for young people through co-operation.



CASE STUDIES

It's time to listen to young people.



ACTIONS

Giving young people fairer access to opportunities.



PARTNERSHIPS

Going further to create a fairer future for young people.



CONTACT

To find out more information contact the team.



REWRITING THE STORY TO CREATE A FAIRER FUTURE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

New report reveals fears for the future

Life isn't always a fairy tale for young people. Despite living in one of the world's richest countries, 10-25 year-olds across the UK face a very uncertain future-as new research from the Co-op reveals.

Unfair Tales, an in-depth report reveals how young people *really* see the future. Commissioned by the Co-op with ICM, the research has sought the views of 2,000 10 to 25 year olds. It looks to understand how they feel about their prospects and opportunities.

The findings are stark and concerning. Young people have jumped out of the pan, whilst starting to recover from the covid-pandemic, only to fall straight into the fire, as a major cost of living crisis looms over the nation, in addition to a backdrop of geographical inequality. The reality of life for many young people in the UK is very different to the world they see and consume on social media.

- **Almost half** (48%) of young people feel they will need to leave their hometown to achieve what they want in life
- **Among those aged 16-25, more than a quarter** (29%) say that the rising cost of living will make it harder to get a job
- **Over a third** (35%) say that these factors will negatively impact their mental wellbeing
- **Over a quarter** (27%) are less hopeful about their future

These numbers are worrying. Our young people aspire to so much-but too many feel that owing to current societal constraints they won't have a chance to achieve those aspirations.

At the Co-op we believe that young people should hope for better and have the fairy tale ending they so rightly deserve.

That's why Co-op has a number of youth-led and mental wellbeing programmes which give young people fairer access to opportunities and come together to make their voices heard.

As we come out of the pandemic, young people still appear to have been left behind. The central and unifying call of **Unfair Tales** will see us take urgent action to tackle inequality of opportunity, levelling up for young people everywhere and to look from a business community as to how we can support.

With three quarters (76%) of young people wanting to make a difference in their career, now is the time to listen to the voices of young people and work together to truly make the UK a place where everyone can reach their full potential, working together to build genuine co-operation between government, business, and community.

NO FILTER FUTURES. THE UNFILTERED VIEWS OF YOUNG PEOPLE...



Key findings

It's apparent from the research that no amount of filters can hide just how hard societal issues have hit young people's ambitions, whilst only accelerating their worries.

The research has identified **four key pressure points** that are having an impact right now on young people:

1 Where I live will affect my life chances

Almost half of young people (48%) think they will need to leave the area where they currently live to achieve what they want in life- a sentiment that increases with age (52% of those aged 16-25 agree vs. 40% of those aged 10-15).

This is also an emerging theme coming out of the [Peer Action Collective \(PAC\)](#), with young people telling peer researchers about a scarcity of opportunities in their local area.

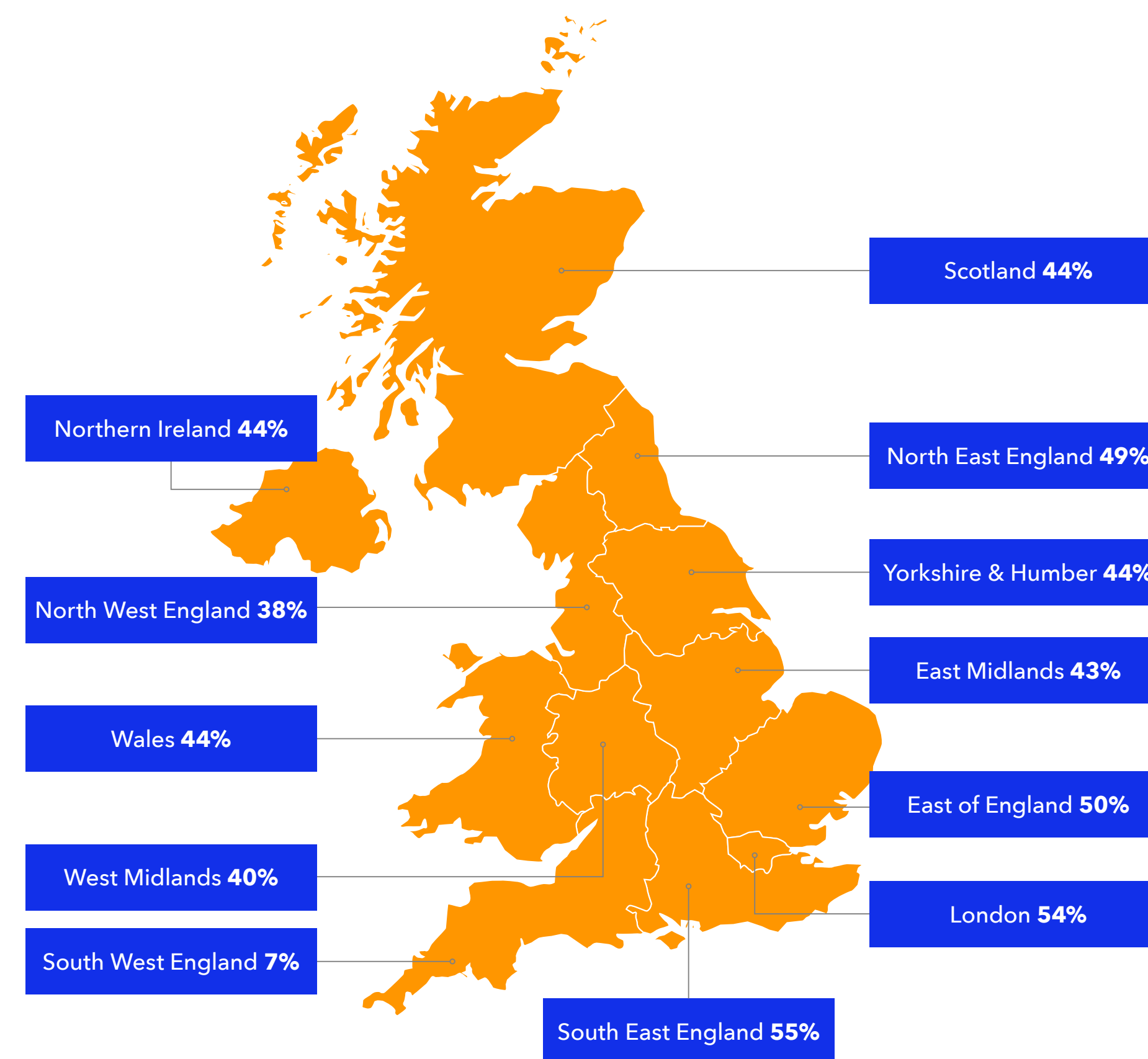
Young people also told the PAC researchers that travel costs were an issue and a barrier to accessing opportunities.

The majority, 72% of 10-25 year-olds, feel this most strongly that there are too few opportunities where they live. Those aged 10-15 are least likely to feel there is anything in their community for them with nearly a third (30%) feeling this way, as opposed to 16% of 20-25 year-olds.

That sentiment only increases among females and those living in rural areas. Those in rural areas are least likely to feel there are lots of opportunities for them where they are growing up/grew up (41%, vs. 50% urban).

Males aged 16-25 are more likely to feel there are lots of opportunities for them in the place they grew up than females (50% 16-20 year-old males, vs. 44% 16-20 year-old females).

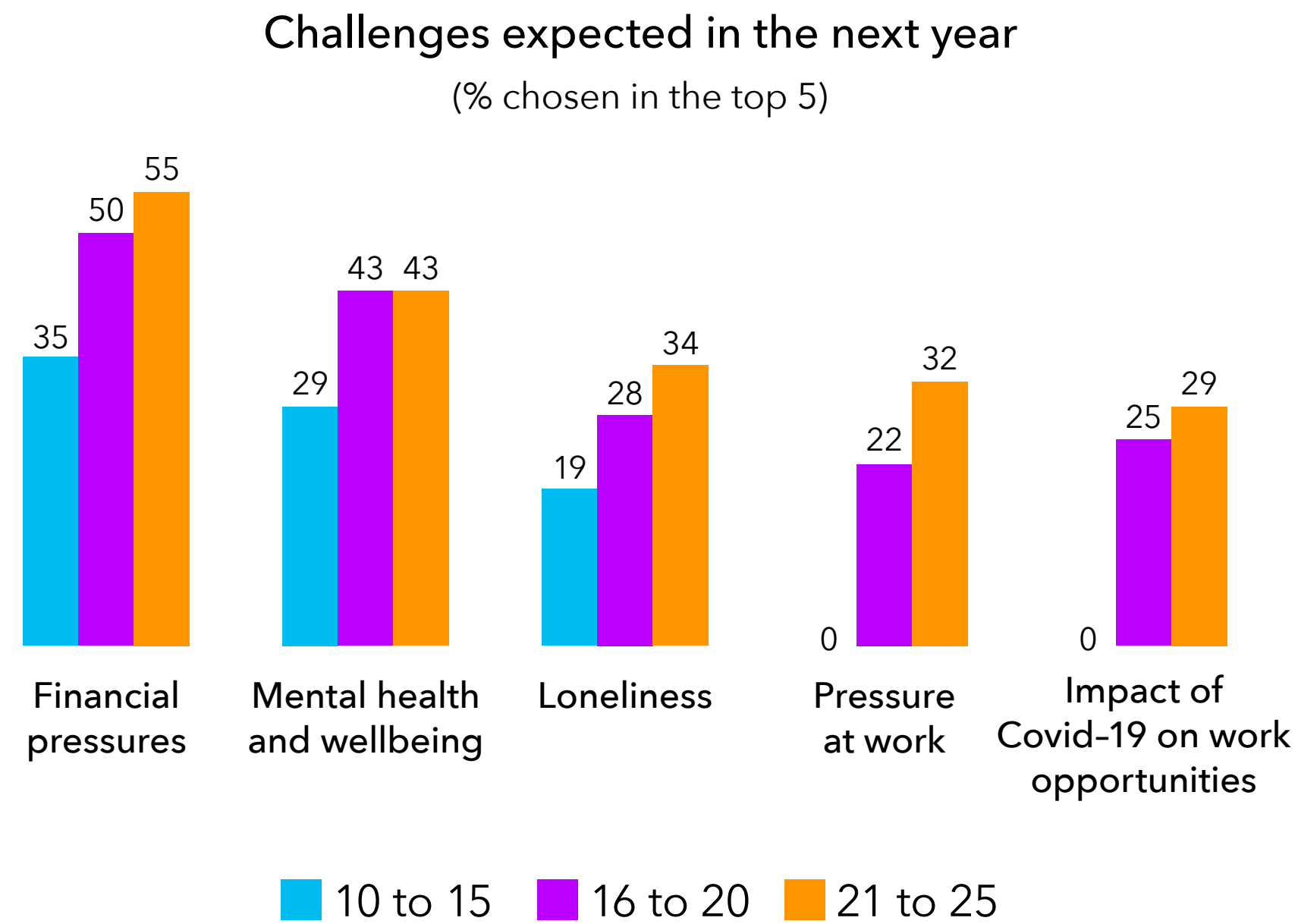
This map of the UK shows how young people outside of London and the South East believe they have less opportunities





2 The rising cost of living will impact my life goals

The rising cost of living has presented a fresh set of challenges for young people, with children as young as 10 being concerned and acutely aware of the rising cost of living. Almost half (47%) of 10-25 year-olds see financial pressures as one of the top five challenges they will face in the next 12 months, whilst over a half (54%) of 13-25 year-olds feel it will be harder to save money for their future.



Furthermore, nearly a third (29%) of 16-25 year olds believe the rising costs will make it harder for them to get a job, and a fifth (21%) feel the rising cost of living will negatively impact their career goals for the year.



3 The rising cost of living will affect my mental wellbeing

The rising cost of living presents a new mental wellbeing challenge for young people, on top of the backdrop of poor mental wellbeing during the pandemic, that hasn't been fully addressed.

Over a third (35%) of 13-25 year-olds believe the rising price of everyday things will negatively impact their long-term mental wellbeing...

...this is a particular concern among older age groups, with nearly half (45%) of 21-25 year-olds, and a fifth (20%) of those aged 10-15 years of age.

Furthermore, a quarter (25%) of children aged 10-15 acknowledged loneliness as a top challenge they faced in the last 12 months, despite lockdown restrictions reaching an end, these feelings of loneliness are set to continue with nearly a fifth (19%) of 10-15 year-olds expecting to feel lonely over the next year.

4 Learning lost to the pandemic is my biggest challenge

The impact of the pandemic on education has been a leading challenge over the last 12 months for more than 2 in 5 young people (42%). This is expected to be less of a challenge over the coming 12 months (31%), but other challenges are expected to take precedent such as worries about war/conflict (39%). Young people aged 10-15 are more likely to be worried about war/conflict, (50% of 10-15 year-olds vs. 33% of 16-25 year-olds.)





EDUCATION IS KEY

Young people see education as an important way out, with more than 7 in 10 young people (73%) thinking education is key to achieve what they want in life. This is seen most strongly amongst 10-15 year-olds, with over 4 in 5 (83%) thinking education is key, and (68%) with 16-25 year-olds

Here are some of the ways Co-op is helping to give young people fairer access to opportunities and making their voices heard.



CREATING OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE THROUGH CO-OPERATION

Peer Action Collective (PAC)

All too often, young people's voices aren't heard and this has to change. But change won't happen if young people aren't at the heart of it. That's why we've come together with the Youth Endowment Fund and the #iwill Fund (a joint investment between The National Lottery Community Fund and Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport) to give young people the chance to take the lead, so that they're shaping the solutions they want to see in their communities.

Together with our partners, we've invested £5.2 million to build a network of over 120 peer researchers (aged 16-25), who are designing their own research projects. The researchers are working with around 5,000 other young people (aged 10-20) to find out about their experiences and what they want to see change in their communities.

1,500 young changemakers will then take the lead on delivering social action to bring about long-term change on the issues.



PAC research

As part of the initial pilot research projects, which have been underway since October 2021, overarching themes about inequality and access to opportunities have started to emerge.

Mirroring the research from Co-op, young people are telling the peer researchers through the PAC that meaningful opportunities just don't exist for them, or other young people like them.

The PAC peer researchers also have a lot to say about how opportunities could be better tailored to them, with structural barriers seen as the largest issue in accessing opportunities.

Race, gender, income and ability were all mentioned by at least one group of peer researchers as barriers to accessing opportunities. The most frequently cited structural barrier was location.

Young people spoke about having a scarcity of opportunities in their local areas, with some areas favoured over others, e.g. London. Travel costs are also an issue, if an opportunity is outside the area a young person lives.

Conversations with the peer researchers made it clear what high-quality opportunities should look like.

Opportunities for young people should:

- 1. Be inclusive and accessible—considering the effect of stereotyping young people and doing more to overcome access needs.**
- 2. Meet young people in their local areas, in their own time, aligning to their interests and desire to make change.**
- 3. Widen what counts as 'experience' and place lower onus on qualifications to make young people feel more confident to apply.**



MEET JHEMAR

Aged 20, working with the Lambeth PAC partnership, one of many PAC Peer Researchers making a difference for young people in his community in Brixton and Tulse Hill. Having joined the PAC to help make positive changes in reducing and abolishing knife crime, Jhemar is also gaining new skills and opportunities.

"The PAC is so important to me because I am developing skills which will always stay with me and help me to run future campaigns to help achieve my goal of abolishing knife crime.

I've had a lot of opportunities already where I've been speaking with professionals from all different parts of society and developing my communication, organisational and campaigning skills - things I wouldn't have been able to do without with the PAC.

The research from Co-op and the PAC shows that my generation is calling out for opportunities to get on in life and I hope more young people can get a hold of these like I have through the PAC to fulfil their futures".

Bringing to life his experiences and giving a voice to young people in communities across the UK, Jhemar has created an exclusive track - which you can listen to [here](#)



So much stress

**Some want to move
out of the ends**

Just wanna start again

Start it fresh

**Feel like they need
to pack bags**

and leave

**In search of
opportunity**

CASE STUDIES

It's time to listen to young people

Across the country and at different stages of their lives, young people want to be heard, to make a change not only for themselves but their generation.

Maddie, 21

Southport

Co-op Apprentice

"Working as an apprenticeship has opened so many doors for me, so early on in my career, and I believe more young people should be taught about the benefits apprenticeships have in creating career opportunities without having to move to a big city to get on in life."



Nabilah, 18,

Manchester

Co-op Live Apprentice

"College has been a huge help in breaking the barriers to employment for me. I had mock interviews which helped me prepare for the real thing and I recently completed my placement at Co-op through the Connell Young Business Leaders program, which has helped me decide my future path. Levelling up to me means recognising the North and embracing the fact the UK is not just London. The same quality of education, should be accessible to everyone in the UK and the government should invest further into the North."



Rae, 14

Manchester

Co-op Academy Manchester student

"I know that if I were to stay in my hometown that my future career would be a lot more difficult to achieve as there's a lack of opportunities for me. I'm about to start my exams and already I'm having to think beyond them and where I'll need to move to in a few years' time - adding even more worry. The government needs to give more focus to young people my age and provide better opportunities to help us with our future."





GIVING YOUNG PEOPLE FAIRER ACCESS TO OPPORTUNITIES

In it together, when it comes to creating a brighter future for young people

At the Co-op we believe in co-operating for a fairer world and our work with young people is central to this. We're committed to giving young people a voice and helping them to prosper-regardless of where they live.

From our work with the **PAC, the Young Members' Board** which supports Co-op, to our innovative **virtual work experience and apprenticeship schemes**, we're continually creating new opportunities.

There's no doubt that today's young people feel fearful about tomorrow. By listening and acting on what they say, together we can give them hope for the future. Through sharing capabilities, resources and funding with partners, we can achieve more together. So our aim is that, through co-operation, we will enable young people to change their lives and play an active role in changing the world around them for the better.





HOW THE CO-OP IS SUPPORTING FUTURE GENERATIONS

The PAC

In March 2021 we announced the Peer Action Collective (PAC), a unique partnership with [Youth Endowment Fund](#) (YEF) and the [#iwill Fund](#) (a joint investment between The National Lottery Community Fund and Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport) investing £5.1 million to give 6,000 young people the chance to make their communities safer, fairer places to live.

Co-op Virtual Work Experience

Having successfully delivered a virtual work experience to 1,500 students at our Co-op Academy Schools in 2021, 2022 will see us take this experience national. Focusing on providing young people most in need of opportunity with the chance to experience the world of work through an online experience. The programme will run for a week at a time and we'll run 7 weeks every year for the next 3 years starting in summer 2022. We're hoping to reach 26,000 of the most disadvantaged young people over the 3 years.

Apprentices

Apprenticeships play a critical route for young, hard-working people enabling them to get to a long-term career, that's why we support up to 750 active apprenticeship across our Co-op, from the support centre in Manchester to the frontline in UK high streets, in Food stores and funeral homes.

Co-op Academies

With 28 Co-op Academies and colleges across northern England and ambition to grow up to 40, in some of the most economically challenged areas in the UK, Co-op has seen first-hand the positive impact it has in changing young people's lives, where Co-op values and principles are brought to life.



Co-op's Apprenticeship Levy Matchmaking service

Designed to create even more apprenticeships from within under-represented groups, including black and ethnic minority candidates and those from low socio-economic backgrounds. As of April 2022, 546 apprentice opportunities, worth approximately £5m, have been matched with apprenticeships in care, construction, engineering and health and science being supported and spanning apprenticeship standards from level two to six. It's a great example of what can be achieved through co-operation.

Co-op Young Business Leaders

In October, Co-op started its second cohort of Young Business Leaders, offering a paid work placements to BTEC Business Studies students at Connell Co-op College, giving them meaningful work experience and an opportunity to develop their employability skills, giving them a competitive edge in the job market.

Co-op Young Members Board

Co-op's Young Members Group is a group of Co-op Members aged 16-25 from across the UK, coming from different backgrounds and experiences with different skills, who all work with Co-op on projects and activities with young people at the core. Each member of the Co-op Young Members Group has their own network of young people to involve in their work. The group's vision is to inspire a movement of young people who co-operate for a fairer world.

Bringing communities together to improve mental wellbeing

As part of its vision 'Co-operating for a Fairer World', the Co-op is working in partnership with Mind, SAMH and Inspire to bring communities together to improve mental wellbeing including new services across the UK that support people to build their resilience.



Co-op's Strive Network

Co-op's Strive Network offers young colleagues aged 16-30 the opportunity to co-operate, collaborate and learn from each other, creating a more inclusive environment for everyone and giving younger colleagues the resources and guidance to build their careers. Strives ambition is to help young colleagues shine in their careers by providing them with training, networking and development opportunities.





GOING FURTHER TO CREATE A FAIRER FUTURE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Our commitment to making a fairer future for young people doesn't stop there. We're working with a range of partners to reduce inequalities and barriers that stand in the way of young people achieving their aspirations and creating a positive future for themselves. We are:

- **Working with the Rt Hon Justine Greening**, founder of the Social Mobility Pledge and Former Secretary of State for Education, to map Co-op's work to date that contributes to levelling up the UK, as well as taking on board recommendations on how Co-op can go further to support levelling up, with a specific lens on improving opportunities and reducing inequalities for young people.
- **Continuing our work with the PAC.** The PAC isn't just about research—it's about making change. That's why we're supporting a group of 1,500 changemakers (aged 10-20) to take what the researchers learn and turn it into action. From setting up a youth centre, improving local mental health services or supporting more young people into employment; together, Peer Researchers and Changemakers will work to create opportunities to make their communities better. As the PAC evolves throughout the year, we'll be updating on how the Peer Researchers and Changemakers are turning research into action.





CONTACTS

For more information and to speak with a case study, please contact the Co-op Press Team below:

Sarah Fitton: sarah.fitton@coop.co.uk | 07702 506 126

Mark Carrington: mark.carrington@coop.co.uk | 07890 384 471



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ICM interviewed a nationally representative sample of 2,000 young people living in the United Kingdom aged 10-25 via an online survey between 24 March and 5 April 2022. Participants aged 10-15 (and some aged 16-17) were recruited through their parents; both participants and parents gave their consent to take part in the survey.

Unless otherwise stated, not all differences between demographics are statistically significant. Any differences which are labelled significant have been tested at the 95 per cent confidence level.

The research was conducted in accordance with ISO 20252 and ISO 27001, the international standards for market research and information security management.

ABOUT CO-OP

Co-op is the UK's largest consumer co-operative, owned by more than four million active members.

We're a major food retailer and wholesaler, we're the largest funerals provider in the UK, a major provider of regulated consumer legal services, particularly probate and wills, and a major provider of life planning and insurance products.

Employing over 60,000 people, Co-op has an annual turnover of over £11 billion. As well as having clear financial and operational objectives, the Co-op is a recognised leader for its social goals and community-led programmes. Co-op exists to meet members' needs and stand up for the things they believe in.

coop.co.uk

