Blueprint for All

Life chances survey

November 2025

Foreword by our Chief Executive

At Blueprint for All, we believe that every young person deserves the chance to thrive, regardless of their background. The Life Chances 2025 research exposes the persistent barriers that continue to limit opportunity in education, employment, financial stability, wellbeing, and inclusion for ethnically diverse and socioeconomically disadvantaged young adults across the United Kingdom.

This extended executive summary provides an overview of the findings ahead of the publication of the full Life Chances 2025 report. It highlights how structural inequalities identified in our 2021 study have deepened over time, as pandemic disruption has given way to a cost-of-living crisis.

The evidence is clear: fewer than half of young people see the job market as fair, only **29%** believe their employer is committed to inclusion, and financial insecurity continues to undermine progress.

The full report, to be released shortly, will provide detailed analysis and policy recommendations. Together, we can translate this evidence into meaningful change and create a society where every young person can realise their potential.

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

Introduction

The Life Chances 2025 report builds on Blueprint for All's 2021 baseline study to provide a longitudinal perspective on how opportunity and inequality have evolved for young people in the United Kingdom. Conducted independently by Censuswide, the two survey waves capture the experiences of over 1,000 ethnically diverse and socioeconomically disadvantaged young adults aged 18–30, exploring how race, socioeconomic background, and intersecting identities shape access to education, employment, financial stability, wellbeing, and inclusion.

The 2021 survey was conducted in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic and reflected the uncertainty of a generation entering adulthood amid national disruption.

The 2025 follow-up expands this evidence base by using a broader, more inclusive sample, offering a richer view of how opportunity structures and inequalities have persisted and, in some areas, deepened. Together, these data provide a rare longitudinal insight into how structural disadvantage continues to shape young people's life chances.

This research takes place against a backdrop of economic instability and policy reform. At the time of writing, close to one million young people aged 16–25 are not in education, employment, or training. UK graduates face the toughest job market since 2018, defined by high competition and unlivable entry-level salaries. Government responses, such as the Youth Employment Guarantee, the proposed Employment Rights Bill, and the Department for Work and Pensions' new skills agenda, signal a greater focus on youth employment and job security. Collaboration between the Department for Work and Pensions and the Department for Health and Social Care reflects growing recognition of the connection between work, health, and wellbeing.

Yet this shift occurs amid growing fatigue and scepticism about Equity, Diversity and Inclusion. Life Chances 2025 gives voice to young people navigating these contradictions, revealing that while awareness of inequality has grown, financial stability and wellbeing have not.

Methodology

The Life Chances 2025 study builds on the 2021 baseline survey, which explored how race, socioeconomic background, and intersecting identities influence young people's access to opportunities in the UK.

The 2025 follow-up survey was conducted using a broader, more inclusive sample of 500 ethnically diverse young adults aged 18–30, drawn from across the UK. Participants represented a wide spectrum of gender identities, ethnic backgrounds, educational pathways, and financial circumstances, creating a richer and more representative picture of contemporary youth experience.

To complement the quantitative data, a focus group was held with ten ethnically diverse participants under the age of 30. These discussions provided deeper insight into the lived realities behind the statistics, revealing how young people experience and navigate structural inequalities in their own words.

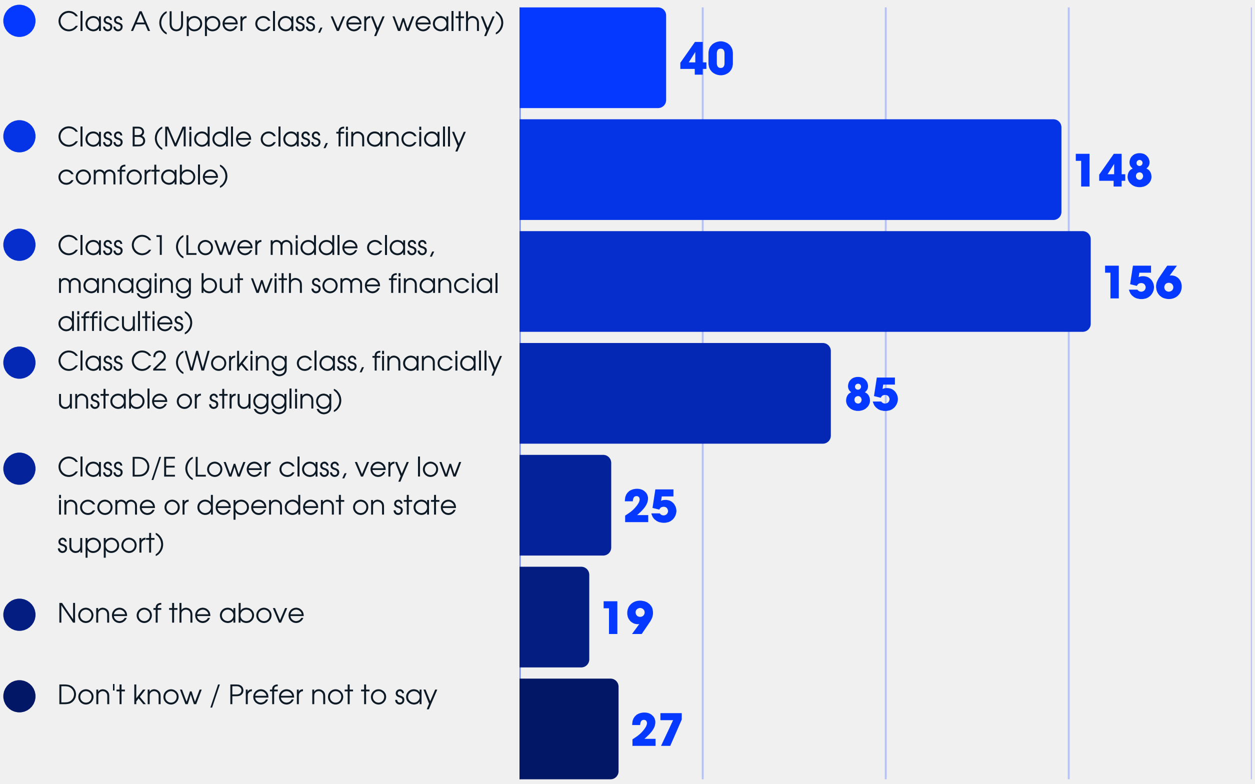
In addition, a nationally representative comparator survey of 1,000 UK adults was conducted in 2025. This dataset enables comparison between the Life Chances cohort and the wider population, offering essential context for understanding whether the barriers reported by young people reflect generational divides or broader societal patterns.

Together, these data sources provide a longitudinal and comparative evidence base that captures both the structural forces shaping opportunity and the lived experiences of those most affected.

2025 Survey Participants Demographics

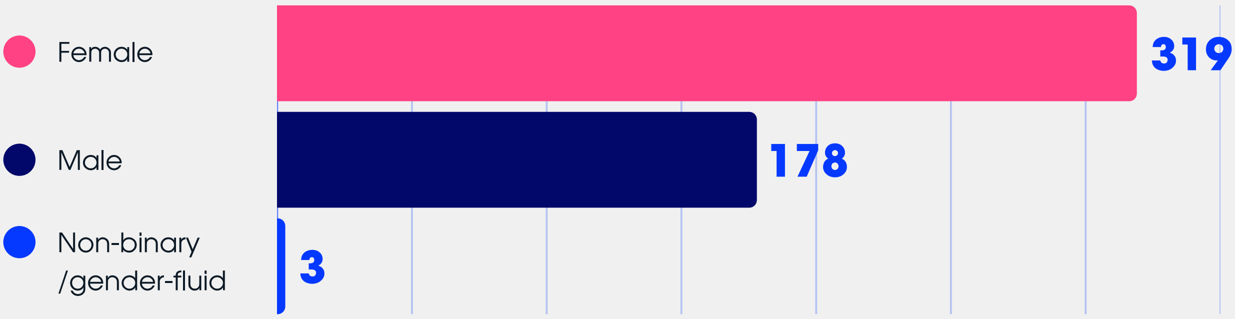
Socioeconomic background

500 ethnically diverse 18-30 year olds



Gender

500 ethnically diverse 18-30 year olds

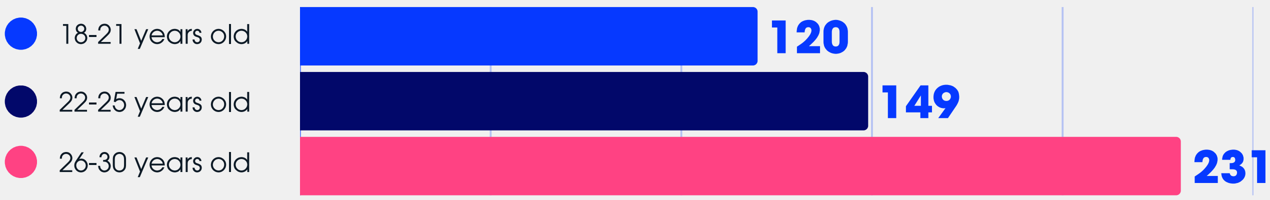


Free School Meals

Yes	No	Prefer not to say/Unsure
266	197	37
53.50%	39.50%	7.00%

Age

500 ethnically diverse 18-30 year olds



Ethnicity

500 ethnically diverse 18-30 year olds

220
Black (Net*)

109
Mixed descent (Net*)

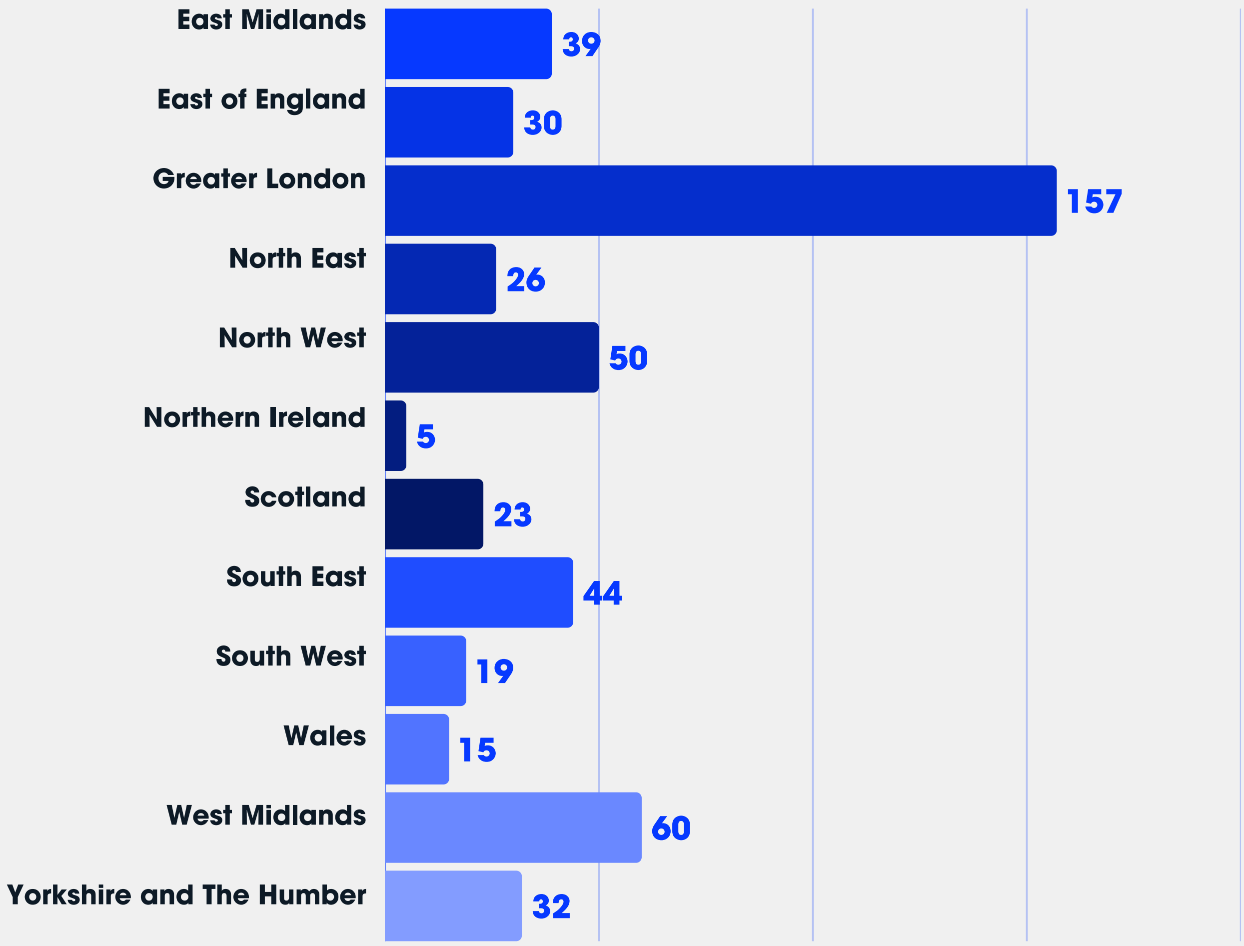
157
Asian (Net*)

*Each broad ethnicity category—Black, Asian, and Mixed (Net)—includes multiple subgroups, such as African, Caribbean, South Asian, East Asian, and mixed White heritage backgrounds.

The sections that follow present the key findings from the Life Chances 2025 study, supported by comparative insights from the 2021 baseline. They explore five interconnected domains: **Higher Education, Employment, Financial Stability, Wellbeing, and Equity, Diversity and Inclusion** - revealing how structural barriers continue to shape young people's opportunities and how these challenges have evolved in the years since the pandemic.

Region

500 ethnically diverse 18-30 year olds



Key Findings

To provide context, this report draws briefly on the Life Chances 2021 survey before turning to the 2025 findings. Placing the two studies side by side highlights how barriers first documented in 2021 have not only persisted but become more entrenched. What began as pandemic-driven crises of finance, access, and wellbeing in 2021 has, by 2025, hardened into structural nequalities shaping the lives of ethnically diverse and socioeconomically disadvantaged young people.

This comparative perspective ensures the current findings are understood not in isolation but as part of a longer trajectory of inequality, underscoring the urgency of systemic reform and the importance of Blueprint for All's mission (Social Mobility Commission, 2023).

1. Higher Education

- 2021 findings underscored how financial strain drove young people to consider dropping out, with students from disadvantaged* backgrounds more than twice as likely to be affected **(24% vs. 11%).** Loss of bursaries and inability to secure part-time work left many without means to continue, and **94%** of disadvantaged students reported facing barriers to staying in education.
- 2025 findings echo this, with **84%** of respondents stating that finance is critical to their continuation in education, and within this group, **38%** describe it as essential. Reliance on loans, long working hours, and unaffordable rent continue to undermine academic success. Across both studies, finance is the defining determinant of higher education access and completion, reinforcing earlier findings on the relationship between cost, access, and persistence in study (Sutton Trust, 2023). What began in 2021 as a pandemic-induced financial collapse has evolved into long-term affordability issues, showing that for many disadvantaged students, higher education remains a fragile pursuit.

94% of disadvantaged students reported facing barriers to staying in education.

84% of respondents stating that finance is important to their continuation in education

> **I felt very unprepared when I arrived at uni; I had never been taught the importance of soft skills at school, so I had to learn them over time. No one had ever explained what a growth mindset was.**

Our longitudinal evidence shows that affordability continues to shape educational choice and persistence. Many young people from economically disadvantaged backgrounds are reluctant to take on the long-term burden of debt, often opting out of higher education entirely. This reinforces the importance of creating parity between academic and technical pathways. High-quality apprenticeships and employer-linked technical education offer credible alternatives that can help young people from disadvantaged backgrounds succeed without incurring debt, provided these routes are valued and resourced on equal terms with university degrees.

*Each broad ethnicity category—Black, Asian, and Mixed (Net)—includes multiple subgroups, such as African, Caribbean, South Asian, East Asian, and mixed White heritage backgrounds.

2. Employment

- In 2021, an overwhelming **96%** of young people reported barriers to professional careers, citing lack of experience, closure of trainee schemes, and entry-level salaries below a liveable wage. The survey found that **41%** had already abandoned their career plans, a figure that was higher among disadvantaged respondents **(45%).**
- In 2025, these barriers remain, albeit in different ways. Difficulty securing internships or work experience affected **42%** of respondents, while **38%** struggled to find their first job after completing their education. Career advancement remains restricted, with women and ethnically diverse groups disproportionately affected.

41% **abandoned their career plans**

38% **struggled to find their first job after completing their education**

The 'experience paradox' - being required to have experience before being given a chance was a defining feature in both surveys. In 2021, the closures of trainee schemes blocked entry; in 2025, unpaid or inaccessible internships perpetuate exclusion.

This continuity underscores the persistence of exclusionary employment practices as a systemic issue, reflecting broader structural barriers to social mobility, Friedman and Laurison (2019).

Our findings also reveal that employers' interventions such as mentoring, awareness training, and anonymised recruitment are widely recognised but often viewed as inconsistent or performative. Many young people describe feeling excluded from professional networks or pressured to assimilate into dominant workplace cultures.

This suggests that inclusion efforts must now move beyond the existence of initiatives toward accountability and measurable outcomes. Expanding apprenticeships and employer-led training programmes can help bridge the access gap for those who choose not to pursue university, offering structured, paid pathways into stable careers.

> **"Networking is supposed to help, but if you've not been accepted in those spaces before, it doesn't feel safe. Rejection makes you question, where's the 'right fit' if no one looks like me?"**

3. Financial Stability

- 2021 findings painted a stark picture of financial precarity. Nearly two-thirds **(64%)** of young people took on additional jobs to supplement loans, rising to **73%** among disadvantaged groups. Concerns about repaying debt **(63%)** and securing employment **(71%)** underscored a generation entering adulthood with profound insecurity.
- In 2025, cost-of-living pressures dominate, with **30%** citing financial stress as their most consistent challenge. Women **(62%)** and Black respondents **(64%)** were most likely to identify affordability as a concern. Job security, housing, and discrimination amplify this insecurity.

73% of young people from disadvantaged groups took on additional jobs to supplement loans

30% financial stress as their most consistent challenge

Both surveys reveal financial precarity as a consistent thread running through the experiences of young people. In 2021, the source was pandemic job losses; in 2025, it is the rising cost of living. This continuity highlights that financial instability is not a temporary crisis, but a persistent condition affecting disadvantaged young adults.

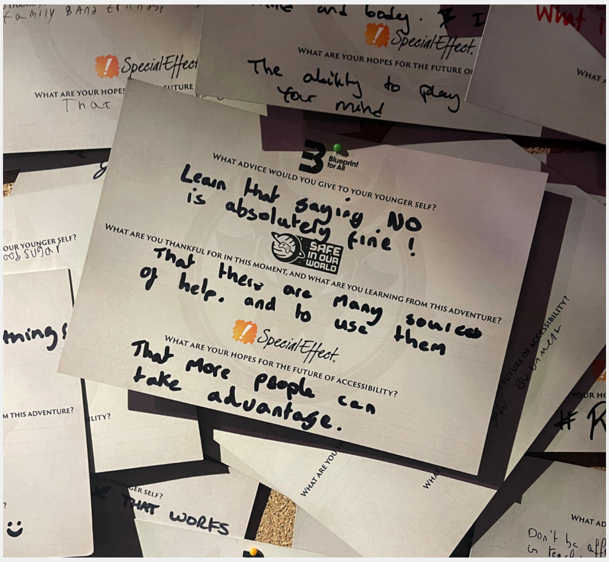
These findings indicate that people are facing a cumulative affordability crisis rather than isolated moments of difficulty. Financial insecurity constrains choices, from continuing education to accepting unpaid internships or relocating for work. The data point to the need for a joined-up policy that links financial stability to social mobility, ensuring that living costs, rent, and wages are addressed as core issues of youth opportunity, rather than as peripheral economic challenges.

> **"I have temporarily had to pause my dream and take a job to pay my debt for a while."**

4. Wellbeing and Mental Health

- In 2021, the pandemic exacted a heavy psychological toll: **91%** of respondents reported emotional impacts, with **59%** experiencing anxiety, **52%** stress, and **44%** sleep loss.
- By 2025, the focus has shifted to chronic strain. Fewer than half **(47%)** report improved mental health in the past five years, and only **(46%)** feel safe and supported in their communities. While nearly half of the respondents engaged with social movements like Black Lives Matter and #MeToo, fewer believed that these efforts had delivered meaningful change.

91% **of respondents reported emotional impacts**



The shift from acute crisis to chronic erosion reflects how unresolved structural barriers fuel ongoing mental health challenges. Both studies demonstrate that wellbeing is not merely a private matter but is deeply intertwined with systemic inequalities in education, employment, and community belonging.

These findings demonstrate that mental health interventions must extend beyond clinical provision to include social and economic determinants of wellbeing. For many respondents, poor mental health is the outcome of instability rather than its cause. Addressing financial insecurity, discrimination, and a sense of belonging at institutional and policy levels is therefore integral to any sustainable wellbeing strategy.

> **“Mental health support made me feel worse, not better. I felt like they didn’t take me seriously.”**

5. Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI)

- In 2021, **25%** of respondents felt that employers had become more risk-averse, favouring candidates from elite universities or with prior experience. This was seen as a key barrier to workforce diversity and social mobility.

> **Sometimes you're told they're looking for the 'right fit,' but when you look around and no one is like you, you know they're probably not looking in your direction.**

- In 2025, scepticism has hardened. Fewer than half **(46%)** see the job market as fair, and only **29%** believe their employer is firmly committed to EDI. The majority **(58%)** report seeing no effective interventions. Concern about international rollbacks of EDI was particularly high among Black respondents.

25% of respondents felt that employers had become more risk-averse

29% believe their employer is firmly committed to EDI

Conclusion

Why Our Work Is More Urgent Than Ever

Across both survey waves, young people expressed persistent doubt that EDI is genuinely embedded in institutional practice. The language has shifted from risk-averse exclusion in 2021 to tick-box superficiality in 2025, yet the message remains unchanged: young people are unconvinced by the authenticity of inclusion efforts.

Visibility alone does not equate to trust. For EDI to be credible, young people need to see evidence of lasting, structural change; representation in leadership, fair pay, transparent promotion processes, and genuine accountability. The erosion of confidence in inclusion coincides with global rollbacks of diversity commitments, underlining the need for UK employers, educators, and policymakers to reaffirm and protect these principles as central to equity and growth.

Taken together, the Life Chances 2021 and 2025 surveys reveal striking continuity. Acute, pandemic-driven challenges have become entrenched, structural barriers.

Whether in higher education, employment, financial stability, wellbeing, or inclusion, young people continue to face systemic constraints that limit ambition and opportunity. The evidence is clear: without structural reform, the UK risks consigning another generation to lives shaped by inequality rather than potential.

The Life Chances 2025 findings confirm what Blueprint for All witnesses daily; that talent is everywhere, but opportunity is not. Despite resilience and aspiration, young people from ethnically diverse and socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds continue to face entrenched barriers that inhibit stability and progress:

- **Education inequality:**
Finance and caring responsibilities continue to drive students from higher education. Blueprint for All's scholarships and mentoring programmes directly address these gaps, helping young people to remain in study and transition successfully into work.

- **Employment exclusion:**
Closed networks and unpaid roles perpetuate privilege and limit entry into professional careers. "Our Foot in the Door" and employer partnerships create accessible, paid routes into stable employment.

- **Financial insecurity:**
Rising costs and housing stress remain significant barriers to opportunity. Blueprint for All advocates for structural reform while equipping young people with practical tools to manage financial pressures.

- **Wellbeing and belonging:**
Safety and community remain fragile. We build inclusive spaces and peer networks where young people can connect, lead, and thrive.

- **EDI fragility:**
Tick-box inclusion undermines trust. We work with employers to embed accountability, ensuring inclusion is measurable, sustained, and authentic.

The urgency is unmistakable.
If inequities remain unchallenged, the UK risks wasting talent, deepening divisions, and alienating a generation. Aligning our charitable mission with the evidence from Life Chances 2025 positions Blueprint for All to drive meaningful, systemic change, transforming research into action and potential into opportunity.

Recommendations
at a glance

Our recommendations from the Life Chances 2025 report are organised into three key stakeholder groups: educators, employers and policymakers.

Each set of actions is grouped into three categories: immediate (within 12 months), medium-term (1 to 3 years), and long-term (3 to 5 years) priorities.

This structure is designed to ensure that interventions move beyond short-term initiatives and create lasting, systemic change. The recommendations reflect not only what young people have identified as barriers but also what Blueprint for All's mission demands: practical steps that convert potential into opportunity and deliver fairer futures for all.

The tables below summarise the actions required from educators, employers and policymakers, organised into immediate, medium-term, and long-term priorities, to ensure that young people's potential is matched by opportunity.

For Educators

Immediate (within 12 months)	Medium term (1 to 3 years)	Long term (3 to 5 years)
Expand **non-repayable bursaries and grants** and simplify application processes. Audit **curricula and staffing** to improve representation. Launch **pre-entry and induction programmes for first-generation** students. Promote **early awareness of academic and technical** routes in schools and colleges.	Develop **soft skills and growth mindset programmes**. Develop **flexible and modular study pathways** that allow students with caring responsibilities, employment, or health needs. Expand **mentoring and sponsorship** with diverse role models. Establish **first-generation support programmes** in all institutions.	Shift success measures to **completion and graduate outcomes,** disaggregated by background. Institutionalise **equity impact assessments** in all student services. Embed **early exposure programmes** in schools and communities.

For Employers

Immediate (within 12 months)	Medium term (1 to 3 years)	Long term (3 to 5 years)
Audit and publish the **impact of existing D&I schemes.** Ensure all **internships and placements are paid and accessible.** Create **trusted reporting channels** for discrimination and bias.	Embed **equity checks** into recruitment, promotion and pay. Strengthening **sponsorship and progression pathways** with transparent tracking. Link **inclusive behaviours to manager performance reviews.** Partner with charities to open **professional networks.**	Link **executives' pay and appraisals** to measurable equity outcomes. Publish **longitudinal diversity data** on recruitment, retention and progression. Shift from diversity 'inputs' to **impact metrics** such as belonging and representation in leadership. Foster an **inclusive culture** where authenticity is valued.

For Policymakers – Financial Stability

Immediate (within 12 months)	Medium term (1 to 3 years)	Long term (3 to 5 years)
Guarantee **emergency hardship funds** for students and young workers. Raise the **minimum wage for under-30s** in line with the cost of living.	Introduce **youth housing guarantees** and rent controls. Pilot **graduate debt relief schemes** for disadvantaged groups.	Scale housing and financial programmes nationally to reduce **intergenerational inequality**.

For Policymakers – Wellbeing and Mental Health

Immediate (within 12 months)	Medium term (1 to 3 years)	Long term (3 to 5 years)
Fund **culturally competent mental health services** with input from diverse communities. Provide **free or subsidised support** for excluded groups.	Develop combined **mental health and career programmes** for NEET young people. Invest in **community-led safe spaces and networks.**	Establish **national standards** for equitable youth wellbeing services across education, employment and community settings.

For Policymakers – Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI)

Immediate (within 12 months)	Medium term (1 to 3 years)	Long term (3 to 5 years)
Require large organisations to publish **pay, promotion and retention data** by demographic. Protect **funding for EDI programmes** during economic or political shifts.	Link **senior leader appraisals and budgets** to EDI outcomes. Create **youth advisory panels** to co-design and review strategies.	Build **cross-sector resilience** against political or international backlashes. Establish **statutory duties** for organisations to demonstrate sustained progress on inclusion

The Life Chances 2025 report makes clear that the barriers facing young people are no longer temporary or exceptional. They are systemic, persistent and deeply entrenched. However, the findings also reveal an ambitious generation, clear about what needs to change and determined to succeed if given the chance.

This is why Blueprint for All exists. By combining research with practical programmes and partnerships, we work to ensure that talent is recognised, supported and rewarded wherever it is found. We now call on educators, employers and policymakers to act with urgency and purpose. Without change, the UK risks consigning another generation to denied opportunities. With change, we can unlock potential, rebuild trust and create a society where life chances are defined by ambition and ability rather than background.

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Mini Glossary:

The following terms are used throughout this summary to support clarity and accessibility for all readers.

Comparator group

A nationally representative sample of 1,000 UK adults, conducted by Censuswide, was used to benchmark the views and experiences of the Life Chances cohort against wider societal patterns.

Culturally competent mental health services

Mental health support that recognises and integrates individuals' cultural backgrounds and identities.

EDI (Equity, Diversity and Inclusion)

A framework used by organisations to ensure fairness, equal opportunity, and representation across different backgrounds and identities.

Intersectionality

A way of understanding how multiple aspects of identity, such as race, gender, and class, combine to shape people's experiences of advantage or disadvantage.

NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training)

A term describing young people who are currently outside formal education, paid work, or training programmes.

Socioeconomic disadvantage

A situation where individuals face barriers to education, employment, and wellbeing because of limited financial resources, social networks, or opportunities.

Systemic inequalities

Refer to entrenched social and economic disparities shaped by long-standing institutional, structural, and policy practices that disadvantage certain groups—particularly those from racially minoritised and lower-income backgrounds (Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2023; Social Mobility Commission, 2022).