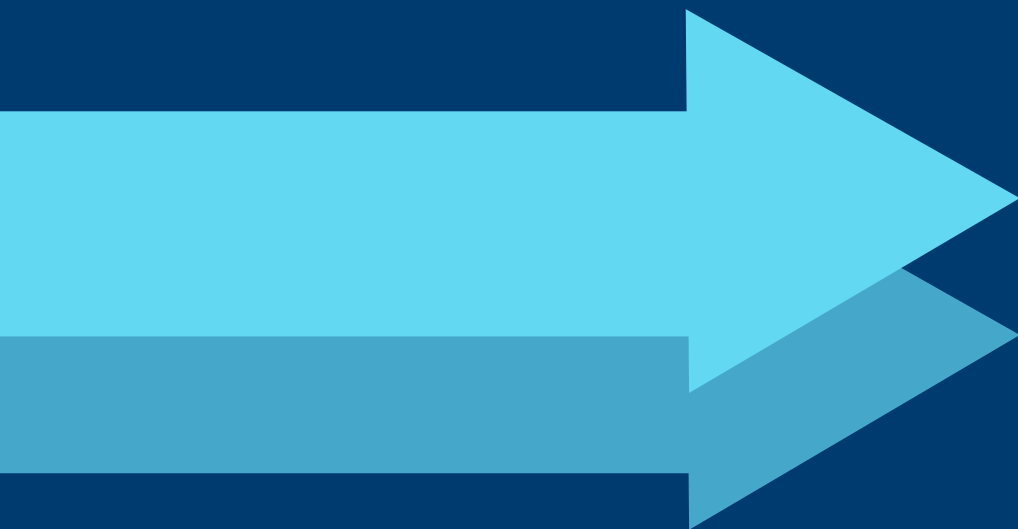


Life chances survey

24 May 2021



Foreword

The life chances of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds are being severely impacted by the pandemic, and there is a knock-on effect to employers who risk missing out on the opportunity to recruit a new and diverse generation of talent. These are the findings of our report into how the Covid-19 crisis is affecting young people's paths to higher education and professional careers, which reveals that those from disadvantaged backgrounds are being disproportionately affected.

Blueprint for All commissioned Censuswide to survey circa 500 people aged 18–24 who attended university in the spring of 2021. We found a stark contrast between those from disadvantaged backgrounds and others, with more of those from disadvantaged backgrounds considering dropping out of their studies because the pandemic means they can no longer afford to stay in education.

Just as worryingly, we found those from disadvantaged backgrounds are also abandoning plans to pursue professional careers. This is not only a heart-breaking situation for those individuals but a looming crisis for all those employers who, now more than ever before, are committed to discovering a richer pool of talent to recruit from and to build teams with inclusion at their core.

Now is a crucial point for the UK because we have the chance to take decisive action to prevent life chances slipping away to the detriment of us all. The good news is we have ways to make this happen.

Charities like Blueprint for All are already focused on creating an inclusive society. Our programmes provide inspiration, opportunities and support to talented young people from disadvantaged and under-represented backgrounds, enabling them to succeed. We work with innovative organisations and businesses to address disparity of opportunity, so everyone's talents, skills and perspectives are valued.

We are calling on employers and the government to support charities like ours, to work together to ensure that the pandemic does not prevent us from building a society where institutions, businesses and organisations thrive as a result of an inclusive culture.



Sonia Watson OBE, Hon.FRIBA, Hon.FRIAS
Chief Executive
Blueprint for All

Methodology

Censuswide surveyed 502 18–24 year-olds, who attended university between 25th March and 6th April, 2021. This sample is referred to as 'young people' within the report, or 'students' where the sample is specifically referring to those that are currently at university. When referring to those from 'disadvantaged backgrounds', this is defined as those who received free school meals at least some of the time.

Findings

Barriers to staying in education

Young people from disadvantaged backgrounds are considering dropping out of education at over twice the rate of those from advantaged backgrounds (24% vs 11%), due to the strain on their finances caused by the pandemic.

The pandemic has disrupted lives across the world for over a year. From job losses and business closures, to home working and remote learning, the adaption to a new way of life was sudden and unprecedented. The impact on students and young people has been immense and the knock-on effect means uncertainty around finishing higher education and entering professional careers.

32%

Almost a third of young people surveyed said the training or education scheme they were on stopped during the pandemic.

20%

Meanwhile, a fifth (**20%**) of young people said they are considering dropping out of their studies due to the strain on their finances caused by the pandemic, and the same percentage (**20%**) said they have fully lost a grant or bursary that was supporting them.

24%

Young people from a disadvantaged background appear to be more impacted financially. For example, young people from disadvantaged backgrounds are considering dropping out of education at over twice the rate of those from advantaged backgrounds (**24% vs 11%**), due to the strain on their finances caused by the pandemic.

27%

In addition, over a quarter (**27%**) of young people from a disadvantaged background said they have fully lost a grant or bursary that was supporting them, **over seven times more than those from a non-disadvantaged background (4%)**.

31%

For those that have dropped out of university, or are considering doing so, almost half (**47%**) said it was because they were unable to secure a part-time job necessary to support themselves. Whilst **almost a third (31%)** said it was because their grant or bursary funding has been partially cut.

With this drop-out more common among people from a disadvantaged background, the repercussions in the future mean that employers could face a dramatic decrease in the diversity of the graduate talent pool to recruit from.

Of the students (young people currently at university) surveyed, the top five barriers listed for remaining at university are:



- Furthermore, over **1 in 6 (17%)** stated that they have lost their job that they used to supplement or support themselves while at university, which is a barrier to staying.
- These barriers are more likely to affect those from disadvantaged backgrounds, with **94 per cent** of students from disadvantaged backgrounds saying there were barriers for remaining at university, compared to **88 per cent** of those from non-disadvantaged backgrounds.
- In addition, **over a fifth (23%)** of students from disadvantaged backgrounds stated that they need to financially support their family due to the loss of household earnings, compared to **less than a fifth (18%)** of students from non-disadvantaged backgrounds who said the same.
- Furthermore, a striking **71%** of students surveyed said that these barriers for remaining at university have become worse¹ due to the pandemic.

It is clear that the students surveyed are facing numerous barriers to remaining at university, but the impact of the pandemic has also created challenges to entering professional careers for them.

Future careers

96%

Professional career plans are being abandoned with 96% of young people seeing barriers for entering a professional career.

41%

More than **2 in 5 (41%)** students surveyed agree that they have abandoned their plans for a professional career because of factors related to the pandemic.

45%

Once again, this appears to have impacted those from disadvantaged backgrounds more: **45 per cent** of students from disadvantaged backgrounds agree² that they have abandoned their plans for a professional career because of factors related to the pandemic, versus **32 per cent** of students from non-disadvantaged backgrounds.

The research clearly demonstrates the unique challenges that today's young people face, and the setbacks caused by the pandemic. The statistics indicate that young people from disadvantaged backgrounds have been hit harder by the pandemic. Therefore, businesses and universities need to work harder to counter this inequality.

A huge 96% of young people see barriers for entering a professional career - the top five barriers respondents perceive are:

1. Much more competition for graduate/entry level roles due to the wave of job losses since March

(42%)

2. Companies being more averse to risk, wanting to only hire employees with experience

(38%)

3. The requirement for entry level jobs becoming out of reach for students, who haven't already graduated and have no practical experience

(37%)

4. Trainee schemes and work placements being closed due to revenue streams being negatively impacted by the pandemic

(29%)

5. The salary for entry level jobs is not possible to live on

(27%)

- A quarter **(25%)** of young people surveyed also feel that a barrier to their professional career is companies wanting to only hire employees from top tier universities, as they are averse to risk.
- Furthermore, over **1 in 6 (18%)** believe that companies are more averse to risk and therefore will not want to hire employees from less conventional backgrounds, which increases to **a fifth (20%)** for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds.
- A far higher percentage of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds have had to take on a job/work to supplement their student loan, than those from non-disadvantaged backgrounds.

Financial security and wellbeing

In addition to the challenges faced by young people for remaining at university and entering a career, the financial impact on young people and their families is clear.

Almost **two thirds (64%)** of young people surveyed have had to take on a job/work to supplement their student loan, with a far higher percentage **(73%)** of young people from a disadvantaged background having done so compared to those from a non-disadvantaged background **(39%)**.

Moreover, the majority **(67%)** of those that have had to take on a job/work to supplement their student loan stated they had to take this on because of the pandemic, with almost three quarters **(72%)** of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds stating this compared to less than half **(43%)** of young people from non-disadvantaged backgrounds.

Losing sleep about the future

The uncertainty faced by young people surveyed does not end at remaining at university and starting a career; there are concerns surrounding the economy and what this means for them.

Indeed, **over 7 in 10 (71%)** students surveyed agree that after graduating/completing their studies, they feel the worsening economy means they will be unable to find a job in their chosen professional career.

Furthermore, **over 3 in 5 (63%)** students surveyed agree that after graduating/completing their studies, they feel the worsening economy means they will struggle to repay student debt.

Looking more specifically at the emotional toll Covid-19 has had, **over 9 in 10 (91%)** young people surveyed have been impacted emotionally by the pandemic. In more detail, almost **3 in 5 (59%)** said they have experienced increased anxiety, **over half (52%)** have experienced increased stress and **over 2 in 5 (44%)** said they have lost sleep.

¹combines 'much worse' and 'somewhat worse'

²combines 'strongly agree' and 'somewhat agree'

Conclusion

The findings of the Life Chances Survey show that now is a critical time for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds – their futures hang in the balance. If these young people drop out of education and professional careers, this will cause a knock-on effect that will impact employers and 'UK plc' will miss out on the opportunity to enrich the workforce with a new generation of diverse talent, skills and perspectives.

There is still time to turn this situation around. Charities, like Blueprint for All, run programmes to create an inclusive society by supporting young people, from disadvantaged and under-represented backgrounds, entering sustained professional careers. If employers and the government support charities like Blueprint for All, we can work together to keep young people, from disadvantaged backgrounds, in education and provide the job opportunities that will build a society where businesses and organisations thrive as a result of an inclusive culture.

About Blueprint for All

Blueprint for All works with young people, communities and organisations to create an inclusive society in which everyone, regardless of their race, ethnicity or background, is provided with tangible opportunities to thrive.

We believe that every person regardless of their background, should have the opportunity and support to flourish in a society that recognises and values them.

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