



King's
Trust



THE KING'S TRUST
TK MAXX

YOUTH INDEX
2025

INTRODUCTION



Welcome to the Youth Index report for 2025 which, for the first time, we are publishing under our new name; The King's Trust.

Since 2009, this annual report has brought together the voices of thousands of young people and reflected how they are feeling about different aspects of their lives, such as their work, education and health. Their perspectives help us to understand the external factors impacting their overall wellbeing, as well as the challenges they face in navigating the difficult transition to adulthood. Crucially, they also tell us what needs to change to ensure that every young person, no matter what their postcode or circumstances, has a chance to succeed in life.

We are publishing this report against a backdrop of a challenging economy, global unrest and a rapidly changing world of work. Many young people are feeling the pressure and, as the findings show, it is those who are already facing disadvantage and adversity whose prospects are at the greatest risk.

The research confirms what we know from our daily interactions with young people; that being out of work, education or training (NEET) remains the most significant factor compared to any other demographic or characteristic in indicating poor wellbeing and low confidence in the future. These young people are significantly more likely to be unhappy and lacking in self-belief than those who are in work or education; a sobering thought given that there are almost a million NEET young people in the UK.

The findings of this research show that many of these young people desperately want to work. In fact, for one in five NEET young people, getting a job is one of their biggest goals in life. There is so much to gain from supporting them on a pathway to employment; in addition to transforming their own lives, their successes will support their local communities and help to drive the wider economy.

Despite the challenges of the last year, I'm pleased to say that more than 73,000 young people benefited from the support provided by King's Trust programmes. Ultimately, more than three in four moved into employment, education or training outcomes after completing one of our programmes.

None of this would be possible without our dedicated colleagues, partners and volunteers, who are committed to delivering our vital work in areas most in need across the UK. Their passion and determination to champion young people is a force to be reckoned with, but they cannot do it alone – we need businesses, government, and individuals to work with us so that we can reach as many vulnerable young people as possible.

We all stand to gain by building a future that works for young people. In supporting our cause, you can be a part of the solution to the issues raised in this report and help us to give more young people the opportunities they deserve.

Jonathan Townsend, CEO

FOREWORD



With our shared vision of empowering young people to achieve their potential, there is a deeply rewarding, long-term relationship with The King's Trust.

Over the past decade, this partnership has transformed the lives of over 8,000 young individuals across a range of programmes and initiatives, providing them with the confidence, skills, work experience, and job opportunities they need to overcome adversity and thrive.

We are incredibly proud to sponsor this research for the first time, as we believe the Youth Index is a powerful tool that allows The Trust to better understand and address the most meaningful support, significantly impacting a generation of young people.

This year's Youth Index sheds light on the immense pressures young people are facing today. The lasting impacts of the cost of living crisis and the pandemic have disrupted key, formative moments in their education, early careers, and livelihoods. By supporting this research, we aim to support The Trust in the quest to make a significant difference, helping young people navigate these challenging times with resilience and hope.

The Youth Index reveals that alongside the growing numbers of young people out of work, the majority are concerned they are not equipped with the right tools to pursue employment. This is affecting young people's mental health and wellbeing, as well as their aspirations in life, such as owning a home or raising a family. What is particularly concerning is that the research consistently leads to the point that those facing the greatest disadvantage and adversity are much more likely to feel this way.

While these challenges are significant, the research does present a beacon of hope. It tells us that the overwhelming majority of young people are determined to achieve their goals, and that the route to improving young people's confidence, wellbeing, and long-term prospects is meaningful employment. What they require is the right support and opportunities to make this a reality.

Certainly at TJX Europe, we have witnessed the incredible potential that young people possess when they do receive the right support. The majority of those who have participated in our programmes with The King's Trust have flourished in their careers, including over 1,500 within our own business. Their drive, resilience, and determination inspire us, reinforcing why we are passionate about the importance of giving every young person — regardless of their background—the chance to build a brighter future.

Jo Murphy, Vice President of Corporate Responsibility & Sustainability at TJX Europe



BACKGROUND

The Youth Index is a national survey that gauges the happiness and confidence young people feel across a range of areas, from working life to mental and physical health. It measures how young people are feeling about their lives today as well as their aspirations for the future.

The findings are derived from the results of a survey in which a sample of 4,285 young people participated between 29th November and 17th December 2024. The survey was conducted online by YouGov on behalf of The King's Trust. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all UK young people aged 16 to 25.

Methodology

Survey participants are asked how happy and confident they are in different areas of their lives. The responses are then converted into a numerical scale, resulting in a number between zero and 100, where 100 denotes participants being entirely happy or confident and zero being not at all happy or confident.

The results for 2025 have been mapped against the data from the previous 15 Youth Index reports to give a high-level view of how the wellbeing and aspirations of young people have changed over time.



10%

of respondents are not currently in education, employment or training (NEET).

63%

of these have been unemployed for more than six months.



15%

of respondents have fewer than five GCSEs graded A* to C, or the new grading of 4 to 9, or Scottish Standards, levels 1 or 2.



11%

of respondents received free school meals throughout their time at school. Young people from low-income backgrounds are indicated in this study as those who received free school meals throughout school.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The King's Trust TK Maxx Youth Index highlights the stark contrast between the experiences of young people who face disadvantage and adversity, versus those of their peers. It finds that NEET young people, those with no GCSEs, young people from poorer backgrounds and young people who have a disability reported the lowest overall wellbeing scores this year.

The Index, which measures how young people feel across different aspects of their lives, finds that the area young people are least happy and confident in is money. Although the confidence young people feel in the amount of money they have has risen slightly to 66, the same score was recorded in 2009, when the UK was experiencing a recession amidst a global financial crisis. The happiness and confidence young people have in their emotional health remains the lowest scoring aspect after money.

The report suggests that, despite wanting to work, many young people are stuck in a loop of unsuccessfully applying for jobs. Low confidence in their own qualifications, skills and experience is fuelling their self-doubt, while the lack of opportunities to learn and prove themselves in a work environment is preventing them from breaking the cycle.

Despite these barriers, more than two thirds of young people (70 per cent) are determined to achieve their goals in life. For many young people, having a job is crucial to helping them get to where they want to be. Being locked out of the job market simply cannot be an option for them.

Potential going to waste

Despite wanting to work, many NEET young people are struggling to enter the job market. For some, the effects of unemployment are taking their toll on their wellbeing and confidence.

- ▶ One in five (22 per cent) NEET young people say that securing a job is one of their biggest goals.
- ▶ Around one in six (16 per cent) NEET young people have been rejected for more than 50 jobs.
- ▶ More than a quarter (29 per cent) of NEET young people have applied for jobs they do not want because they are desperate to work.
- ▶ Almost one in three (30 per cent) state they have experienced a mental health problem due to being unemployed.
- ▶ Just over half (53 per cent) of NEET young people say that the longer they are unemployed, the worse they feel about themselves.
- ▶ Two thirds (67 per cent) of NEET young people say that being in work would give them stability in life.

Fears of falling short

The findings show that the majority of young people are worried they are not equipped with the right tools to pursue employment that is secure in the future economy. For those from the poorest backgrounds, these concerns are even more acute.

- ▶ Almost two in five (39 per cent) of young people say they have (or had) no idea how to find a job when leaving school, rising to half (50 per cent) among those from low-income backgrounds.
- ▶ More than half of young people (56 per cent) are concerned they lack the skills, experience or qualifications to pursue the career they want, rising to 61 per cent among those from low-income backgrounds.
- ▶ More than half (61 per cent) are concerned that their lack of skills, experience or qualifications will impact their ability to get a job that is secure in the future economy.
- ▶ More than a third (39 per cent) say that worrying about achieving their career goals has made their mental health worse, with similar numbers (35 per cent) not being confident they can get the job they want.
- ▶ One in ten young people from a low-income background (12 per cent) are missing school or work due to an inability to afford the transport costs (compared to 4 per cent of more affluent peers).

Struggling to stay connected

The data shows that many young people are experiencing isolation and loneliness. A number of factors are contributing towards this, including financial pressures, poor mental health and deprivation.

- ▶ More than a third of young people (35 per cent) always or often feel lonely, while 30 percent always or often feel isolated.
- ▶ More than a third of young people from low-income backgrounds (37 per cent) say their local area feels less welcoming than 12 months ago.
- ▶ Almost half of young people (49 per cent) feel that their generation feels more divided than this time last year.
- ▶ Around one in four young people (26 per cent) say their mental health has led to them avoiding seeing family or friends over the last 12 months.
- ▶ A third (32 per cent) are worried about being picked on due to their faith, sexual identity or cultural background. For those from poorer backgrounds, this rises to 45 per cent.

Losing hope in their life goals

Many young people today feel an overwhelming pressure to achieve their life goals, often struggling with the fear that they will never live up to their own expectations. The weight of these concerns is affecting their aspirations and wellbeing.

- ▶ Almost a third of all young people (30 per cent) think they will fail in life, with NEET young people even more likely to feel this way (44 per cent).
- ▶ More than half (53 per cent) of young people feel anxious about their future on a daily basis.
- ▶ A third (33 per cent) do not think they will be as successful as their parents and guardians, and NEET young people are even more likely to feel this way (40 per cent).
- ▶ Four in ten (41 per cent) of young people state that worrying about achieving their life goals has made their mental health worse.

The outlook for young women

Young women are more likely than young men to be feeling apprehensive about their future. They are disproportionately struggling with low self-confidence and poor mental health compared to young men, and many feel their goals will always be out of reach.

- ▶ Young women are less likely than young men to feel in control of their future, with 44 percent of young women not feeling in control compared to 36 per cent of young men.
- ▶ More than half of young women (58 per cent) feel anxious on a daily basis about their future, compared to 49 per cent of young men.
- ▶ One in four young women (24 per cent) are not confident that they will be able to achieve their life goals, compared to 18 per cent of young men.
- ▶ More than a fifth of young women (23 per cent) say their mental health has stopped them from going to work, school or college in the last year, compared to 14 per cent of young men.
- ▶ Young women are more likely than young men to experience a loss of confidence in their skills as a result of being out of work.

Finding a way forward

Despite the pressure they are under, young people are working towards a positive future for themselves and their communities. Having access to the right support is something that many feel could help them to succeed.



Some of the things young people feel would help them succeed are:



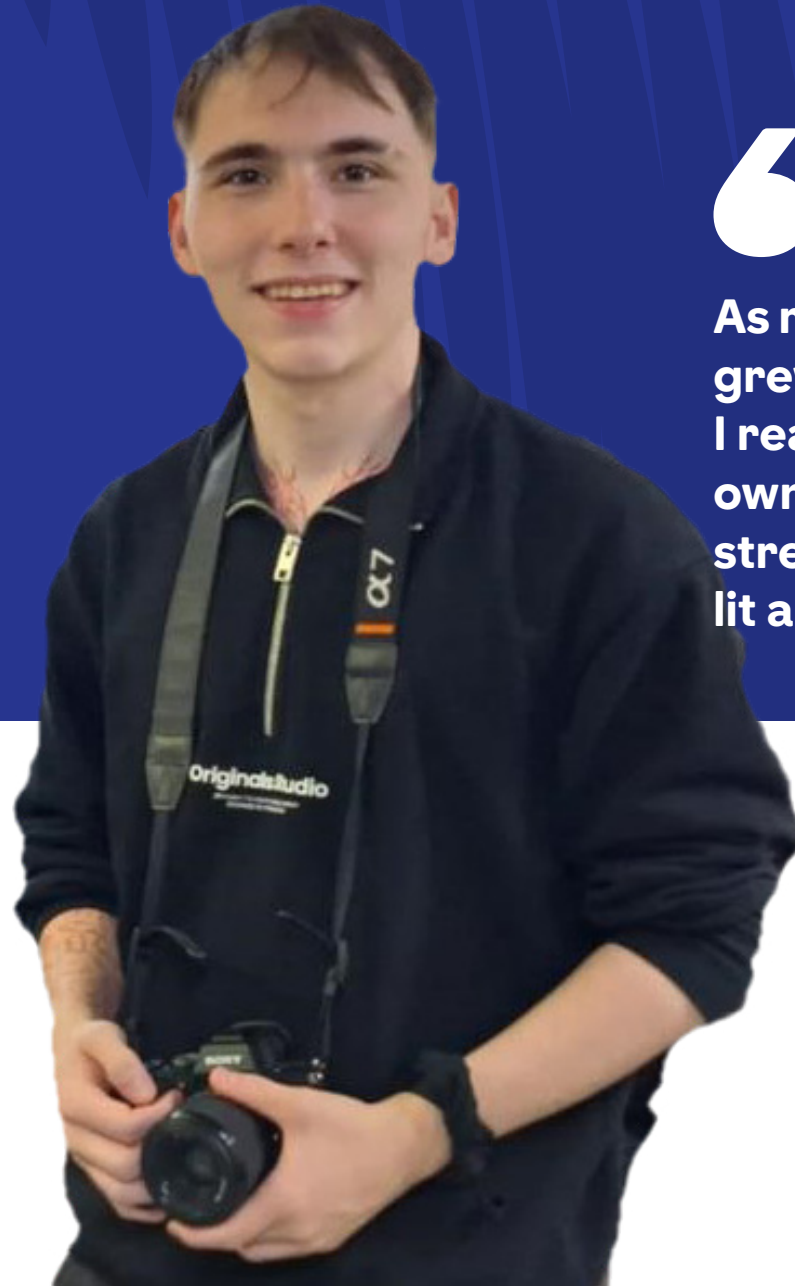
work experience opportunities.



help with CV and interview skills.



help with developing confidence.



As my confidence grew each day I realised my own worth and strength, which lit a fire in me.

Being out of work and education for eight months knocked 19-year-old Adam's confidence, negatively impacted his mental health and he struggled financially and emotionally. With the support of The King's Trust, Adam completed Team; a twelve-week personal development course delivered by Groundwork. He is now employed as an Administrator for a non-profit organisation in Oldham.

"Before coming to The King's Trust, I was in a dark place mentally. My experience of an apprenticeship, where a company restructure left me without a manager and facing constant stress, really knocked my self-belief and my mental health went downhill.

"Leaving the apprenticeship, I returned to finish my last year of college. I was keen to work after graduating and applied for more than a hundred jobs during my eight months of unemployment. However, I often didn't hear back, and I wasn't successful in the interviews I did do.

"Being out of work and education took a major toll on me. The constant rejection from employers knocked my confidence, my mental health was at an all-time low, and I was struggling to see a way forward.

"The Team programme was a real eye-opener for me. Over the three months we did varied

































activities including team building tasks, like rock climbing and caving, and a community project where we revamped a garden.

"The staff created a positive environment for us to learn in. I was given opportunities I never thought I'd be given and learned lessons that aren't taught in the normal classes you get at school and college. This was priceless. As my confidence grew each day I realised my own worth and strength, which lit a fire in me.

"My two-week work placement turned into a job at the end of the course, and I couldn't be happier. After being out of work for so long, it feels great to have a job, have a wage coming in and not be constantly stressed about my finances. While I continue to work on my mental health, being in a job has helped me massively and I finally feel like I am contributing to society again."

ADAM'S STORY

YOUTH INDEX SCORES

<div><div></div><div>Happiness</div></div> <div><div></div><div>Confidence</div></div>	2025		2024		2023		2022		2021		2020		2019		2018		2017		2015		2014		2013		2012		2011		2010		2009	
																																
Work / education	68	69	67	67	67	67	68	66	67	66	68	68	68	68	67	67	69	68	69	68	70	67	69	67	70	70	68	67	70	70	71	71
Home / accommodation	75	73	74	71	73	71	74	69	76	72	75	70	76	71	75	71	75	71	75	72	76	73	76	73	78	75	76	73	76	75	76	76
Community / local area	69	69	68	67	66	66	67	66	69	68	67	66	68	68	68	68	68	68	69	68	70	70	68	69	69	71	68	68	69	69	69	70
Family relationships	77	78	76	77	76	76	74	75	77	78	75	76	77	79	77	78	77	78	79	80	79	79	79	79	80	81	78	78	81	82	79	81
Relationships with friends	74	73	72	72	70	70	71	71	74	73	72	71	72	72	72	72	73	73	73	73	75	75	74	74	77	78	75	75	78	78	77	79
Money	58	66	56	63	56	64	60	65	60	65	58	64	56	65	56	64	58	65	58	65	58	65	58	66	58	67	57	65	56	66	56	67
Qualifications	75	74	74	73	75	73	75	72	77	74	76	74	76	73	76	73	76	74	77	74	76	74	76	74	77	76	76	75	77	76	79	79
Physical health	68	72	66	70	63	68	63	68	65	69	63	68	63	68	63	68	65	70	67	70	69	72	69	73	71	74	68	72	71	74	69	74
Emotional health	62	68	60	65	58	64	57	64	56	64	58	64	58	64	57	65	61	67	64	70	67	72	66	72	67	70	67	68	70	71	67	73
Total Index scores	69	71	68	69	67	69	67	68	69	70	68	69	68	70	68	69	69	70	70	71	71	72	70	72	72	74	70	71	72	74	71	74
Overall Index score	70		69		68		68		69		68		69		69		70		71		72		71		73		71		73		73	

WELLBEING ANALYSIS



Happiness

The total Index score for the happiness young people feel in their lives has increased by one point, from 68 to 69, due to increases of one or two points across each of the various areas measured.

Looking across the different areas measured by the Index, the lowest scoring aspect of young people's happiness this year is money, which has a score of 58. This is only two points above the lowest level ever recorded by the Index in this category.

Although the score for emotional health has increased this year, from 60 to 62, it remains the second lowest scoring aspect by a margin of at least six points when compared to all other areas measured except money.

The scores for the happiness young people feel about their qualifications and employment have both crept up from the all-time lows recorded last year by one point, to 75 and 68 respectively.

The happiness scores measuring the way young people feel about their community, relationships with friends, physical health and home and accommodation have all continued to increase for the third year in a row.



Confidence

Young people are feeling more confident across all the areas measured by this research compared to last year, with a two point uplift in the overall Index score for confidence. The changes to the confidence scores are broadly similar to those seen in the scores for happiness.

Although the confidence score for money has risen to 66, it remains the lowest scoring aspect again this year and is comparable to the score published in 2009, when the UK was in the middle of a recession amidst a global financial crisis. Emotional health is the lowest scoring area after money, sitting five points below the peak score of 73 which was recorded in 2009.

It is encouraging to see that young people's confidence in their employment has increased by two points to 69, and that the confidence they have in their qualifications has also increased by one point compared to last year.



PERSONAL CIRCUMSTANCE COMPARISONS

The score for overall confidence and happiness young people feel in their lives varies according to their different personal circumstances and identities.

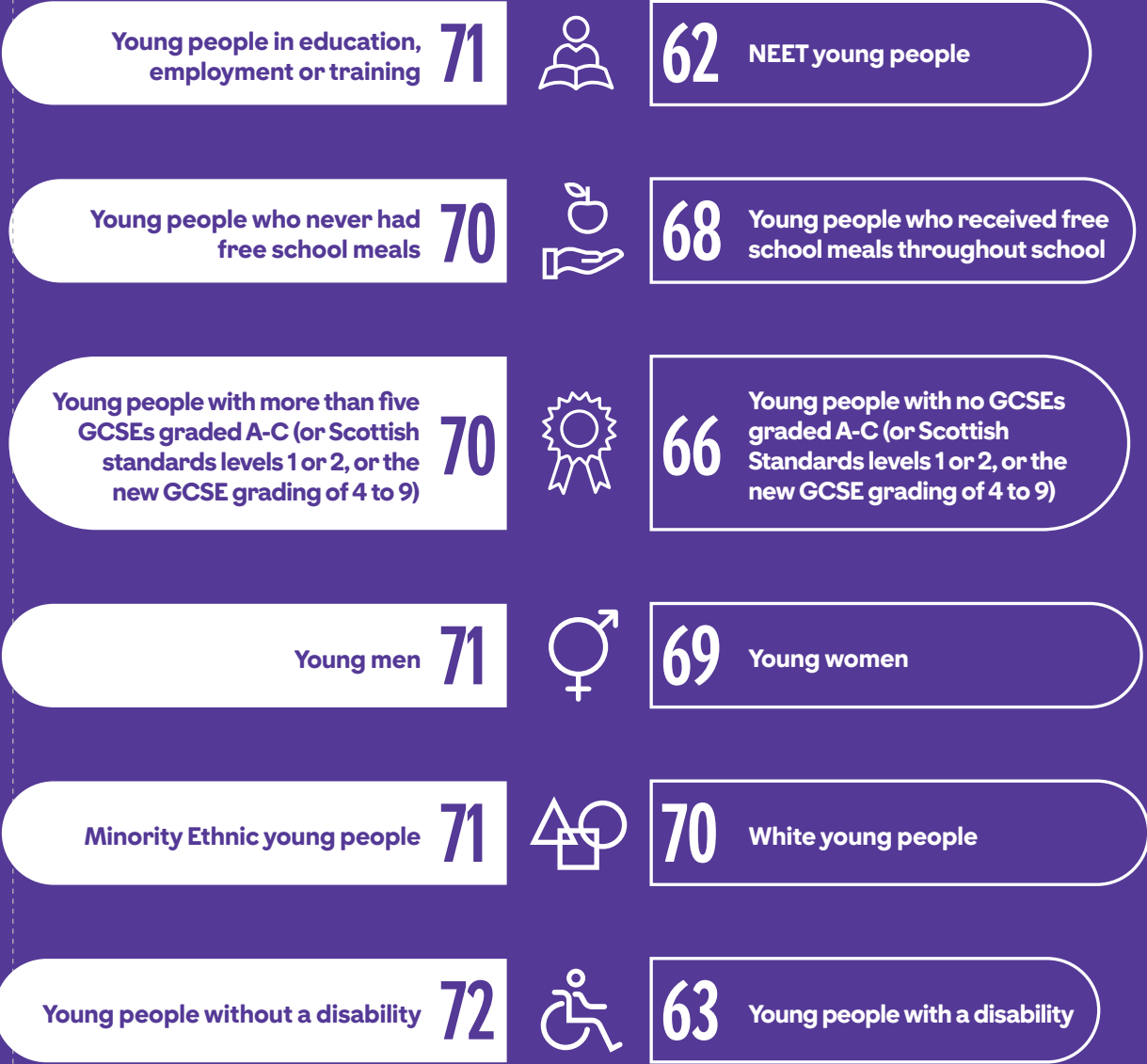
The findings show a correlation between circumstances such as being unemployed, being from a low-income background or having a disability, and having lower Index scores. The data also shows that young women still have an overall Index score that is two points lower than the score for young men.

Of these factors, the lowest score of 62 was reported by young people who are not in employment, education or training (NEET). This is in stark contrast to the score for those who are in employment, education or training, which is nine points higher, and the overall 2025 Index score, which is eight points higher. There is also a large gap between the scores for young people without a disability and young people with a disability, which stand at 72 and 63 respectively.

Young people from poorer backgrounds, who are indicated in this study as those who received free school meals throughout school, have an overall happiness and confidence score that is two points lower than that of their more affluent peers.



Index scores for different personal circumstances & lived experiences



OVERALL 2025 INDEX SCORE: 70

POTENTIAL GOING TO WASTE

Looking across all the factors the Youth Index measures, it is young people who are not in employment, education or training (NEET) who are the most likely to experience overall low wellbeing and confidence in the future. In the UK today, almost a million young people are NEET¹, and this number has been steadily rising over the last two years.

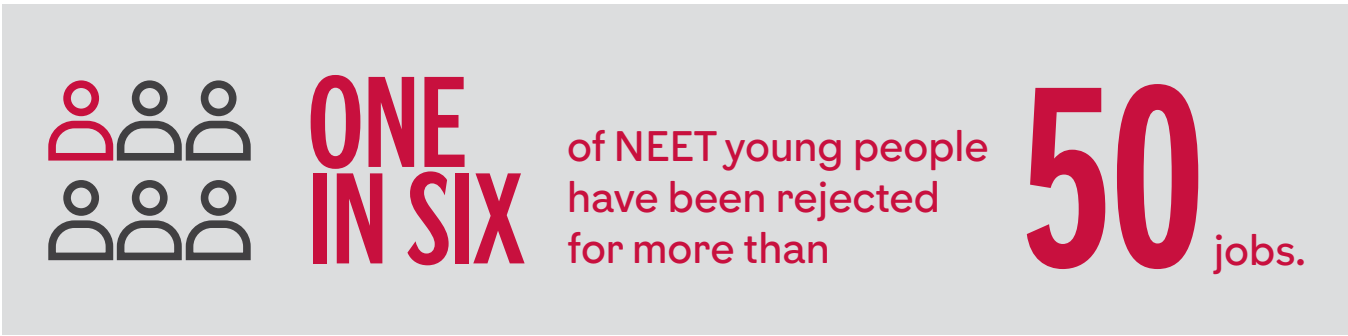
Many NEET young people want to work, with one in five (22 per cent) saying that securing a job is one of their biggest goals in life. However, getting a foot on the ladder is not always easy; more than a quarter (29 per cent) say they have applied for jobs they do not want because they are desperate to work and almost a fifth (19 per cent) are applying for jobs every day. Half (53 per cent) of NEETs feel embarrassed about being out of work, and a similar number report that being unemployed makes them feel hopeless about their future (50 per cent).

Many NEET young people are facing a complex combination of challenges which are preventing them from moving into work. Poor mental health, difficult personal and financial circumstances and low self-esteem are among the factors holding them back.

For example, almost one in ten (8 per cent) NEET young people have turned down a job because they could not afford the costs associated with it, such as the costs of their travel or a uniform. Others may find it difficult to prioritise work because they have competing demands on their time; for example, one in ten (10 per cent)

of NEET young people who have caring responsibilities are unable to work, despite wanting to, due to high caring costs and the time they devote to caring responsibilities.

When asked to describe some of the barriers to achieving their career goals, a quarter of NEET young people (24 per cent) said they do not have the right experience for the jobs they want; a quarter (24 per cent) said there are not enough job opportunities in their local area and a fifth (21 per cent) said there is a lack of opportunities to help them secure the jobs they want.

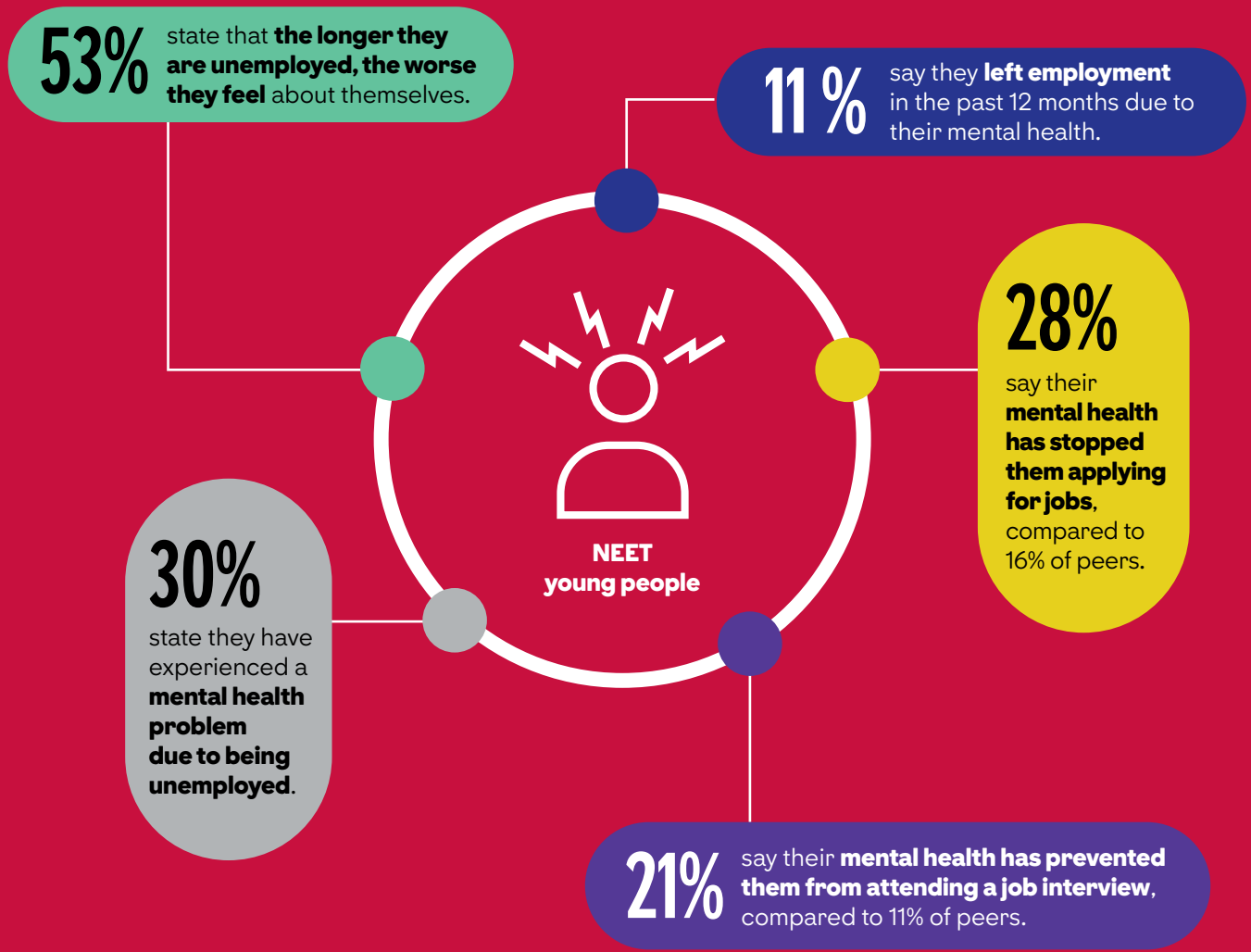


1. ONS, Nov 2024: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peoplenotinwork/unemployment/datasets/youngpeoplenotineducationemploymentortrainingneetable1>

Trapped by poor mental health

One of the biggest obstacles preventing NEET young people from entering the job market is poor mental health. The findings suggest that unemployment negatively affects their wellbeing but this decline, in turn, makes it harder for them to secure work.

The following statements show the impact that poor mental health and unemployment can have on each other.



A crisis of confidence

Another casualty of unemployment is the confidence young people have in themselves and their ability to get a job. More than a third of NEET young people (44 per cent) confirmed that being out of work means they have lost confidence in their skills, while more than half (51 per cent) are not confident that they can get the job they want.

When asked what kind of support they would find helpful for taking the next steps in their career or moving into work, one in three of NEET young people (32 per cent) said they would like support with developing their confidence, 30 per cent said work experience opportunities and 29 per cent said they would like help with CV writing and interview skills. Training opportunities with employers which could lead to a job would be helpful for 28 per cent of NEET young people, as would a focus on improving their qualifications, while 27 per cent said mental health support would be helpful.

Supporting young people to reach their full potential can positively impact multiple areas of their lives. Two thirds (67 per cent) of NEET young people say that being in work would give them stability in life and over half (53 per cent) feel it would improve their mental health.



A lot of the young people we work with need to access a safe environment that allows them to see and develop the skills they already have but haven't had the opportunity to nurture. So many of them are far more capable than they realise when they first walk through the doors, and I hope they share my sense of pride in them when they go on to push through barriers and achieve their goals."

**- Marissa D'Cunha,
Youth Development Lead**

Working with organisations across the country, our employability programmes help young people build their skills, confidence, and experience to secure sustainable jobs across a range of sectors. For example, our focus on supporting young people to start careers in health and social care led to more than 1,700 young people taking up jobs in the sector last year.





Interacting with patients feels like the most natural thing in the world now – I'm loving every minute of it!

"If you'd have asked me this time last year what I'd be doing in 2025, I could never have imagined it'd be working in the NHS! It wasn't something I ever thought I could achieve. I'm now working as an administrator and am so much happier!"

EMILY'S STORY

"I first got introduced to The King's Trust when I took part in the Achieve education programme at school. I was a bit quiet at school, so this was a good way for me to make new friends and experience new things.

"After studying graphic design at college, I applied for jobs in the customer service sector, as there didn't seem to be enough graphic design opportunities where I lived. I couldn't secure a role. I then started to apply for bar work to see if that might offer me an alternative. It didn't. Employers are looking for experience, which I didn't have. The rejection was exhausting.

"Being unemployed was tough. You start to doubt yourself and I started to believe I'd never get a job. The lack of money affects every part of your life. My mum suggested I go to the job centre to apply for Universal Credit, which would enable me to get financial support as well as support to find a job. The Universal Credit team introduced me to Claire, who worked at my college, and she told me about The King's Trust Team programme.

"The 12 week programme really helped me. One of the best things about it was meeting other young

people who were going through similar experiences – I no longer felt alone. Another plus was securing a two-week work experience as an administrator at De Montfort University. I really enjoyed the diversity of the role, getting a routine and working within a large organisation.

"After completing Team, I signed up for another King's Trust programme, this time in partnership with the NHS. I was keen to take part as it would help me to get closer to my goal of becoming an administrator.

"The programme was fantastic. It really helped me to feel more confident and, by the end, I felt prepared to apply for jobs and attend interviews.

"Within less than a month after completing the programme, I secured a job in the NHS! I'm currently working in the children's administration department preparing files, working within the clinic assisting with appointments and speaking to patients. When I started on the programme, I didn't have the confidence to answer the phones or speak to patients. Now interacting with patients feels like the most natural thing in the world – I'm loving every minute of it!"

FEARS OF FALLING SHORT

Amidst a changing employment landscape and a government focus on getting more people into work, this research finds that more than half of young people (56 per cent) are worried they lack the skills, experience or qualifications to pursue a career they want. More than half (61 per cent) are concerned these factors will impact their ability to get a secure job in the future economy. Such fears are even more prevalent among those from the poorest backgrounds.

Young people are feeling ill-equipped to pursue the careers they want, with two thirds (68 per cent) worried that it is difficult to find a job and almost half (49 per cent) reporting that there are no good job opportunities in their local area. Among those who are working, almost half (47 per cent) are worried about losing their jobs and not being able to find work.

Apprehension about their career prospects is taking a toll on young people's mental health and confidence, with over a third (39 per cent) reporting that worrying about achieving their career goals had made their mental health worse and 35 per cent saying they do not feel confident that they can get a job they want.

Underlying issues

- ▶ **Many young people finish school unprepared for the reality of working life.** More than a third of all young people (39 per cent) say they had no idea how to find a job when they left school, and this rises to half of young people from the poorest backgrounds.
- ▶ **Poor mental health has a detrimental effect on young people's ability to pursue employment,** with 17 percent reporting their mental health stopped them applying for jobs and a tenth (11 percent) having lowered their career aspirations because of it.
- ▶ **Particularly for those from poorer backgrounds, financial pressures over the last 12 months are holding them back.** One in ten of young people from a low-income background (12 per cent) are missing school or work due to inability to afford the transport costs (compared to 4 per cent of their more affluent peers). Similar numbers of those from low-income backgrounds (11 per cent) are also having to turn down jobs because associated costs were too high, compared with 3 per cent of peers.
- ▶ **Caring responsibilities impact one in five young people, rising to over a third among those from low-income backgrounds.** This not only affects young people's ability to do their work but can prevent them from having a job in the first place.

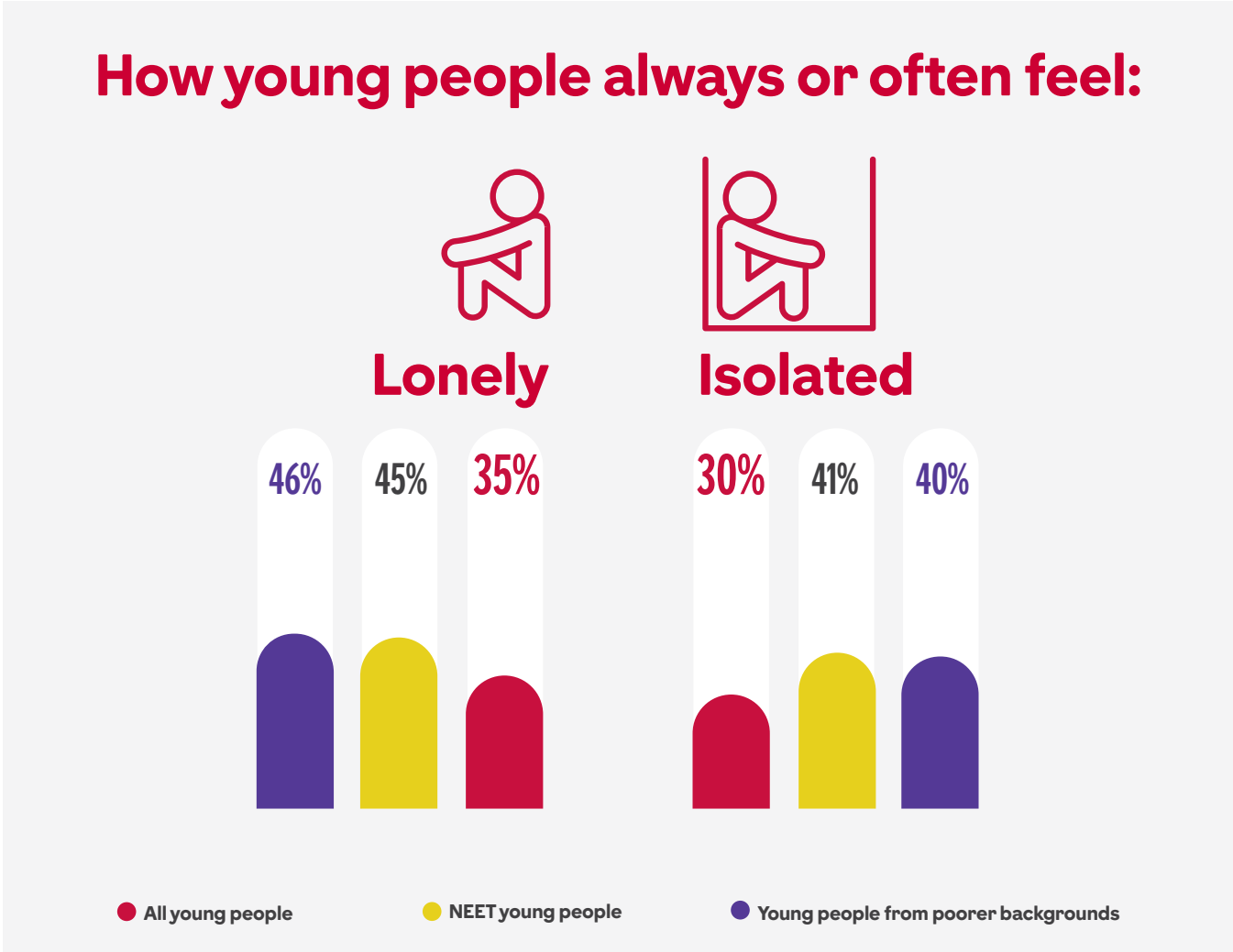
Top barriers young people face to achieving their career goals



The Trust's range of programmes support young people to build their confidence, skills, resilience and wellness, removing some of the barriers they face to achieving their career goals. Our own data shows that 68 per cent of young people feel they improved their confidence, communication, and ability to set and achieve goals whilst on our programmes last year.

STRUGGLING TO STAY CONNECTED

Although isolation and loneliness are experiences often associated with older generations, this research shows that many young people are also living through similar challenges. Financial pressures, poor mental health and deprivation are all key factors behind this, and it is those from poorer backgrounds, as well as those who are NEET, who are most likely to be affected.



Limited by their circumstances

Financial worries and poor mental health are among the barriers stopping young people from spending more time with their friends or family. Over a quarter of young people (26 per cent) say they have not socialised with friends or family to save money during the past year, and a similar number (26 per cent) say their mental health has led to them avoiding seeing family or friends over the last 12 months. Four in ten (43 per cent) say they find it difficult to meet new people.

For many young people from the poorest backgrounds, the effects of deprivation in their local area are also more likely to be affecting them than their more affluent peers.

Half of those from low-income backgrounds (51 per cent) have noticed a decrease in the variety of after school activities or clubs in their area in recent years (compared to 43 per cent of their more affluent peers) and more than a third (37 per cent) say their local area feels less welcoming than 12 months ago (compared to 27 per cent of peers).

Sadly, a fifth of young people from low-income backgrounds (21 per cent) feel as though they don't have any support network to turn to if needed (compared to 14 per cent of peers), while a quarter (28 per cent) say they feel scared to leave their local area (compared to 17 per cent of peers).

Feeling divided and misunderstood

While loneliness and isolation can take many forms, the data suggests that one of the things young people are concerned about is how others perceive them. More than half of young people (59 per cent) feel unfairly judged or misunderstood by wider society and 49 per cent feel that even their own generation feels more divided than this time last year.

A third (32 per cent) are worried about being picked on due to their faith, sexual identity or cultural background, and for those from poorer backgrounds and those who are NEET, this number rises to 45 per cent.

“ I'm not at all surprised that 43 per cent of young people find it difficult to meet new people. I think especially after Covid, so many lost their social skills and trust in people. Many people don't know how or where to make friends outside of school or work.

After dropping out of University, I was very isolated. I wanted to gain life skills and try something new, as I had no idea what I wanted to do next. The Trust's Explore programme helped me with this and gave me confidence, routine and structure'

— Emmanuel, London

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I'm now in a job I enjoy, in a better place with my mental health and feeling confident about myself and my future.

Caitlin was struggling with her mental health and confidence when she came to The King's Trust for support. She completed a twelve-week personal development programme and, shortly after, she secured full-time employment for the first time in several months.



CAITLIN'S STORY

"Before coming to The King's Trust I was really struggling with my mental health. I worked part-time at a fast-food restaurant which I didn't enjoy, and I was dealing with a lot in my personal life. This weighed me down and knocked my confidence. Eventually, I'd reached my breaking point. I took sick leave and was out of work for a few months.

"Being out of work was really tough, especially financially. I knew I had to get back on the right path somehow. My mental health and lack of confidence was overwhelming me and I didn't know what to do."

With encouragement from her mum, Caitlin came to The King's Trust and enrolled on a Team programme being delivered by Groundwork.

"I had low confidence to begin with but built this up over time doing activities like abseiling and rock climbing, working on a community project to revamp a garden, and a work experience placement where I was responsible for administrative tasks.

"The Team programme gave me the self-belief I was lacking and taught me some valuable skills like communication and managing my time and stress. It also helped me to set aside my fear of trying new things.

"These experiences gave me the motivation to get myself out of the negative headspace I had been in and apply myself to a job I was passionate about."

After completing the Team programme, Caitlin secured a role as an Assistant Team Leader and is now using her experience to help other young people.

"Without the support of The King's Trust, I wouldn't be where I am today; in a job I enjoy, in a better place with my mental health and feeling confident about myself and my future."

LOSING HOPE IN THEIR LIFE GOALS

This research shows how the pressures facing young people today are creating a sense of anxiety and self-doubt, leaving many to question whether they can ever achieve their life goals. The uncertainty of the future, combined with the weight of their own expectations, can make the journey to success feel like an uphill battle, with those who are NEET and those from the poorest backgrounds more likely to be impacted than their peers.

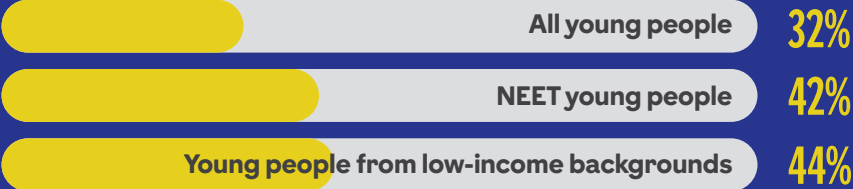
When asked what their biggest goals are in life, many young people placed financial security (59 per cent), having their own family (35 per cent), owning their own home (34 per cent) and good mental health (32 per cent) high on their list. However, as the opposite chart shows, many of them do not think their life goals will ever be achievable.

Sadly, almost a third of all young people (30 per cent) think they will fail in life, with NEET young people even more likely to feel this way (44 per cent). Anxiety about their futures is an emotion felt daily by more than half of young people (53 per cent) and 41 per cent say that worrying about achieving their life goals has made their mental health worse.

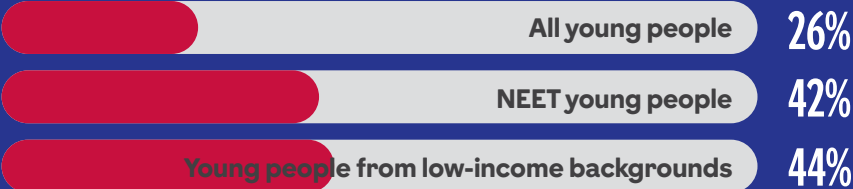
Securing and sustaining employment can play an important role in helping young people to feel more confident in their prospects. Almost two thirds of young people (65 per cent) think being in work is good for their mental health, 76 per cent feel it gives them financial stability and 72 per cent think it makes them feel confident about their future.



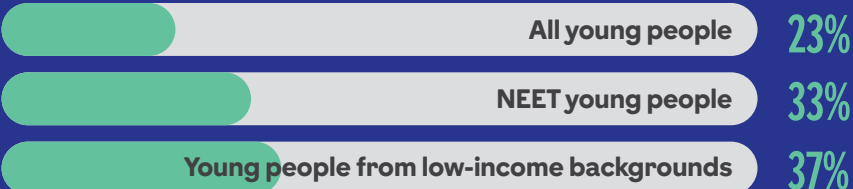
I do not think I will ever have enough money to own my own home



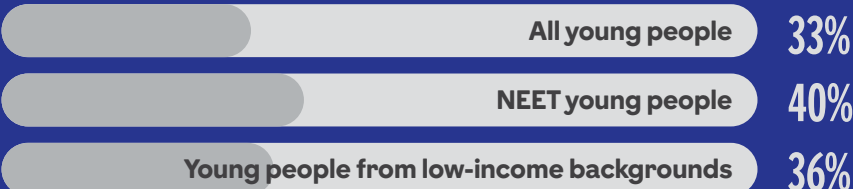
I do not think I will ever earn enough to raise my own family



I do not think I will ever be financially stable



I do not think I will be as successful as my parents/guardians





I'm a successful business-owner, having started my wedding stationery and design service through The Trust's Enterprise programme. But there was a time not so long ago when I never would have imagined being an entrepreneur, let alone having a future worth looking forward to and making my dream come true.

"Having access to the right opportunities and support when I needed it most enabled me to go from being in a job which wasn't for me, struggling with my mental health, to being my own boss and fitting work in around my personal needs."

– Steph, owner of Aura by Esselle, the Wirral

THE OUTLOOK FOR YOUNG WOMEN

This research shows that young women are feeling more despondent than young men about their future prospects, with factors such as low confidence and poor mental health disproportionately holding them back from achieving their goals.

Young women are less likely than young men to feel in control of their future, with 44 percent of young women not feeling in control compared to 36 per cent of young men. For many young women, this plays on their minds all the time, with 58 per cent feeling anxious on a daily basis about their future, compared to 49 per cent of young men. In addition to this, one in four young women (24 per cent) are not confident that they will be able to achieve their life goals, compared to 18 per cent of young men.

Mental health challenges

Poor mental health is a significant factor that is disproportionately preventing many young women from reaching their full potential. More than a fifth of young women (23 per cent) say their mental health has stopped them from going to work, school or college in the last year, compared to 14 per cent of young men, and one in five (20 per cent) say it has stopped them from applying for jobs (compared to 14 per cent of young men).

Young women are also more likely to get caught in a downward spiral, with 44 percent reporting that worrying about achieving their career goals has made their mental health worse (compared to 35 per cent of young men).

Mastering the move into work

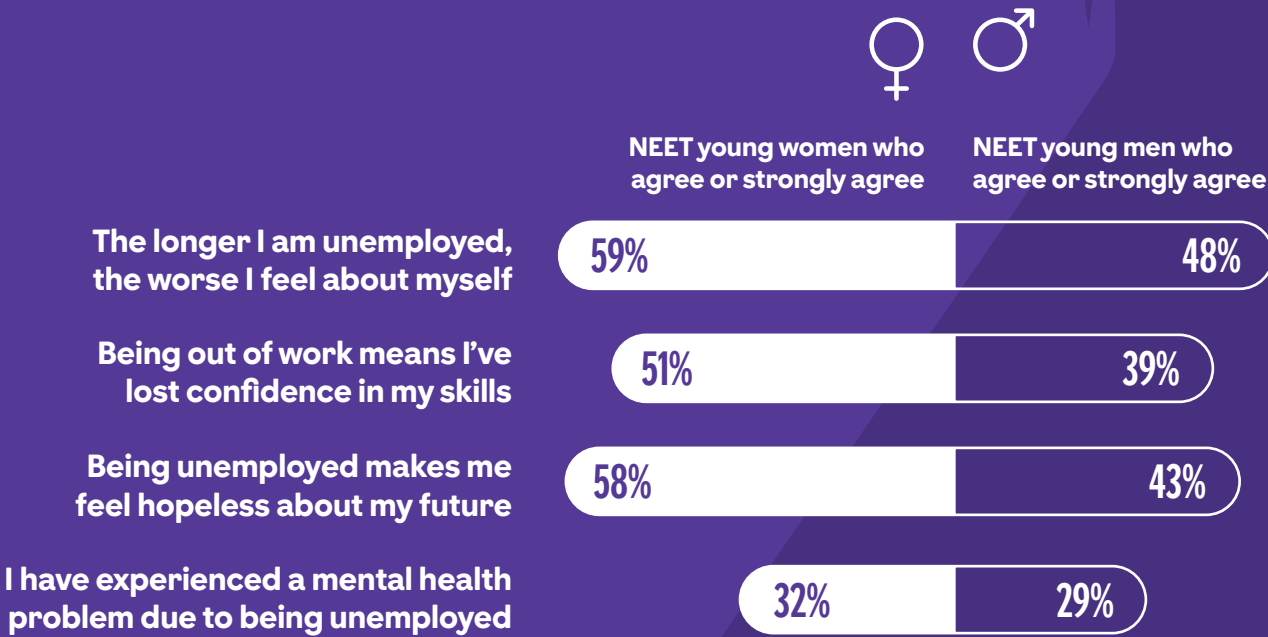
For many young women, the transition between education and the workplace can be a challenging experience. 44 per cent of young women had (or have) no idea what to do with their lives after leaving school, compared to 38 per cent of young men, and almost three quarters (73 per cent) think it is difficult to find a job, compared to 64 per cent of young men. This is despite the fact that young women are less likely to be out of work than young men².

The findings in the boxout on the following page also show that young women are more likely than young men to experience a loss of confidence and self-esteem, or a decline in their mental health, as a result of being out of work.

Some of the things young women say could help them with their next steps in their career or moving into work are support with building their confidence (43 per cent, vs. 34 per cent of young men), help with CV and interview skills (44 per cent vs. 34 per cent of young men) and work experience opportunities (45 per cent vs. 37 per cent of young men).

2. The ONS Labour Market Statistics published in January 2025 show that 12.5 per cent of young women are currently unemployed compared to 16.3 per cent of young men. The ONS Labour Market Statistics published in November show that 11.2 per cent of young women are NEET compared to 15.1 per cent of young men.

Experiences of NEET young women compared to NEET young men



“After doing The King’s Trust programme, my confidence has grown so much and I learned to believe in myself. My role as a Healthcare Assistant is really rewarding. Knowing that I’ve made someone else’s day better makes me feel more positive about myself”

– Mollie, Liverpool



**I feel like myself again
and am a lot more
optimistic about my
future now.**

For Jaiden, securing a job with TK Maxx after a long stretch of unemployment was a turning point that means she can start saving money and work towards living independently. She developed her confidence and skills on The Trust's Get into Retail programme with TK Maxx and hasn't looked back since.

"I'd been unemployed for a year when I heard about the TK Maxx and King's Trust programme. My time out of work was quite stressful and I started to feel anxious in social situations. It felt like I was running out of options, and I wasn't sure what my next steps could be after leaving university.

"I'd had part-time jobs in the past, mainly temporary contracts, which wasn't ideal. When my job coach told me about the programme, I was excited. I think what really interested me was the work experience and support the programme offered. It would enable me to grow into the role. The fact there was the possibility to secure a position really appealed too! I also love shopping in TK Maxx!

"While on the programme, I was matched with staff from TK Maxx who became my work buddies. They were friendly and there to support us, while we were in store learning all aspects of the sales associate role – from customer service, to working on the tills, putting out stock and health and safety. We also had King's Trust staff on hand to support us too, this included help with interview skills and checking in to see if we were ok.

"Over the four weeks, I could feel myself relaxing into the role and my confidence was growing too. Speaking to customers became less daunting and more enjoyable.

"I've now started to work at TK Maxx and am really enjoying the variety of being on the shop floor, assisting customers and merchandising stock. I currently live at home with my family but now that I've secured the job at TK Maxx, I can start saving so that I can move out and have more independence. I'm also keen to start driving too.

"I really enjoyed my time on the programme, I made some great friends. We all supported each other. I feel like myself again and am a lot more optimistic about my future now."

JAIDEN'S STORY

FINDING A WAY FORWARD

Although they face some difficult challenges, young people are not giving up on themselves and have not lost sight of their goals. For many, employment is key to getting where they want to be in life, seen as a route to personal as well as professional growth.

Despite all the pressure young people are under, more than two thirds of them (70 per cent) feel determined to achieve their goals. While having financial stability and good mental health sit high on the list of things young people want in life, the findings also show how many want to prioritise having a positive impact on society and their community, with a quarter of them (24 per cent) feeling this way.

The research also shows that young people think having a job can positively impact many areas of their lives. Three quarters of young people (77 per cent) said that having a job makes them feel as though they have stability in life, while 72 per cent think it improves their self-confidence and 65 per cent think it is good for their mental health.

Self-employment is also attractive to many young people, with (42 per cent) interested in starting their own businesses. Young men and young people from poorer backgrounds are among the most likely to feel this way.

Support young people say they would find helpful to take the next steps towards their job ambitions



ABOUT THE KING'S TRUST (FORMERLY THE PRINCE'S TRUST)

The King's Trust believes that every young person should have the chance to succeed, no matter what their background or the challenges they are facing. We help those from disadvantaged communities and those facing the greatest adversity by supporting them to build the confidence and skills to live, learn and earn.

The courses offered by The Trust help young people aged 11-30 to develop essential life skills, get ready for work and access job opportunities. We support them to find work because having a job or running a business can lead to a more stable, fulfilling life.

Since The Trust was founded by HM The King in 1976, when he was HRH The Prince of Wales, we have helped more than a million young people across the UK. Three in four of those we supported over the last five years have moved into work, education or training.

We are pleased to have changed our name to The King's Trust, reflecting our Royal Founding President's continued dedication to our work. We remain committed to working for young people and enabling them to create a better future for themselves. By helping them today, the benefits will be felt for years to come – not just for those we support, but for their communities and the wider economy.

Acknowledgements

The King's Trust would like to thank the young people who are featured as case studies in this report. The Trust would also like to thank TK Maxx for supporting this research and YouGov for conducting the Youth Index.



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