



Life Chances Survey

**A longitudinal study of
opportunity and inequality for
young adults in the UK**

November 2025



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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 report highlights the entrenched barriers that continue to limit opportunities in education, employment, financial stability, wellbeing, and inclusion for ethnically diverse¹ and socioeconomically disadvantaged young adults in the UK.

Our research began in 2021, in the immediate aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic and in the wake of George Floyd's murder, a moment that sparked a global conversation about race and justice. It was designed to capture the lived experiences of young people and track how societal and institutional promises on equity, diversity, and inclusion translated into real change. Four years later, the follow-up survey of 500 young adults reveals that, despite shifting contexts from pandemic disruption to a cost-of-living crisis, many structural barriers persist.

The findings are stark: fewer than half of respondents see the job market as fair, only **29%** believe their employer is committed to EDI, and most report no effective interventions. Financial precarity, insecure housing, and limited access to internships and work experience continue to undermine education and career progression, with women and ethnically diverse groups disproportionately affected. Wellbeing challenges are widespread, showing how deeply inequality intersects with mental health and belonging.

These insights require urgent action. Education must remove financial and systemic barriers. Employers must embed fairness in recruitment, pay, and progression. Policymakers must tackle the root causes of inequality, from housing affordability to equitable access to opportunity. Young people are asking to be recognised, resourced, and respected.



I invite policymakers, educators, and employers to engage with this evidence, reflect on the voices of young people, and act decisively.

This is not just a report - it is our blueprint for a more inclusive society.

Sonia Watson OBE, Hon.FRIBA, Hon.FRIAS, MBA(dist)
Chief Executive
Blueprint for All

¹ - Throughout this report, the term 'ethnically diverse' is used in line with prior Blueprint for All research (2021) and reflects a preferred terminology identified by participants.

Executive Summary

Blueprint for All's Life Chances research, first conducted in **2021** and repeated in **2025** offers a longitudinal perspective on how ethnically diverse and socioeconomically disadvantaged young adults experience opportunities and inequalities in the United Kingdom. Drawing on surveys with 500 young people aged 18 to 30, a national comparator of 1,000 adults, and focus group insights, the study explores five domains: higher education, employment, financial stability, wellbeing, and equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) (Social Mobility Commission, 2023; Youth Futures Foundation (YFF), 2025).

Findings reveal a generation rich in ambition, yet constrained by systemic barriers that limit access, progression and stability across life domains. Comparing **2021** and **2025** reveals how short-term, pandemic-era crises of finance, access, and wellbeing have evolved into structural inequalities that shape the lives of disadvantaged young adults.

1. Higher Education: Affordability as the Decisive Barrier

“Finance has never been spoken about in my family... I just don’t feel equipped to manage information, so I retreat and ignore the problem.”

Across both survey waves, the affordability of higher education remains the strongest predictor of participation and completion². In **2025**, **84%** of respondents stated that finance was important for staying enrolled, with **38%** describing it as essential. Black respondents (**89%**) and **88%** of those who had received free school meals were most reliant on financial support. Comparator data show that only **32%** of UK adults believe higher education is affordable for most young people, compared with **18%** within the Life Chances cohort.

Findings confirm that the reliance on repayable loans has increased, and access to non-repayable bursaries remains limited. Many respondents described balancing employment and study as unsustainable, with long working hours undermining academic success.

² - Percentages throughout the Executive Summary are rounded to the nearest whole number. Minor rounding differences may occur across subgroups.

2. Employment: Persistent Inequality Beneath a Meritocratic Façade

“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 the ‘right fit’ is if no one looks like me.”

The transition from education to employment remains a defining point of exclusion. In **2025**, **42%** of respondents struggled to secure internships or work experience, and **38%** found it difficult to obtain their first job. Women (**48%**) and Asian respondents (**50%**) were most affected, while **41%** of London-based participants faced barriers despite the region’s job density. Comparator data show that **54%** of UK adults view the job market as fair, compared with only **46%** of the Life Chances cohort.

These findings highlight the persistence of the ‘experience paradox’, where young people are required to have experience before being given an opportunity. Informal recruitment networks and unpaid placements continue to reinforce privilege. While employer awareness of diversity has improved since **2021**, participants in **2025** express growing scepticism about the authenticity and consistency of inclusion initiatives.

Employers must move from awareness to accountability by ensuring internships are paid, embedding equity checks in recruitment and promotion, and linking inclusion outcomes to leadership performance (CIPD, 2020; YFF, 2025).

3. Financial Stability: From Temporary Shock to Structural Precarity

“My biggest financial worry is moving out, as I will literally be working to pay rent, and I won’t have any quality of life.”

Financial insecurity has become a defining feature of early adulthood. In **2025**, **30%** of respondents identified financial stress as their main challenge, rising to **34%** of women and **33%** of Black respondents. Comparator data reveal that **61%** of UK adults worry about the cost of living, increasing to **72%** within the Life Chances cohort. Concerns about debt, rent, and job security dominated open-text responses, with many describing financial hardship as a constant background stress.

These findings illustrate that economic recovery has not reached all groups. What was a temporary shock in **2021** has become a structural condition in **2025**, characterised by stagnant wages, high rent, and insecure employment. Financial precarity now constrains decisions about education, career mobility, and home ownership.

Integrated policy reform, linking wages, rent regulation, and youth debt relief is required to restore stability and enable social mobility.

4. Wellbeing and Mental Health: Chronic Strain and Fragile Belonging

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

Acute psychological distress in **2021** has become chronic by **2025**. Fewer than half (**47%**) of respondents report improved mental health in the past five years, and improvement is lowest among women (**43%**) and those aged 18 to 21 (**31%**). **46%** feel safe and supported in their communities. Comparator data show that of **57%** UK adults report stable or improved mental health, ten percentage points higher than among the Life Chances group.

The data suggests that mental health disparities are driven less by individual vulnerability than by persistent economic and social stressors. Respondents link poor wellbeing to financial insecurity, discrimination, and lack of belonging. Both survey waves point to a cumulative effect where financial strain, housing precarity, and exclusion erode wellbeing over time.

Effective mental health strategies must address structural causes including economic hardship, discrimination, and community safety alongside clinical provision (ONS, 2025; Wright et al., 2021).

5. Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI): Declining Trust and Uneven Progress

“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.”

Trust in the authenticity of EDI efforts has declined across the cohort. In **2025**, **46%** perceived the UK job market as fair, and only **29%** believe their employer is firmly committed to EDI. A majority (**58%**) report seeing no effective inclusion initiatives in their workplace or community. Comparator data show modestly higher confidence among the wider adult population, with **36%** perceiving a strong commitment to EDI. Black respondents expressed particular concern (**64%**) about international rollbacks of EDI undermining UK progress.

This indicates a shift from the **2021** perception of “risk-averse exclusion” to a **2025** narrative of “tick-box superficiality”. Young people remain unconvinced that inclusion principles are embedded in organisational practice. For inclusion to be credible, they seek transparency in pay and promotion, visible representation in leadership, and measurable accountability.

Visibility without accountability undermines trust. Organisations must embed EDI metrics into pay, promotion, and governance structures to ensure that inclusion is both demonstrable and enduring (Social Mobility Commission, 2023).

Cross-cutting Insights

Across all themes, the **2021** and **2025** surveys reveal continuity rather than progress. Temporary crises of affordability, employment access, and wellbeing have hardened into structural inequalities that disproportionately affect ethnically diverse and socioeconomically disadvantaged young adults. Without systemic reform, the United Kingdom risks entrenching a generational divide between potential and opportunity.

Recommendations

Educators should expand non-repayable bursaries, simplify grant applications, and provide targeted support to first-generation and pre-entry students. Embedding mentoring, modular study options, and equity impact assessments within student services will help improve continuation and attainment for disadvantaged groups.

Employers should ensure that internships and placements are paid and accessible, strengthen accountability through transparent pay and promotion data, and embed inclusive practices in leadership appraisals. Sponsorship and progression frameworks must shift from voluntary initiatives to measurable outcomes that reflect long-term commitment.

Policymakers must link youth wages, housing policy, and wellbeing provision to the cost of living, guaranteeing emergency funds and safeguarding EDI investment. Coordinated reform that connects financial stability, housing access, and mental health provision is vital to preventing the widening of inequality and to securing equitable life chances for all young people.

Conclusion

The Life Chances 2025 findings reveal that young people remain ambitious and resilient, yet systemic barriers persistently limit their potential. **Talent is everywhere, but opportunity is not.** Blueprint for All's mission is to translate evidence into action by working with educators, employers, and policymakers to create fairer systems where every young person, regardless of background can thrive. The call to act with urgency and intent is clear: the next generation's life chances must be shaped by ability, not inequality.

Introduction

Overview

The Life Chances 2025 report explores how opportunity and inequality have evolved for young people in the years since the COVID-19 pandemic. Drawing on two national surveys and qualitative insights, it examines how race, socioeconomic background, and intersecting identities continue to shape access to education, employment, financial stability, wellbeing, and inclusion across the United Kingdom.

Introduction

The Life Chances research, commissioned by Blueprint for All, comprises two survey waves conducted in 2021 and 2025 by Censuswide³, who surveyed our participant pool to examine how race, socioeconomic background, and intersecting identities influence young people's access to education, employment, and wider life opportunities.

At the time of writing, almost one million young people aged 16–25 are not in education, employment, or training (Office for National Statistics (ONS), 2025). In September 2025, Chancellor Rachel Reeves announced a Youth Employment Guarantee for 22 to 25-year-olds, acknowledging the scale of the challenge (HM Treasury, 2025). The proposed Employment Rights Bill and the new skills agenda led by Pat McFadden signal a policy shift towards greater job security, while collaboration between the Department for Work and Pensions and the Department for Health and Social Care highlights the growing recognition of the link between health, wellbeing, and work. Research from the People's Health Trust (2025) further evidences how chronic financial and occupational strain affects young workers' mental and physical health.

These developments offer cautious optimism, suggesting that government policy is beginning to recognise the interdependence of labour, health, and wellbeing. Yet this shift occurs within an increasingly contested environment. Equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) practices across sectors are being questioned, diluted, or rolled back. Gains in visibility have coincided with rising fatigue and backlash.

The Life Chances 2025 report offers both analysis and voice. It situates national debates about opportunity within the lived experiences of young people striving to build stable futures amid uncertainty. The findings show that while awareness of inequality has grown, financial security and wellbeing have not improved. Persistent pressure to access and sustain employment continues to generate chronic anxiety and instability, limiting the ability of disadvantaged young people to plan and participate fully in work and wider society.

³ - Censuswide is an independent market research agency that conducted both survey waves on behalf of Blueprint for All. All research was carried out in accordance with the Market Research Society (MRS) Code of Conduct and the UK General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

Methodology

The **2021 baseline survey** examined the immediate effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on young adults' life trajectories. It captured responses from **502 university students and recent graduates aged 18-24** who had received free school meals. This cohort represented socioeconomically disadvantaged young people navigating higher education and early employment during a period of acute national disruption.

The **2025 follow-up survey** expanded the scope to a **broader, more inclusive sample of 500 ethnically diverse young adults aged 18-30**, drawn from across the United Kingdom. Participants represented a wide range of identities, ethnic backgrounds, educational pathways, and financial circumstances, providing a more comprehensive view of contemporary youth experience.

Together, these two survey waves offer a **longitudinal perspective** on how opportunity structures, systemic inequities, and individual aspirations have evolved since the pandemic, providing robust evidence to inform policy, educational practice, and employment strategy.

A **focus group** with ethnically diverse participants under 30 years old was also conducted to capture the lived experiences behind the quantitative findings. These qualitative insights illustrate how young people today perceive and manage structural inequalities.

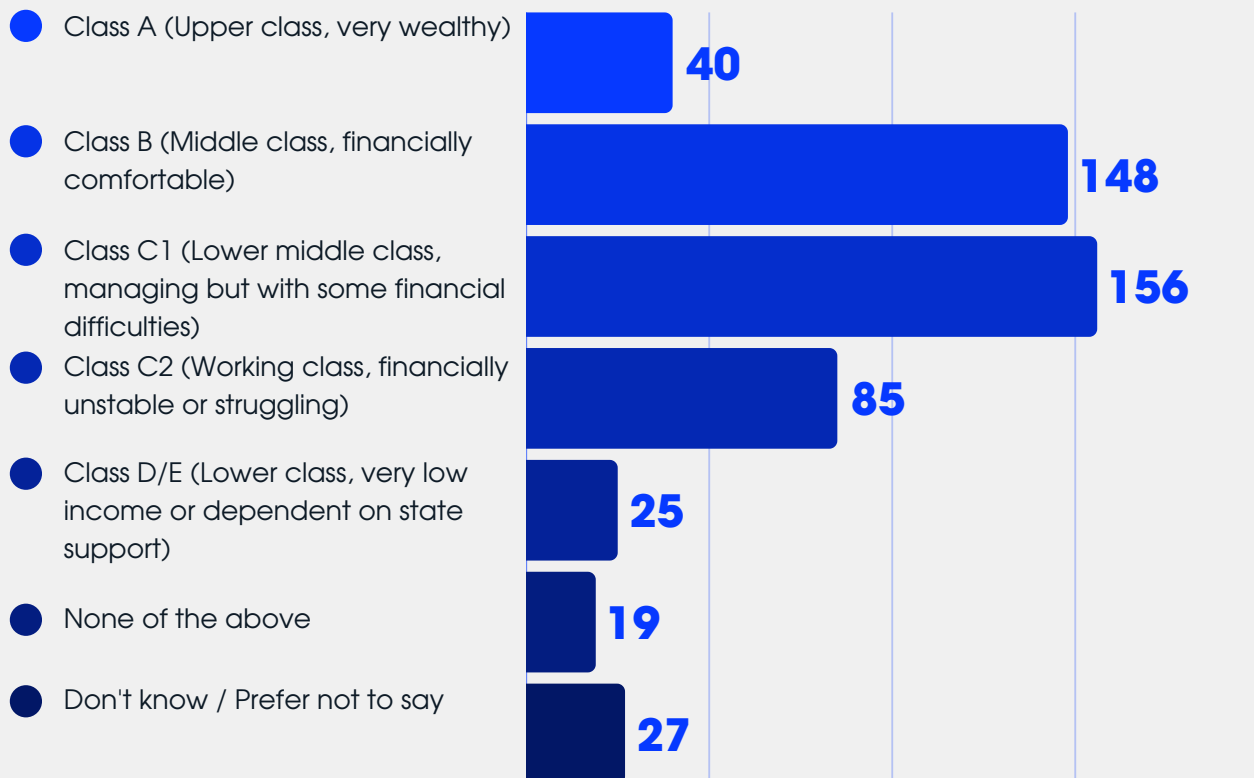
In addition, a **nationally representative comparator survey of 1,000 UK** adults was conducted in 2025 to contextualise the findings. This comparative dataset, presented in a dedicated section at the end of the report, situates the Life Chances cohort's experiences within broader societal and generational trends.

Together, these mixed methods provide a comprehensive, **evidence-based comparison**, combining quantitative rigour with qualitative depth to understand the realities facing young people in modern Britain.

2025 Survey Participants Demographics

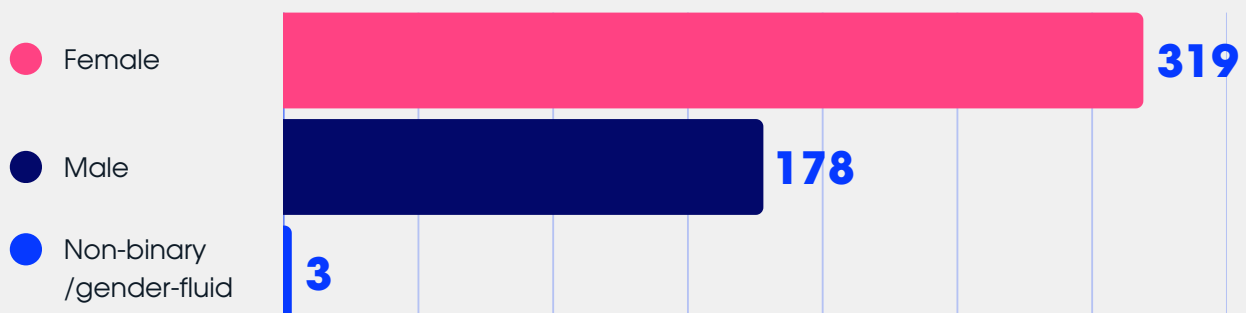
Socioeconomic background

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%

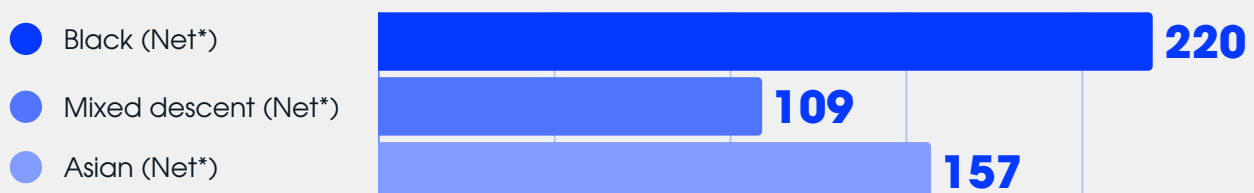
Age

500 ethnically diverse 18-30 year olds



Ethnicity

500 ethnically diverse 18-30 year olds



*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.

Findings

Youth at a Crossroads

In a decade shaped by social upheaval, economic disruption, and political ambivalence toward equality, understanding how young adults perceive and navigate opportunity has never been more urgent. Blueprint for All's Life Chances research offers a rare longitudinal perspective on how ethnically diverse and socioeconomically disadvantaged young people experience structural inequalities in the United Kingdom.

Drawing on extensive quantitative and qualitative evidence, this section examines how opportunity has evolved across five interconnected domains: **higher education, employment, financial stability, wellbeing and mental health, and equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI)**. Together, these themes reveal the ongoing tension between aspiration and constraint, showing how systemic barriers continue to limit the translation of potential into progress.

The findings point not to a lack of ambition, but to a recurring pattern of **constrained opportunity**, in which structural inequities in access, resources, and representation continue to undermine confidence and belonging. Participants' reflections illuminate the psychological toll of insecurity and the persistence of inequality even amid growing awareness and policy attention.

The sections that follow present a detailed analysis of each thematic area, integrating statistical patterns with the lived experiences of young people across the United Kingdom. The report concludes with recommendations aimed at advancing systemic reform and ensuring that opportunity is matched by equity.



1. Higher Education

Access Deferred, Not Denied

Context and Continuity: 2021–2025

Access to, and persistence in, higher education remain key indicators of life opportunities for young adults in the UK. Between the 2021 and 2025 Life Chances surveys, students from ethnically diverse and socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds have continued to face systemic inequalities in both entry and retention. Financial instability, caregiving responsibilities, and poor mental health shaped these challenges.

To examine how young adults access and remain in higher education, participants were asked a series of questions about their financial circumstances, barriers to continuation, and access to opportunities. The 2025 survey built on the 2021 baseline to capture changes in affordability, institutional support, and perceived fairness in access. These questions were grouped thematically, and the table below summarises the areas explored and the corresponding 2025 results.

Theme	Summary of Survey Questions	2025 Results
Financial support	Whether participants worked during study, use of loans, bursaries, grants, or scholarships	89% of students worked during study; 90% among Black students. 58% accessed student loans, 52% used maintenance loans, and 63% of men did so compared with 57% of women.

Theme	Summary of Survey Questions	2025 Results
Role of funding in completion	Importance of financial support in enabling the completion of studies	84% said finance was important for staying enrolled, with 38% saying it was essential. By gender: 85% of women and 83% of men rated it important; 42% of women vs 30% of men said essential. By ethnicity: Black 89% important (46% essential), Asian 81% important (34% essential), Mixed 80% important (28% essential). By socioeconomic status: FSM⁴-eligible 88% important (41% essential) vs non-FSM 81% important (38% essential).
Barriers to continuation	Perceived challenges to remaining in higher education, such as cost of living, family responsibilities, or loss of income	Top barrier: rent affordability (34% overall; 38% women, 24% men). Other barriers: poor academic experience (26% women, 7% men), family financial dependence (20%), loss of part-time job (17%), caring responsibilities (34% men).
Use of loans and grants	Type of financial aid accessed (repayable and non-repayable)	68% used repayable student loans; 52% maintenance loans. Among loan users, 71% also received at least one bursary, grant, or scholarship. Non-repayable aid by gender: men 28%, women 24%. Access by ethnicity: Black 69%, Asian 69%, Mixed 78%.

⁴ - Free School Meals

Theme	Summary of Survey Questions	2025 Results
Access to opportunity	Ease or difficulty of accessing networks, internships, university entry, and early career roles	23% of respondents reported difficulty gaining entry to university; 25% of women and 21% of men.
Financial pressures and work during study	Whether students work during study and the impact on experience	89% of disadvantaged students worked while studying, mostly in part-time or seasonal jobs. Financial strain higher among Black students (90%).

“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.”

In 2021, **24%** of disadvantaged students, defined by eligibility for free school meals, considered leaving their course due to financial strain, compared with **11%** of their more advantaged peers. By 2025, financial pressures had not diminished. Instead, higher education has become increasingly reliant on repayable loans, and affordability gaps have/had widened as living costs outpaced support.

Financial Pressures and Work During Study

“I have temporarily had to pause my dream and take a job to pay my debt for a while.”

In 2025, over **89%** of disadvantaged students reported working during their studies to supplement their household income, most often through part-time or seasonal work. This was especially common among those from Black ethnic backgrounds (**90%**).

While paid work may reflect resilience, a clear but concerning link with financial strain remains evident. Extensive working hours while studying have been shown to negatively impact academic outcomes, disproportionately affecting those without family financial safety nets (Office for Students, 2023).

Reliance on Loans and Use of Grants

Our 2025 survey found a continued reliance on repayable financial support for access to higher education among racially minoritised and socioeconomically disadvantaged students. More than half of respondents reported taking out loans; **68%** accessed student loans; these figures were exceptionally high among male respondents (**63%**).

Maintenance loans were used by **52%**, with **59%** of those who had received free school meals reporting greater financial vulnerability and less access to alternative sources of support, such as family income, assistance or savings.

“My family was expecting me to take care of responsibilities, but I decided I could do something better and took a huge education loan.”

Access to non-repayable financial aid, such as bursaries, grants, and scholarships, was generally high across the sample. However, among those who had taken out a student or maintenance loan, **71%** received at least one form of non-repayable support, indicating that such aid was most often accessed by students already borrowing and accumulating significant debt.

By gender: men were slightly more likely than women to receive non-repayable financial aid (**28% vs. 24%**). Access was broadly consistent across ethnic groups: **Black 69%, Asian 69%, Mixed 78%**.

To promote financial fairness, policymakers and institutions should consider expanding and proactively targeting bursary schemes, especially for students who may be hesitant to incur educational debt. Doing so could help reduce long-term financial stress and improve student retention and academic outcomes.

Importance of Financial Support for Completion of Studies

Financial support remained critical to the continuation of studies in 2025. Across the cohort, **84%** reported that finance was important for staying enrolled, and within this group, **38%** stated it was essential.

“My family was expecting me to take care of responsibilities, but I decided I could do something better and took a huge education loan.”

Disaggregated results:

- **By gender:**
Women were more likely than men to consider finance essential, at **42%** compared to **30%** respectively. Overall, reported importance was similar, with **85%** of women and **83%** of men recognising it.
- **By ethnicity:**
Black students reported the highest reliance on financial support, with **89%** rating it as important, and within that group, **46%** as essential. Asian students reported **81%** as important, and within that group, **34%** as essential. Students of Mixed heritage reported **80%** importance and **28%** as essential.
- **By socioeconomic status:**
Students who had received free school meals were more likely than their peers who had not to view finance as important (**88%** versus **81%**). In the essential category, **41%** of those who had received free school meals expressed the same view, compared with **38%** of those who had not.

These figures demonstrate that financial support is not supplementary but foundational. Recent research shows that access to scholarships markedly improves retention among students from low and middle-income households (Sutton Trust, 2023). Between 2018 and 2022, the proportion of UK students reporting financial stress rose by **55%**, a spike linked with deteriorating mental health and increased risk of non-continuation of education.

Barriers to Continuation: Economic, Cultural, and Institutional

In 2021, our survey captured barriers exacerbated by the pandemic, including remote teaching, caring during lockdowns, and the sudden loss of part-time work, alongside financial worries. By 2025, survey results shifted focus away from public-health restrictions and towards affordability, constraining students' ability to sustain their studies. The most common barrier in 2025 was rent affordability, reported by **34%** overall, with higher rates among women (**38%**) than men (**24%**). Other barriers included a poor academic experience (**26%** of women, **7%** of men), family financial dependence (**20%**), and loss of part-time jobs used to support their studies (**17%**). Caring responsibilities remained a significant concern, particularly among men (**34%**).

“I have been struggling with rent”

The persistence of financial strain, housing challenges, and academic dissatisfaction illustrates the cumulative effect of economic and institutional barriers. Recent Sutton Trust (2023) research highlights that the cost-of-living crisis has had a pronounced effect on students from lower-income families, who are significantly more likely to cut back on food and essentials and to seek additional paid work to afford basic living costs.

Overall, the findings indicate that financial pressure, housing, academic experience, and family obligations all contribute to shaping whether students can successfully complete their studies, underscoring the need for targeted, intersectional support across universities.

Accessing University: Entry Still Uneven

Entry barriers persisted across the two surveys. In 2025, **23%** of respondents who had attended or were currently enrolled reported difficulty gaining entry, with women **(25%)** slightly more likely than men **(21%)** to cite this barrier.

These figures reflect entrenched inequalities in university access, which are linked to prior attainment, application support, and awareness of opportunities; issues well-documented in UK social mobility research (Social Mobility Commission, 2023). The modest gender difference suggests that entry barriers intersect with broader inequities in school preparation, confidence, and access to guidance and support.

“After getting into uni, people were always way ahead of me in terms of knowledge or planning. I always felt like I was continuously missing something that they already had... whereas for me it was always like hit and miss.”

Between 2021 and 2025, evidence indicates the cumulative pressures of unaffordable housing, reliance on loans, and inequitable access to internships reinforce social reproduction, where educational attainment and career progression are shaped more by economic and social background than individual merit. Evidence indicates that higher education remains characterised by structural barriers to both access and persistence. Financial support plays a pivotal role in enabling disadvantaged and racially minoritised students to participate. Without bursaries, grants, and targeted support, retention is unlikely for a significant proportion of students (Office for Students, 2023).

The cumulative pressures of unaffordable housing, reliance on loans, and inequitable access to internships reinforce social reproduction, where educational attainment and career progression are shaped more by economic and social background than individual merit.

2. Employment

Barriers and Aspirations: The Myth of Equal Entry

Continuity and Change: 2021-2025

Across both Life Chances surveys, the labour market transition continued to be a source of profound anxiety and exclusion. In 2021, **96%** of respondents cited barriers to entering a professional career, such as competition, risk-averse employers, unrealistic criteria, fewer placements, and low pay. By 2025, these concerns had evolved. Amid austerity, inflation, and stagnant social mobility, the myth of equal entry persists. However, the data reveal the way structural inequalities, rooted in race, gender, and socio-economic background, continue to dictate employment outcomes.

To understand how young adults experience the transition into employment, participants were asked about their current work status, career progression, access to networks, and perceptions of fairness and opportunity. The 2025 survey explored how these experiences have evolved since 2021, capturing both persistent and emerging barriers to professional entry and advancement. The questions were grouped thematically, and the table below summarises the areas explored alongside the corresponding 2025 results.

Theme	Summary of Survey Questions	2025 Results
Employment status and sector fit	Employment status; alignment between sector interests and current role	Employment rates: men 69% , women 65% . Full-time employment: men 49% , women 43% . Part-time: women 22% , men 20% . Unemployment: men 8% , women 7% . By age: 18-21, 34% , 22-25 69% , 26-30 81% employed. 30% part-time, 12% unemployed.

Theme	Summary of Survey Questions	2025 Results
Career progression and support	Experiences of job searching, access to networks, and institutional or employer support since 2020	36% overall reported difficulty progressing in their careers. By gender: women 40% , men 28% . By socioeconomic background: FSM-eligible 33% , non-FSM 40% .
Barriers to entry	Perceived barriers such as low pay, unpaid internships, bias, inaccessibility, family responsibilities, and lack of experience	42% overall struggled to secure internships or work experience; women 48% , Asian 50% , Black 36% . 38% overall found it difficult to secure their first job; Asian 45% , women 42% , Black 38% . 41% of those in Greater London experienced difficulty securing professional roles; men 44% , women 40% .
Changes since 2020	Whether barriers have improved or worsened in recent years	49% of respondents said opportunities had increased since 2021. 44% of men and 40% of women still struggled to find work in their intended career paths. 41% of 26 to 30-year-olds and 40% of 22 to 25-year-olds reported difficulty entering work. Fewer than 39% in any demographic found it easier to enter employment.
Professional networks	Access to networks, mentors, or role models supporting employment or advancement	36% overall struggled to access professional networks; women 40% , men 29% . By socioeconomic background: non-FSM 42% , FSM 32% .

Theme	Summary of Survey Questions	2025 Results
Discrimination and fairness	Experience of discrimination and perceptions of equity in employment opportunities	Women 41% and men, 37% identified ethnicity and social background as barriers to professional access.
Career aspirations and sectoral interests	Post-secondary education or training route, desired employment sectors, and alignment with current role	Top career interests: healthcare 20% , financial services 14% , STEM 14% , education 12% , law 11% . Healthcare respondents: 86% women; finance: 52% men; STEM: 62% women; education: 74% women; law: 70% women. Alignment between aspirations and current employment 89% overall; men 92% , women 87% .
Career optimism	Level of optimism about future career prospects and perceived opportunity for advancement	49% perceived improvement in opportunity for underrepresented groups since 2021; 40-44% continued to report difficulty entering intended career paths.

Finding Work, Internships or Experience: A Privilege Gap

“I am not able to do usual summer internships as I’m working two full-time jobs.”

42% of all participants reported difficulty securing internships or work experience, reflecting the limited availability of entry routes into professional sectors.

This rises sharply for women **(48%)** and Asian respondents **(50%)**, with Black respondents also reporting significant difficulty **(36%)**, often linked to limited access to networks and exclusive recruitment practices. Internships and work placements are widely recognised as critical stepping stones for young people transitioning into employment, particularly in competitive sectors such as law, media, and finance. However, these opportunities are often unpaid or informally advertised, favouring individuals with family connections, financial security, or insider knowledge; privileges that are often denied to young people from racially minoritised or lower-income backgrounds.

This 'privilege gap' also intersects with geography, institutional access, and cultural expectations. Research by the Sutton Trust (2018) suggests that ethnically diverse students are more likely to live at home and attend less selective universities, often studying locally. These patterns, influenced by financial pressures and family expectations, can limit opportunities for networking, professional exposure, and participation in extra-curricular activities that are critical to social mobility.

Racial discrimination in recruitment further compounds inequality in access to employment. UK-based audit studies consistently show that applicants with ethnic minority names receive fewer interview invitations than White applicants with identical CVs. Recent research by King's College London (2022) found that ethnic minority candidates were significantly less likely to be shortlisted for an interview, highlighting that name-based bias continues to influence hiring outcomes in the UK labour market.

“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?”

Getting First Job After Education: The Class Ceiling Begins

38% overall found this step difficult, with Asian **(45%)**, women **(42%)**, and Black respondents **(38%)** particularly affected.

These findings align with the concept of entry-level inequality, in which hiring discrimination and network-based recruitment practices disproportionately exclude underrepresented candidates (King's College London, 2022; Social Mobility Commission, 2021). Respondents who had received free school meals reported lower rates **(41%)** than their peers **(47%)**, suggesting that barriers extend beyond economic deprivation to include social capital and institutional bias.

“I applied for a job, and my classmate who had less experience also applied, and he got the job.”

Career Advancement: Structural Barriers Persist

Overall, **36%** of respondents reported difficulty progressing in their careers, with women **(40%)** facing greater barriers than men **(28%)**. Those not receiving free school meals also reported higher rates of difficulty progressing than their peers **(40% vs 33%)**.

At first, this may seem counterintuitive. It is easy to assume that those from more advantaged backgrounds would find it easier to move up. Yet career progression is rarely straightforward. Success often depends on more than ability or performance; it is also shaped by organisational culture, social expectations, and unspoken ideas about who ‘fits’ within leadership or professional spaces. These subtle influences determine who is seen as promotable and who is not, reinforcing long-standing inequalities across workplaces.

These findings reflect what the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD, 2020) calls the progression gap, a pattern where people from working-class or underrepresented backgrounds are consistently overlooked for promotion, even when they have the same skills and experience as their peers. Over time, these barriers are made worse by intersectional factors such as ethnicity, gender, and limited access to professional networks.

“In certain spaces, I don’t know how to navigate them. What does ‘right fit’ mean within the company, because when you look around, no one there is like me. So why would they pick me?”

Professional Networks: Gatekeeping by Class and Capital

Overall, **36%** of respondents struggled to access professional networks. This was more common amongst women than men **(40% vs 29%)**. By free school meal eligibility, a proxy, though imperfect measure, of socioeconomic disadvantage, those not eligible within our dataset of ethnically diverse participants reported higher rates than those eligible **(42% vs 32%)**. Lack of access to networks limits both career progression and job mobility, reinforcing existing inequalities.

In elite professions such as law, finance, medicine, management consultancy, and the media, people often build networks with others who share similar educational, social, and cultural backgrounds. These professions are typically high-status and high-income, offering access to significant social and economic advantage. However, because professional networks are often formed within these closed circles, opportunities tend to circulate among a relatively narrow group of people. This makes it harder for those from less privileged or underrepresented backgrounds to enter or progress within these sectors. Over time, this dynamic reinforces both privilege and exclusion, sustaining a cycle in which access to elite professions remains highly uneven (Friedman and Laurison, 2019; YFF, 2025).

“Hiring happens from within networks, and I don’t have those networks. It’s holding us back.”

Securing a Professional Role: Regional and Gender Patterns

Geography continues to shape access to professional opportunities. Despite Greater London being the UK’s economic hub, **41%** of young people in the region reported difficulty securing professional roles. This reflects wider evidence that high job density does not necessarily translate into equal access, as opportunities are often mediated through compounding negative factors such as competition, social networks, and cost-of-living (YFF, 2025)

Subtle gender differentiations also emerged. Men were slightly more likely than women to report difficulty securing a professional role **(44% vs. 40%)**. However, women were more likely to identify ethnicity and social background as barriers **(41% vs. 37% of men)**. This aligns with research showing that women, particularly from racially minoritised and lower-income groups, face compounding and intersectional disadvantage in recruitment and progression within corporate and professional careers (YFF, 2025).

“I avoided applying to corporate roles because I felt I’d have to change how I look just to be accepted.”

These findings highlight that both place and identity can impact access to professional roles.

Current Employment Status

Employment outcomes reveal the disparities across gender, age, and region. By gender, men **(69%)** were more likely to be employed than women **(65%)**. Men were also more likely to be working full-time **(49% vs. 43%)**, while women were slightly more likely to be in part-time employment **(22% vs. 20%)**. Unemployment was marginally higher among men **(8%)** compared to women **(7%)**. These findings reflect broader patterns in the UK labour market, where women remain more concentrated in part-time roles, often linked to caring responsibilities and occupational segregation.

“I’ve had a bit of insecurity about my background... people like me sometimes felt they weren’t treated fairly because of their race or how they spoke.”

Employment positively correlated with age. Only **34%** of 18-21-year-olds were employed, with many still in education, while employment reached **69%** for 22-25-year-olds and **81%** for 26-30-year-olds. This progression reflects the transition from higher education into the workforce, also highlighting that younger respondents face greater employment instability in acquiring and retaining secure work.

Although London is frequently viewed as the centre of opportunity, its employment rate is lower than expected for such a dense and economically active labour market. By region, London recorded **71%** employment, though with a relatively high proportion of part-time work **(24%)** and **5%** unemployment. In contrast, the West Midlands reported lower overall employment **(65%)** with notably higher part-time work **(30%)** and considerably higher unemployment **(12%)**. While London presents higher employment levels, reliance on part-time work and continued unemployment indicate that opportunity density alone does not ensure fair access or security in the labour market.

“In some roles I felt I had to change myself—my accent, my presentation—to fit in, otherwise I wouldn’t be accepted as my authentic self.”

Career Aspirations and Sectoral Interests

Respondents expressed strong aspirations in specific sectors, with the highest interest in healthcare and medicine **(20%)**, followed by financial services **(14%)**, STEM **(14%)**, education and training **(12%)**, and law **(11%)**. These preferences reflect both traditional professional pathways and sectors associated with stability, progression, and perceived social value.

Gendered patterns were striking. Healthcare was overwhelmingly female dominated (86%), while financial services attracted more men (52%). Notably, STEM aspirations were predominantly held by females (62%), indicating a possible generational shift challenging entrenched gender stereotypes in science and technology. Education remained strongly female (74%), and law also showed a high proportion of female interest (70%). This aligns with broader evidence that female participation in law and STEM has increased steadily in recent years, although structural barriers continue to limit advancement to senior levels. (Law Society, 2023; WISE, 2023; Institution of Engineering and Technology, 2024).

“I remember seeing a Black woman solicitor, and that gave me more confidence to want to go into legal work.”

Age also shaped sectoral preferences. Older respondents (26-30) were more likely to aspire to careers in healthcare, financial services, and STEM sectors, which often require longer training and higher qualifications. By contrast, younger respondents (18-21) were more drawn to law and digital fields, reflecting both the shorter qualification routes in law compared to medicine and the growing influence of digital careers in younger cohorts' aspirations.

These findings highlight that career aspirations are both gendered and generational in nature. While women are entering traditionally male-dominated fields such as STEM, patterns of occupational segregation remain evident, with men still overrepresented in financial services. Age differences suggest that financial capacity, time investment, and qualification pathways influence sectoral choices, reaffirming the significance of socioeconomic background in shaping aspirations.

Alignment of Aspirations and Employment

A large majority (89%) reported working in their chosen or a related sector. Alignment was highest among men (92%), compared with 87% of women. By age, the highest alignment was among 22-25-year-olds (90%). These patterns suggest that once barriers to entry are overcome, sector retention is relatively strong.

Perceptions of Progress: Uneven Gains in Opportunity Since 2021

Since 2021, the UK has seen a marked shift in how opportunity is talked about, invested in, and, crucially, experienced by young adults from ethnically diverse and systemically marginalised backgrounds. When asked whether opportunities for these groups have increased over the past five years, just under half **(49%)** of our participants said yes. This headline figure reflects a nation divided between cautious optimism and entrenched scepticism.

Employment Access Since 2021: A Persisting Challenge

Despite a return to the post-pandemic labour market stability in statistical terms, many young people, particularly from systemically disadvantaged groups, continue to face significant barriers to entering their chosen professional careers. Among those surveyed:

- **44%** of men and **40%** of women reported struggling to find work in their intended career paths. This suggests near parity in perceived access, challenging assumptions of gendered advantage or disadvantage in early-career stages and highlighting broader structural issues affecting all individuals.
- **Respondents from Greater London**, traditionally considered a hub of professional opportunities, reported that **40%** experienced challenges entering work. This is experienced through hyper-competition and the prevalence of informal recruitment networks, which disadvantage those without elite credentials or social capital.
- **Fewer than 39%** of respondents in any demographic reported finding it easier to enter work. This consistency reinforces that structural barriers to employment are widespread, affecting individuals across gender, age, and region.

“My background has been a barrier to me getting work”

The findings indicate that although **89%** of respondents reported some alignment between their career aspirations and current roles, the transition from education to employment remains a significant barrier influenced by structural inequality. Access to internships, initial jobs, and career progression is inconsistent, with race, gender, class, and geography affecting outcomes, despite strong retention once entry is secured. Tackling recruitment bias, limited professional networks, and regional disparities is essential to ensure that aspirations are realised into tangible career opportunities.

“Huge barriers exist...When you tell them your background, they want to know how many people you live with and what language you speak”

3. Financial Stability

When Stability Is a Privilege You Cannot Afford

Perceptions of Equity and Economic Justice

Our respondents' perceptions of racial and socioeconomic equity in the United Kingdom indicate that efforts to advance fairness and justice since 2021 have had only a modest impact, with many continuing to experience systemic barriers to financial security and opportunity. While the United Kingdom has entered a period of economic recovery following the COVID-19 pandemic, this recovery has not been felt equally across groups.

Ethnically diverse young people, particularly those from lower-income households, report being excluded from stable and fairly paid work. Their experiences reflect national evidence that structural inequalities in race and class intersect to heighten exposure to job losses, financial strain, and insecure employment during and after the pandemic (ONS, 2022). More recent evidence shows that these disparities have persisted, with racially minoritised groups continuing to experience lower employment rates, poorer health outcomes, and greater housing insecurity, all of which reinforce economic disadvantage and restrict upward mobility (ONS, 2023).

To examine how young adults experience financial security and fairness, participants were asked about their perceptions of equity, financial wellbeing, and their main concerns for the future. The 2025 survey explored how economic pressures, job precarity, and social inequalities continue to shape wellbeing and opportunity. The questions were grouped thematically, and the table below summarises the areas explored and the corresponding 2025 results.

Theme	Summary of Survey Questions	2025 Results
Perceptions of equity	Views on whether the UK was more or less equitable in 2025 compared to 2020, particularly in terms of racial and class fairness	Men 37% and women, 42% perceived inequity. By age: 18-21 52% , 22-25 41% , 26-30 35% . By ethnicity: Asian 41% (up from 38%), Black 36% (down from 46%).
Financial wellbeing	Main challenges to wellbeing in the past five years, such as financial stress, career uncertainty, family responsibilities, and social isolation	Top challenge: financial stress (30% overall; 34% women, 22% men). Career uncertainty 17% overall; family responsibilities 14% overall (16% men, 13% women); social isolation 11% overall (13% women, 15% Mixed ethnicity). 13% reported no significant challenges.
Discrimination	Experience of racial or class-based discrimination and its effect on wellbeing	Reported by 10% of Black respondents, 12% of Asian respondents, and 8% of those of Mixed heritage.
Economic future concerns	Most significant concerns for the next five years, including cost of living, job security, housing, mental health, and political climate	Cost of living: 61% of women, 44% of men. Job security: 27% of men, 29% of women; highest among 18-21-year-olds (31%). Housing insecurity: 24% of 18-21-year-olds; by ethnicity, Black 19% , Asian 22% , Mixed 17% . Discrimination as a future concern: 15% of men, 12% of women. Mental health: 21% of 18-21-year-olds, Black 19% , Asian 19% . Political climate: 14% of 26-30-year-olds.

Theme	Summary of Survey Questions	2025 Results
Intersectional vulnerabilities	Intersection of gender, ethnicity, and class in shaping wellbeing and insecurity	Black women recorded the highest concern for the cost of living (62%) and mental health (19%).
Policy reform priorities	Views on which UK policy areas most need reform to improve equity and opportunity	Healthcare reform prioritised by 35% of men and 50% of women. Housing affordability: 43% men, 45% women. Workplace equity: 40% men, 41% women.

Our survey uncovered that between 2021 and 2025, perceptions of fairness in the UK economy remained divided. By gender, men reported almost no change, with **38%** perceiving inequity in 2021 compared to **37%** in 2025. Women consistently reported higher levels of perceived inequity compared with men, with **42%** in 2021 and **42%** in 2025. This gap reflects persistent gendered differences in economic experiences and perceptions, consistent with wider evidence of women's greater exposure to low pay, part-time work, and financial vulnerability.

By age, there was a clear generational divide. Among the youngest respondents (18-21), perceptions of inequity increased from **46%** to **52%**, reflecting heightened economic anxiety at the start of working life. By contrast, perceptions of inequity declined slightly among 22 to 25-year-olds, falling from **42%** to **41%**, and declined more sharply among 26 to 30-year-olds, from **38%** to **35%**. This suggests that as young adults progress further in their employment, they may experience modest improvements in financial stability. However, the persistence of generational divides underscores unequal entry conditions and heightened precarity for the youngest cohort.

By ethnicity, the picture is complex. Asian respondents reported an increase in perceived inequity, rising from **38%** to **41%**, which points to growing concern about systemic barriers and economic fairness. In contrast, Black respondents reported a marked decrease, from **46%** to **36%**, suggesting some improvements in perceived fairness. This shift may reflect greater visibility and targeted initiatives in the post-George Floyd period (Black Lives Matter movement), as well as changes in expectations, labour market participation, or localised opportunities. However, it does not necessarily indicate a deep structural transformation, as broader inequalities in employment, pay, and progression persist.

Lived Financial Challenges and Precarity

“My biggest financial worry is moving out, as I will literally be working to pay rent, and I won’t have any quality of life.”

When asked about the most significant challenges to their wellbeing over the past five years, respondents consistently identified financial stress as the most pressing issue. Overall, **30%** highlighted this as their primary concern, with women more affected (**34%**) than men (**22%**). Younger respondents reported the highest levels of financial strain, with **36%** of 18 to 21 year-olds citing it as their greatest challenge, compared with **30%** of 22 to 25 year-olds and **27%** of those aged 26-30. By ethnicity, financial stress was most pronounced among Black respondents (**33%**) compared to Asian (**29%**) and Mixed background respondents (**27%**). These findings align with national evidence that financial insecurity disproportionately affects women, younger cohorts, and racially minoritised groups.

Career uncertainty was the second most common challenge, reported by **17%** of respondents. The rates were the same for men and women, with **17%** of each group reporting this outcome, but age differences were more marked: **15%** among 18 to 21 year-olds, rising to **19%** for 22 to 25 year-olds before levelling at **17%** for 26 to 30 year-olds. This suggests that uncertainty peaks during the transition from education to early career pathways, a stage often characterised by insecure work and limited opportunities for progression.

“I faced financial struggles, had to take a loan, as my family was expecting me to take care of my responsibilities.”

Family responsibilities were identified by **14%** overall, though men (**16%**) were more likely to report this burden than women (**13%**). The highest incidence was among 26 to 30 year-olds (**17%**), reflecting the growing correlation between caregiving, financial responsibility and age. By ethnicity, Asian (**14%**) and Black (**13%**) respondents were most affected, indicating that family obligations may intersect with cultural expectations and financial pressures (ONS, 2023).

Social isolation was reported by **11%** overall, though this was more common among women (**13%**), younger respondents aged 18-21 (**15%**), and those of Mixed heritage (**15%**), echoing research on social disconnection, particularly among young adults. This research also explores how limited access to peer networks and support exacerbates mental health challenges (ONS, 2023).

Finally, **13%** of respondents reported no significant challenges to their wellbeing, a figure that increased to **15%** among respondents aged 26-30 and **15%** among Black respondents. While this indicates emotional and physical resilience amongst respondents, it contrasts with the persistent stressors reported elsewhere in the data. Notably, experiences of discrimination, though below statistical relevance thresholds, were still present: **10%** of Black respondents, **12%** of Asian respondents, and **8%** of those of Mixed descent reported facing discrimination. Though less frequently cited than financial or family pressures, discrimination compounds other burdens such as career instability and housing insecurity, underscoring its enduring impact on wellbeing.

“The people around me, who are also ethnic minorities, sometimes felt they weren’t treated fairly because of their race or how they spoke. That gave me insecurity about my own chances.”

In summary, financial stress proved to be the most significant and consistent challenge across all demographics; however, its intensity differed by gender, age, and ethnicity, emphasising how socioeconomic pressures intersect with broader structural inequalities to influence young people’s wellbeing.

Future Concerns

When asked about their outlook, over half of young adults identified economic and social insecurity as their main concerns. The cost of living was the most pressing issue, with **61%** of women citing it, compared to **44%** of men. Black respondents were most concerned at **62%**, highlighting the unequal impact of ‘the cost of living crisis’ on different demographic groups.

Job security was cited by **27%** of men and **29%** of women, with the youngest respondents aged 18-21 reporting the highest concern at **31%**. This reflects the precarious nature of early career employment and the vulnerability of younger cohorts to economic downturns.

Housing insecurity was another critical issue, with **24%** of 18 to 21 year-olds identifying it as a concern, alongside **19%** of Black respondents. Asian respondents reported **22%** and those of Mixed heritage **17%**, illustrating how access to secure housing intersects with both age and ethnicity.

Discrimination was reported as a future concern by **15%** of men and **15%** of women, reflecting persistent gendered inequalities in the workplace and broader society.

“I applied for a few full-time jobs before I graduated, and I noticed they said they make application processes anonymous, but ethnicity wasn’t anonymous.”

Mental health concerns were significant among younger respondents, with **21%** of 18 to 21 year-olds identifying it as a challenge. Ethnic disparities were also evident, with **19%** of Black respondents and **19%** of Asian respondents reporting concerns about their mental health.

The political climate was another source of uncertainty, with concerns increasing with age and peaking at **14%** among those aged 26-30.

Intersectional vulnerabilities compounded these challenges. Black women, already overrepresented in lower-paid sectors, recorded the highest concerns about both cost of living and mental health, underscoring how cumulative social disadvantage amplifies insecurity.

In summary, the data reveal that young people’s concerns for the future are shaped most strongly by the cost-of-living crisis, financial precarity, job and housing insecurity, and intersecting inequalities of gender, ethnicity, and age, all of which highlight the need for policies that address both structural and economic vulnerability.

“I’ve been working for a few years, but I still can’t afford my own flat... rents go up each year, and landlords ask for huge deposits. It’s frustrating.”

Intersectional Insights

While cost of living, job security, housing, and mental health emerge as common concerns across all groups, the data show that these challenges often cluster in ways that suggest overlapping vulnerabilities.

Mental health concerns appear to be compounded when economic pressures and discrimination are also present. This may reflect the psychological toll of experiencing both structural disadvantages and an increasingly polarised political climate in which immigration, race, and religious identity are frequent topics of divisive public debate.

“I used my university’s mental health advisor service, but it was really unhelpful and made me feel worse. I completely gave up on university services.”

Taken together, these intersectional patterns indicate that policy responses which address only one dimension, for example, economic relief without tackling discrimination, or mental health provision without housing reform, are unlikely to close these gaps. The data reinforces the need for integrated approaches that account for how gender, ethnicity, and age combine to shape people's vulnerabilities in a challenging political and economic environment.

Closing the Gaps: Key Priorities for Improving Life Chances

The most frequently cited priorities for improving life chances among our respondents were healthcare, housing, workplace equity, and education. Although these areas appear distinct, they are all linked by the effects of financial insecurity. Insecure and poorly paid employment limits individuals' ability to sustain stable housing, access adequate healthcare, and invest in further education or training, creating a cycle in which economic insecurity reinforces social inequality.

Respondents often linked these challenges to unequal access to work and persistent discrimination that constrains earnings and career progression. These findings align with national data showing that financial strain and labour market exclusion continue to undermine young people's wellbeing and social connectedness (ONS, 2023), and that many remain outside education, employment, or training, leaving them at increased risk of long-term economic instability (ONS, 2025). Healthcare reform was the leading priority, identified by **35%** of male respondents and nearly half of female respondents (**50%**). This finding is consistent with recent evidence on widening health inequalities, particularly affecting Black and minoritised ethnic communities.

Housing affordability and access emerged as a strong concern, with **43%** of men and **45%** of women identifying it as an essential area for change. This reflects ongoing structural challenges in securing stable and affordable accommodation (Shelter, 2023).

Workplace equity, including fair pay, representation, and opportunities, was cited by **40%** of men and **41%** of women. This aligns with national data showing persistent ethnic pay gaps, lack of representation in leadership, and barriers to career progression (ONS, 2022).

Education reform was consistently highlighted by a third of respondents across all demographic groups, its ranking alongside other basic needs suggests that concerns over access to quality education and the alignment of learning pathways with meaningful career opportunities are closely linked to broader experiences of financial and social insecurity.

Together, these findings suggest that women are more likely to prioritise healthcare, while men more frequently emphasise housing and workplace equity. This pattern reflects gendered experiences of inequality, with women disproportionately affected by health-related inequities and men reporting greater concern over economic stability linked to housing and income.

In summary, the data highlight four clear areas of policy intervention: healthcare, housing, workplace equity, and education; all of which are central to addressing systemic inequalities and improving life chances for young people from ethnically diverse backgrounds.



4. Wellbeing, Mental Health, and Belonging

The Psychological Impacts of Structural Disadvantage

Emotional Consequences of Structural Inequality

To examine how economic pressures, exclusionary environments, and systemic inequality affect wellbeing and belonging, participants were asked about their mental health, feelings of safety, access to support, and perceptions of social change. The 2025 survey explored both personal and structural dimensions of wellbeing, evaluating whether social movements, workplace reforms, and community initiatives have translated into tangible improvement in young adults’ lives. The questions were grouped thematically, and the table below summarises the areas explored and the corresponding 2025 results.

Theme	Summary of Survey Questions	2025 Results
Mental health and wellbeing	Agreement with statements about improvements in mental health over the last five years and the impact of economic and social pressures	47% reported improved mental health; men 48% , women 43% . By age: 18–21 31% , 22–25 46% , 26–30 51% .

Theme	Summary of Survey Questions	2025 Results
Community belonging and safety	Whether respondents feel safe and supported in their local community, and differences by gender, age, and region	46% overall felt safe and supported. By gender: men 51% , women 44% . By age: 26–30 51% , 22–25 48% . Greater London respondents 44% , below national average.
Social movements' impact	Perceptions of whether social movements in the past five years have had tangible outcomes for people like them	45% overall felt that social movements had tangible outcomes. By gender: men 44% , women 46% .
Access to key services	Whether access to employment, housing, healthcare, and education has improved over the past five years	44% overall agreed access had improved. By gender: men 52% , women 41% . By age: 26–30 51% , 22–25 44% . Greater London 43% , slightly below average.

Wellbeing and mental health remain defining challenges for young adults as they seek to establish stability, purpose, and belonging across education, employment, and wider life opportunities. Evidence from both the 2021 and 2025 surveys indicates that systemic inequality, economic pressure, and exclusionary environments continue to heighten psychological strain.

Improved Mental Health

Fewer than half **(47%)** of respondents reported that their mental health had improved over the past five years. Men **(48%)** were more likely than women **(43%)** to report improvement. This pattern reflects broader evidence on the gendered dimension of structural stress, such as economic insecurity, workplace inequality, and unpaid care responsibilities, which disproportionately impact women.

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

Age also differentiated outcomes: older respondents aged 26-30 **(51%)** reported better wellbeing than younger peers aged 18-21 **(31%)** and 22-25 **(46%)**, suggesting that greater stability in employment and life may have contributed to improved mental health. The COVID-19 pandemic significantly disrupted the early career trajectory of many young people, who entered the labour market during lockdown, facing increased insecurity and competition, reduced working hours and a more general loss of experience. In the context of 2025, with youth unemployment remaining high and the rate of NEET (not in education, employment or training) individuals aged 16-25 nearing one million in late 2024, these conditions have likely exacerbated psychological distress amongst younger respondents. This pattern is consistent with evidence linking unemployment and NEET status to poorer mental health outcomes and greater prevalence of common mental disorders among UK youth (ONS, 2025; Resolution Foundation, 2024; Sterud et al., 2025; Wright et al., 2021).

“During COVID, we were the first year doing GCSEs again, and online learning wasn’t effective - it was stressful.”

Regionally, reported rates of poor mental health were broadly consistent nationwide, with **46%** of respondents from Greater London reporting concerns, mirroring the overall average. Yet, despite proximity to services and opportunities, urban pressures such as high living costs and housing precarity may erode these potential advantages, sustaining elevated levels of psychological strain.

While some progress in mental health improvement is evident, the data reveal persistent inequalities. Around **45%** of all respondents agreed that their mental health had improved over the past five years, with lower rates among women **(43%)** and the youngest cohort aged 18-21 **(31%)**. By comparison, improvement was more frequently reported among men **(48%)** and those aged 26-30 **(51%)**. These findings indicate that younger adults and women remain disproportionately affected by psychological strain, underscoring the need for targeted support that tackles both structural pressures and unequal access to mental health resources.

Community Belonging and Safety

Just under half **(46%)** of respondents reported that they feel safe and supported in their local community. Men were more likely than women to report this **(51% vs 44%)**, highlighting a gendered difference in the perception and experience of safety and belonging.

“At a university sports event, I was the only ethnic minority student, and I wasn’t invited to try activities, it made me feel excluded”

Age differences were most pronounced among the youngest respondents. Only **35%** of 18-21-year-olds agreed that they feel safe and supported in their local community, compared with **48%** of 22-25-year-olds and **51%** of those aged 26-30. This suggests that younger adults may experience weaker local connections and lower trust in community settings during early transitions into adulthood.

Respondents in Greater London **(44%)** were less likely to agree, suggesting that urban pressures and inequality may undermine community cohesion. Overall, while a significant minority **(46%)** of young people feel safe and supported, persistent gender, age, and regional disparities highlight the need for greater community investment and policies that promote inclusion and belonging.

Tangible Outcomes of Social Movements

The past five years have witnessed unprecedented visibility of social movements, with many young adults actively engaging through protests, online campaigns, and community initiatives. However, visibility and collective organisation and participation do not necessarily equate to structural change.

Fewer than half **(45%)** feel that social movements have had tangible outcomes for people like them. Differences by gender, age, and location are modest, with women **(46%)** only slightly more likely than men **(44%)** to perceive change. This points to a gap between heightened awareness and measurable impact, raising questions about the ability of movements to translate mobilisation into structural reform.

This reflects a tension between symbolic progress and lived experience: while movements have succeeded in amplifying awareness and solidarity, their capacity to deliver material improvements in policy, equity, and daily life remains contested. For young people, especially those facing entrenched inequalities, this dissonance may foster both scepticism and a call for deeper institutional accountability.

Improved Access to Employment, Housing, Healthcare, and Education

44% of respondents reported that their access to key services had improved in the past five years. Gender disparities were notable, with men **(52%)** much more likely than women **(41%)** to report improvement.

“Paying rent in the London area is more than I can afford, and that really impacts my career options.”

Older respondents (26-30: **51%**) reported better access than younger adults (22-25: **44%**), while Greater London respondents **(43%)** were less likely than average to report improvement.

Across all measures, agreement levels indicate a consistent split between optimism and scepticism. Men generally reported more positive perceptions than women, particularly regarding institutional progress and access to services, reflecting persistent gendered inequalities in lived experiences. Age patterns suggest that life stage and social capital may influence perceptions of progress. Geographic variation, especially in Greater London, reflects the paradox of living in a resource-rich but highly unequal urban environment.

Although social movements have significantly influenced both personal and collective engagement in activism, the current sociopolitical climate poses a challenge and risk to sustaining this momentum.

Over the next five years, changes in political leadership, public policy, and funding priorities may redefine the scope of institutional commitment to equity, placing greater responsibility on grassroots movements to safeguard recent gains.



5. Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI)

A Fragile Consensus

The State of Inclusion: 2021–2025

While Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) initiatives have become more visible across UK workplaces and institutions in recent years, trust in their authenticity and effectiveness remains uneven. Many respondents of the Life Chances 2025 dataset described such efforts as symbolic or ‘tick-box’ in nature, raising questions about the depth of any organisational commitment.

To understand how young adults perceive fairness and inclusion in workplaces and wider society, participants were asked about their experiences of equality, the visibility and effectiveness of EDI initiatives, and the risks of global policy regression. The 2025 survey examined how organisational action, opportunity, and belonging have evolved, revealing both progress and fragility in the UK’s commitment to equity. The questions were grouped thematically, and the table below summarises the areas explored and the corresponding 2025 results.

Theme	Summary of Survey Questions	2025 Results
Perceptions of inclusion and opportunity	Experiences of fairness and inclusion since 2020, including access to employment and the influence of ethnicity or background on career opportunities	Fewer than half (46%) believe the UK job market offers fair opportunities to all backgrounds. By gender: men 49% , women 46% . By age: 18–21 32% , 22–25 51% , 26–30 51% . By ethnicity: Black 55% , Asian 41% .

Theme	Summary of Survey Questions	2025 Results
Perceptions of equality across life domains	Which areas of UK life (e.g., education, healthcare, housing, employment, political representation) are viewed as most equitable	Education 35% , healthcare 31% , housing 27% , social mobility 21% , entrepreneurship 20% , political representation 16% , none 9% . By ethnicity: Black education 45% , healthcare 37% , and political representation 20% . By gender: women education 37% , men 30% ; entrepreneurship men 27% , women 16% . By socioeconomic status: FSM-eligible healthcare 34% , non-FSM 29% .
Organisational action on opportunity	Views on whether businesses and institutions are creating opportunities for people of all backgrounds	51% agree that organisations are creating opportunities. By gender: men 55% , women 49% . By ethnicity: Black 61% , Asian 43% . By age: 22-25 56% , 26-30 54% . Greater London respondents 48% . FSM-eligible 54% .
Workplace and industry change	Perceptions of how diversity and inclusion have changed and how effective initiatives have been over the past five years	Workplace change rated positively by 53-57% overall; industry effectiveness 52-55% . Black respondents 60-63% , Asian 46-50% . By age: 18-21 42-47% , 26-30 57-61% . Men rated 1-3 points higher than women.

Theme	Summary of Survey Questions	2025 Results
Observed effective interventions	Examples of workplace or community EDI initiatives considered effective (e.g., blind recruitment, mentoring, inclusive hiring practices)	42% observed effective interventions. By gender: men 48% , women 39% . By age: 18-21 35% , 26-30, 48% . By ethnicity: Black 51% , Asian 32% . FSM-eligible 48% , non-FSM 38% .
Employer commitment to EDI	Views on how committed employers are to creating meaningful change through EDI	29% said their employer is very committed; 46% somewhat committed; 14% viewed efforts as optics only; 3% not committed; 8% unsure. By gender: men 34% very committed, women 26% . By age: 18-21, 19% , 22-25 22% , 26-30, 36% very committed. By ethnicity: Mixed 20% , Black 38% . FSM-eligible 30% , non-FSM 28% very committed.
Concern about international rollback	Concerns that EDI rollbacks abroad (e.g., in the US) could negatively influence UK policy or practice	58% expressed concern; 21% very concerned, 37% somewhat concerned; 12% not concerned, 21% neutral. By gender: women 59% , men 57% . By age: 18-21 50% , 22-25 58% , 26-30 62% . By region: Greater London 54% concerned (24% neutral, 14% not concerned). By ethnicity: Black 62% (25% very), Mixed 60% , Asian 54% . FSM-eligible 62% , non-FSM 57% .

“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.”

Our data marks a shift from the cautious optimism captured in 2021 to a more sceptical outlook, particularly among young adults from ethnically diverse and low-income backgrounds. The questions grouped under ‘Equity, diversity and inclusion’ explore how young people experience these themes at individual, organisational, and societal levels. Findings highlight how perceptions vary across demographic groups, reflecting differences in lived experience, sectoral exposure, and expectations for the future.

Fair Opportunities in the UK Job Market

Fewer than half **(46%)** of respondents believe the UK job market offers fair opportunities to people from all backgrounds. Men **(49%)** are slightly more likely than women **(46%)** to hold this view, reflecting the observed and persistent gendered divide in perception and experience of hiring and career progression. By age, the younger group were less optimistic, with only **32%** agreeing that job opportunities were fair. In contrast, both 22–25-year-olds **(51%)** and 26–30-year-olds **(51%)** reported agreement well above the overall average. This may indicate that individuals further along in their early careers have had different experiences of workplace equity or access, while younger participants may feel less supported as they begin to navigate employment and recruitment systems.

“If I don’t see anyone who looks like me, I don’t feel safe in those spaces”

Ethnic differences are significant. Black respondents were the most likely to agree that the job market offers fair opportunities, with **55%** expressing this view. In contrast, only **41%** of Asian respondents agreed, consistent with research showing slower career progression despite equivalent qualifications. It is important to note, however, that higher agreement among Black respondents does not necessarily indicate equitable outcomes. Instead, it may reflect differences in expectation, industry representation, or interpretation of fairness, highlighting the complexity of measuring perceived opportunity.

“One specific intervention I have observed as particularly effective is the implementation of blind recruitment in the hiring process. Many organisations, including major corporations and public sector employers, have adopted this approach to reduce unconscious bias.”

Higher educational attainment is associated with more positive perceptions; those with Level 6 (Graduates) report agreement rates exceeding **53%**. However, Greater London respondents (**46%**) were less optimistic, highlighting the paradox of opportunity-rich yet highly competitive and unequal urban labour markets (ONS, 2023).

Overall, these findings reveal that perceptions of fairness in the labour market are stratified by age, gender, ethnicity, and geography. The results suggest that 'fairness' is more often recognised once access has been secured, rather than at the critical entry stage where exclusionary practices are most acute.

Equal Opportunities Across Life Domains: Persistent Inequalities in the UK

Respondents expressed a nuanced view of perceived (in)equality in the UK today. While some areas, particularly education and healthcare, were more often regarded as fair, the data also highlights significant disparities in perceptions, especially among ethnically diverse and socioeconomically disadvantaged groups.

“For us, especially as ethnic minorities, to mix into society, we need to put in 60-65% effort compared to others needing maybe 5%.”

Overall patterns.

Across the total sample, the most frequently cited area of perceived equality was education (**35%**), followed by access to healthcare and support (**31%**). Access to housing was identified by just over one in four respondents (**27%**), and social mobility by **21%**. One in five respondents (**20%**) identified entrepreneurship and business opportunities as equitable, and only **16%** cited political representation. Notably, **9%** stated there were no areas of life they believed to be equitable, underscoring deep-rooted perceptions of systemic inequity.

Demographic disparities

Perceptions of equality were in deep contrast across different demographic groups. Among ethnic groups, Black respondents were more likely than average to view education (**45%**) and healthcare (**37%**) as equitable, yet fewer than a quarter (**20%**) identified political representation as fair.

Among Black respondents, **6%** indicated that there were no areas they considered equitable. Although this figure is slightly below the overall average, the small subgroup size warrants cautious interpretation. Nonetheless, the finding aligns with broader evidence of continuing concerns about systemic fairness, suggesting that perceptions of progress in areas such as education and healthcare may coexist with ongoing experiences of inequity.

“I feel that the UK is already racist as it is; we don’t need to give right-wing people more reason to come out of the woodwork.”

Socioeconomic background also influenced perceptions of (in)equality. Respondents who had received free school meals were more likely to view healthcare as fair **(34%)** compared with those who had not **(29%)**, suggesting that public services may be perceived as relatively accessible. However, this same group was also slightly more likely to state that no areas were fair **(7%)** compared with **(9%)**, indicating that despite some positive views, concerns about exclusion from broader systems of opportunity and decision-making remain.

Gender differences were also notable. Female respondents were more likely to identify education as equitable **(37%)** compared to males **(30%)**, but less likely to cite entrepreneurship and business opportunities **(27% vs. 16%)**. This pattern aligns with evidence that women continue to face structural barriers in entrepreneurship, including limited access to investment capital and networks. (Sutton Trust, 2023)

Household financial background added another dimension. Only **6%** of respondents from middle-class households felt there were no equitable areas, compared with **20%** of those from lower-working households. However, variations across different life domains suggest that financial background alone does not fully explain disparities in perceived equality.

Our findings reinforce the idea that perceptions of equality are uneven and vary by domain. While education and healthcare stood out as relatively equitable spaces, they are far from universally accessible or experienced equally in practice, particularly for marginalised groups. Employment, career progression, and social mobility are consistently regarded as less equitable, highlighting persistent barriers related to class, ethnicity, and geography.

Perceptions of Organisational Action on Opportunity

Just over half of respondents **(51%)** agree that businesses and institutions are actively doing enough to create opportunities for people of all backgrounds. Men **(55%)** were more likely than women **(49%)** to hold this view.

“I want my employer to create a safe and inclusive environment where employees feel comfortable.”

Black respondents reported the highest agreement **(61%)**, potentially reflecting the impact of targeted recruitment and development programmes. In contrast, Asian respondents reported a significantly lower rate **(43%)**.

Perceptions were broadly consistent across age groups, with 22–25-year-olds **(56%)** and 26–30-year-olds **(54%)** showing similar optimism. Those identified as socioeconomically disadvantaged **(54%)** also reported above-average confidence, possibly reflecting direct benefits from targeted interventions. However, Greater London respondents **(48%)** were less convinced, suggesting that visible inequality can temper perceptions of progress.

Observed Effective EDI Interventions in the Workplace or Community

A majority of respondents **(58%)** reported that they had not observed any effective EDI interventions or initiatives in their workplace or community. Responses indicated that some participants had not observed any employer-led inclusion initiatives at all. This points to a significant gap between policy intent and lived experience, raising concerns about the visibility, reach, and impact of EDI measures across UK workplaces and communities.

“I have observed several things in my workplace, such as a mentorship programme, an employee response group and a very flexible work arrangement.”

42% of respondents reported observing effective interventions, and even these positive experiences were unevenly distributed across demographic groups. Men were more likely than women to report observing effective initiatives (**48%** compared with **39%**), while observation rates increased steadily with age, from just **35%** among those aged 18-21 to **48%** among those aged 26-30.

“In my organisation, EDI has been gaining momentum with various initiatives aimed at promoting diversity and addressing disparities.”

Black respondents were most likely to report seeing effective initiatives **(51%)**. In contrast, Asian respondents reported the lowest observation rate, at just **32%**. Socioeconomic factors played a role: those eligible for free school meals were more likely to have observed effective initiatives **(48%)** than those who were not **(38%)**.

In my opinion, some of the most effective interventions related to equity, diversity, and inclusion in the workplace or community are those that go beyond surface-level actions and address systemic issues while creating a culture of openness, understanding, and accountability.

Effectiveness of Workplace EDI Initiatives

Around **51%** of respondents believe that current workplace EDI initiatives are effective in addressing inequality. Gender differences were modest, with men **(53%)** slightly more positive than women **(50%)**.

Age differences were more pronounced, and agreement rose from **43%** among 18-21-year-olds to over **53%** among older groups, indicating that direct workplace exposure to EDI may increase confidence in its effectiveness. Black respondents again reported the highest levels of confidence **(59%)**, while Asian respondents are notably less optimistic **(42%)**.

“Companies might be less accountable in checking their biases or addressing discrimination without strong EDI measures.”

Employer Commitment to EDI

Fewer than one in three respondents **(29%)** believe their employer is ‘very committed’ to EDI and creating real change. The majority **(46%)** view their employer as ‘somewhat committed’ but could do more, while **14%** perceive the efforts as primarily for optics. Only **3%** felt there was ‘no commitment at all’, and **8%** were unsure.

“Because of what is going on in the world right now, there will be backlash, resistance, and slow negative cultural shifts.”

Responses revealed that men **(34%)** were more likely than women **(26%)** to report strong commitment from their employers. While women more often described efforts as somewhat committed **(47%)** or mostly optics **(16%)**, men’s views were more polarised overall, with a higher share perceiving either strong commitment or no commitment at all **(4%)** compared with **1%** among women).

“My employer has implemented unconscious bias training and flexible work policies, which appear to be positively received. However, long-term impact assessment would be valuable.”

Age

19% of 18 to 21-year-olds report strong commitment from employers, with a majority **(57%)** believing employers could do more. Among 22 to 25 year-olds, just **22%** see strong commitment, and **17%** believe efforts are optics, the highest of any age group. By contrast, **36%** of 26 to 30 year-olds feel their employer is very committed, and they are less likely to view efforts as optics **(14%)**.

Ethnicity

Respondents of Mixed heritage were the least positive, with only **20%** seeing strong commitment and nearly a quarter **(23%)** viewing efforts as optics. Black respondents report the highest levels of perceived commitment, with **38%** stating that their employer is very committed, and only **10%** viewing efforts as merely optics. Socioeconomic background also shapes perceptions. Respondents who were eligible for free school meals are slightly more positive, with **30%** reporting a strong commitment and **51%** indicating a somewhat committed attitude. Those who had not are more sceptical, with fewer **(28%)** reporting strong commitment and more **(18%)** seeing efforts as optics.

Taken together, these results suggest that while EDI is widely recognised across workplaces, perceptions of real change remain uneven. Younger employees and women show the most scepticism, raising concerns about how well EDI efforts are meeting the needs of those at earlier stages of their careers or with compounding indices of disadvantage. More positive responses among Black and free school meal-eligible respondents may indicate that targeted interventions are making a difference, but these gains appear uneven. The overall pattern suggests that commitment is visible but has not yet consistently translated into trust or confidence in structural change.

Social Movements and Personal Activism

The past five years have also been significantly shaped by major social movements that have taken place as much (if not more) in a digital sphere than a physical one. These include such moves as, #MeToo, the climate justice movement, and Black Lives Matter, intensifying after George Floyd's murder in 2020.

“Typically, things that happen in the US affect the rest of the world, and lately political stances have affected many UK citizens.”

Almost half of respondents **(49%)** reported that social movements in the last five years have changed how they engage with activism. Women **(51%)** are more likely than men **(45%)** to report this shift. Older respondents (26-30: **54%**) report higher influence than younger peers (18-21: **38%**). Those in Greater London **(53%)** also report higher engagement, likely reflecting the capital's concentration of activism spaces and events.

Similarly, almost half of respondents (49%) believed that people around them had altered their engagement with activism due to recent social movements. Age differences were slight, subtly favouring older respondents noticing change (18-21: 37% ; 22-25: 52%; 26-30: 53%). Gender differences were marginal (men: 47%, women: 50%), suggesting a broad perception of activism's increased visibility within peer networks. Respondents in Greater London (51%) were marginally more likely to observe this trend.

Although not recorded, this report speculates that the higher engagement reported by older respondents may reflect their contemporary life stage during the COVID-19 pandemic. Those aged 26-30 were entering or consolidating early careers and had greater independence, resources, and networks that could be channelled into activism. In contrast, many individuals aged 18-21 were still in education or experiencing restricted mobility due to lockdown, which may have limited their opportunities for direct involvement. This divergence highlights how age at the onset of the pandemic shaped both exposure to activism and the capacity for meaningful participation. Regional differences also matter: London, with its density of activist networks and protest spaces, appears to have fostered stronger engagement than other parts of the UK, as seen in large-scale demonstrations such as the Black Lives Matter protests in 2020 and climate justice actions that continued despite restrictions.

Impact of International Policy Rollbacks on the UK

Respondents frequently drew direct parallels between the rollback of EDI initiatives in the United States and the risks of similar developments in the UK. This reflects a perception that political shifts in the US, particularly under Trump's presidency, may embolden UK policymakers and organisations to weaken their own commitments to inclusion.

This concern extends not only to abstract international influence but to the replication of specific political dynamics. For some, the change in the US government was seen as a warning sign that could easily be mirrored in the UK context.

“A new government, just like what was witnessed in the USA recently, may decide to replicate exactly what happened in the US here in the UK.”

Together, these perspectives highlight a perceived, but also felt, transatlantic signalling effect. If rollback is normalised in the US, it may legitimise similar retrenchment in the UK, undermining existing progress and increasing vulnerability among minority groups, as indicated in our survey results. A clear majority **(58%)** of respondents expressed concern about the impact of international policies on the policies and practices of UK, with **21%** reporting as 'very concerned' and a further **37%** 'somewhat concerned'. By contrast, one in eight **(12%)** were not concerned, while a further **21%** reported as neutral.

Opinion by gender was indistinct, with **59%** of women and **57%** of men expressing concern. Women are slightly more likely to report 'somewhat concerned' **(38% vs 36%)**.

“My concern is that the rollback of EDI programmes abroad could create a trickle-down effect, where UK organisations with global ties feel emboldened to scale back their own initiatives.”

Age presented clearer distinctions. Concern rose with age: **50%** of 18 to 21 year-olds expressed concern, compared with **58%** of those aged 22-25 and **62%** of 26 to 30 year-olds. Younger respondents were also more likely to report being not concerned **(13%)**, as opposed to neutral. This could suggest that older cohorts, more experienced in policy and workplace environments, are more sensitive to the implications of international shifts.

Regional variation highlights that Greater London respondents were slightly below average in concern **(54%)**, while showing higher neutrality **(24%)** and greater proportions not concerned **(14%)** than other localities.

Division of opinion by ethnicity was notable. Concern was highest amongst Black respondents **(62%)**, with **25%** reporting as 'very concerned'. Those of mixed descent also reported high concern **(60%)**. Asian respondents overall were lower at **54%**, though this masks variation across sub-groups, including more nuanced experiences within ethnic categories.

“They are just going to do the same thing that Trump did, making it harder for people of colour, especially Black people, to get jobs.”

Respondents eligible for free school meals reported as more concerned **(62%)** than those who did not **(57%)**, suggesting those from disadvantaged backgrounds are more attuned to risks of reduced EDI protections.

The findings reveal how perceptions of vulnerability to political rollback align with lived experiences of inequality. Groups who have historically faced systemic exclusion and discrimination, whether by race, class, or socioeconomic status, are more likely to anticipate negative consequences. The relative neutrality among younger respondents may reflect limited exposure to systemic change, whereas older participants appear more conscious of political risks. Taken together, these results highlight that the prospect of regression in EDI is not an abstract concern but a lived risk, with those most dependent on protective frameworks most alert to potential erosion.

Perceptions of Progress: “Who Sees Change, Who Feels Left Behind”

In the 2025 Life Chances survey, respondents were encouraged to reflect on the effectiveness and impact within their workplaces and industries, particularly in the last five years. Responses to this question reveal a cautiously optimistic picture. Across both workplace and industry contexts, a majority of young, ethnically diverse respondents recognised some progress and effectiveness in EDI efforts. Favourable ratings for change ranged from **53%** to **57%**, while effectiveness scored between **52%** and **55%**, with workplace measures generally viewed more favourably than industry-wide change. Negative sentiment remained relatively low (**12-14%**), indicating that while some perceive limited impact, few see outright regression.

Response by ethnicity was pronounced in their difference. Black respondents consistently recorded the highest positive scores, ranging from **60% - 63%** across all four measures. Asian respondents, however, were consistently at the lower end (**46% - 50%**), with the lowest figure (**46%**) for industry effectiveness. This suggests that while certain minority groups feel a clear benefit from EDI policies, others may not see their experiences meaningfully reflected in these initiatives.

Those aged 26-30 were the most positive (**57% - 61%**), while 18 to 21 year-olds were the least (**42% - 47%**). For younger entrants, entrenched barriers at the start of their careers may limit the visibility of change. In contrast, more experienced peers may be better positioned to benefit from evolving workplace cultures.

Gender differences were smaller, with men, on average, rating change and effectiveness 1-3 percentage points higher than women across all four questions.

When comparing the workplace with industry perceptions, respondents were consistently more positive about their own workplace than about the industry as a whole. This indicates that while many recognise tangible progress within their organisations, they are less convinced that systemic change is taking place across the sector. For policymakers and employers, the message is clear: to create lasting impact, EDI strategies must go beyond organisational boundaries and tackle the structural barriers present throughout entire industries.

EDI in the UK: Absence in Practice, Fear of Retrenchment

A clear tension emerges from the survey. The majority reported never having observed any specific interventions or initiatives related to EDI that were effective or even present in their workplace, educational setting, or community. However, the majority expressed concern that the rollback of EDI programmes abroad, particularly in the US, could negatively impact UK efforts.

“Although there’s been some improvement in race relations in the last five years, I believe society is rebelling against EDI efforts, with a kind of psychological over-correction pulling things back in the other direction.”

The open-text responses reveal that this concern is not abstract; it is grounded in concrete fears about the replication of US-style rollbacks in UK workplaces, institutions, and policy frameworks. Respondents mentioned several risks:

Policy and organisational emulation

UK businesses with US ties may adopt similar retrenchment strategies, reducing budgets, diluting priorities, and abandoning targeted interventions. This could slow workplace diversification, hinder inclusive hiring practices, and erode the exchange of best practices.

“Because some UK businesses have connections with the USA, they may be influenced to roll back their own EDI, bringing setbacks to promoting inclusion and diversity in the UK.”

Cultural and political backlash

The rise of far-right political groups ‘culture wars’ on social media, and media-led scepticism of EDI were seen as threats that could normalise discrimination and legitimise bias.

“This could fuel culture wars on social media, influencing the public with misguided narratives, especially with the rise of alt-right extremism and Reform UK.”

Marginalisation of vulnerable groups

Participants feared heightened isolation, discrimination, and reduced access to opportunities for disabled people, ethnic minorities, LGBTQ+ communities, and those facing housing or financial insecurity. Concerns extended to the potential erosion of rights for women and other protected groups, especially under economic austerity.

“Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic and disabled individuals will be forced into social isolation and targeted for existing—we are already seeing this with the proposed PIP cutbacks.”

International signalling effect

If major economies scale back EDI, respondents believed it could send a global message that these initiatives are unimportant, emboldening UK organisations to deprioritise them and undermining progress towards equity.

“I’m worried that if big countries start cutting back on equity, diversity and inclusion programmes, it could send the message that these efforts aren’t important. People in the UK might then believe we don’t need strong EDI initiatives either.”

Contextual Drivers

The political landscape of 2025 has seen highly publicised rollbacks of diversity training, affirmative action, and public-sector equity initiatives in the US. UK political discourse has also sharpened, with some policymakers questioning the legitimacy and cost of EDI work. These developments, coupled with high levels of US-UK corporate and policy interconnectedness, intensify perceptions that the UK could follow suit.

“I observe that global EDI trends may influence UK corporate strategies, particularly in reduced budget allocations or diluted priorities. However, I hope the UK’s distinct legal frameworks and workforce expectations will provide some insulation from extreme rollbacks.”

Overall, respondents perceive EDI as visible but inconsistent. Without embedding equity into organisational culture, leadership accountability, and resource allocation, trust will erode. To sustain progress, EDI must transition from rhetoric to measurable reforms that deliver tangible change.

Comparative Insights

Perceptions of Racial and Socioeconomic Fairness, 2021–2025

In addition to the Life Chances survey of 18 to 30-year-olds, insights were gathered from a nationally representative sample of 1,000 UK adults aged 18 and above. This broader dataset provides a benchmark for assessing whether the views, challenges, and aspirations of the Life Chances cohort are generationally distinct or reflective of broader societal trends⁵. The table below summarises the key questions used to explore public perceptions of fairness, opportunity, and the effectiveness of equity, diversity and inclusion initiatives across the UK.

Theme	Summary of Survey Questions	2025 Results
Perceptions of national fairness	Ratings of the UK in terms of racial and socioeconomic equity (fairness and justice), comparing 2025 with 2020.	Overall, 38% viewed the UK as equitable, 37% as inequitable, and 25% were neutral. Younger adults showed the greatest improvement: inequity fell from 52% to 40% among those aged 18–24, and from 43% to 36% among those aged 25–34. Perceptions of equity rose to 23% and 25% respectively. Older adults (45–54) remained stable at 33–34% inequitable. By gender: men 36% inequitable, women 30% ; men 20% equitable, women 23% .

⁵ - Comparator data represent responses from a nationally representative sample of 1,000 UK adults aged 18+, collected by Censuswide (March 2025). Results are used to contextualise generational differences rather than provide a direct statistical comparison.

Theme	Summary of Survey Questions	2025 Results
Perceptions of fairness, opportunity, and EDI commitment	Agreement with statements about fairness and inclusion in the UK job market, organisational commitment to equity, and the effectiveness of workplace EDI initiatives.	46% agreed that UK institutions are fair and inclusive, while 40% said current EDI initiatives are effective. A further 53% were neutral or unsure. By gender: men 49% , women 46% . By age: 18–24 positive 42% , 25–34 positive 55% , 55+ positive 21% (with over 40% unsure).
Perceived change and effectiveness of EDI in workplaces and industries	Perceptions of change and effectiveness of diversity and inclusion in workplaces and industries over the past five years.	Workplace change rated positively by 36% , with 53% neutral or unsure and 10% negative. Workplace effectiveness was viewed positively by 40% . Industry change and effectiveness were rated positively by 37% and 36% respectively. By age: 25–34 positive 55% , 18–24 positive 45% , 55+ positive 21–22% . By gender: men 40–43% positive, women 31–33% , with women twice as likely to be unsure (31%).

Generational Perceptions of Racial and Socioeconomic Equity

Across the national sample, respondents continued to view the UK as inequitable but shifts between 2021 and 2025 reveal meaningful generational divides. The youngest adults, aged 18 to 24, were the most critical in 2021, with **52%** rating the UK as inequitable. By 2025, this figure had dropped sharply to **40%**, while those perceiving equity rose to **23%**, representing an 8-point increase. This indicates that younger adults are shown growing, though cautious, optimism about fairness in UK society.

A similar trend emerged among those aged 25 to 34. Their perception of inequity declined from **43%** in 2021 to **36%** in 2025, while ratings of equity almost doubled, climbing from **13%** to **25%**. By 2025, this group emerged as the most optimistic overall.

Older cohorts, particularly those aged 45-54, showed virtually no change in their scores. Perceptions of inequity remained relatively stable at around **33-34%**, while perceptions of equity rose only marginally, by no more than **2%** points. These differences suggest that younger generations are far more responsive to equity debates and policy interventions after 2020. This may reflect their greater exposure to inclusive discourse in education and early-career workplaces. At the same time, older adults appear less influenced by these developments and rely more on longer-standing views of fairness.

Gendered Perceptions of Fairness

Gender also shaped perceptions of equity across the national sample. Men consistently reported higher levels of perceived inequity, with **40%** describing the UK as inequitable in 2021, a figure that fell modestly to **36%** in 2025. Women, in contrast, reported lower levels of perceived inequity, decreasing slightly from **31%** to **30%** over the same period. Their perceptions of equity rose from **19%** in 2021 to **23%** in 2025.

This pattern suggests that while women may face disadvantages in specific domains, they are more likely than men to perceive broader societal improvements in equity. It also reflects wider research indicating that men often display lower trust in fairness initiatives, whereas women are more inclined to acknowledge institutional reforms when visible changes occur. (EHRC, 2022)

Diversity and Inclusion in Workplaces and Industries

Across four questions on diversity and inclusion, national respondents expressed cautious ambivalence, with neutrality dominating. In terms of workplace change, **36%** reported positive perceptions, **53%** were neutral or unsure, and **10%** reported negative perceptions. When asked about workplace effectiveness, **40%** responded positively, **53%** were neutral or unsure, and **7%** responded negatively.

Perceptions of industry-wide change followed a similar pattern: **37%** were positive, **53%** neutral or unsure, and **10%** negative. When asked about industry effectiveness, **36%** responded positively, **55%** were neutral or unsure, and **9%** responded negatively. These findings highlight a significant gap in visibility and credibility. Diversity and inclusion initiatives are present, but their tangible impact is not widely trusted or felt by the majority of employees.

Age Differences

Age significantly shaped these perceptions. Adults aged 25 to 34 were the most positive, with more than **55%** affirming both improvements and effectiveness across workplace and industry domains. This group may be overrepresented in sectors where diversity and inclusion efforts are more visible, such as technology, finance, and media.

Young adults aged 18 to 24 were more ambivalent. While **45%** reported a positive change in their workplace, only **42%** believed EDI was effective at an industry level. This drop in confidence suggests younger respondents may be encountering more performative than substantive forms of inclusion.

Older adults aged 55 and above were the least engaged, with only **21-22%** reporting improvements and more than **40%** selecting “not sure.” This indicates that diversity and inclusion initiatives are often invisible or irrelevant to those later in their careers.

Gender Differences

Gender gaps persisted in perceptions of EDI. Men were more positive overall, with **40-43%** affirming improvements, compared with just **31-33%** of women. Men also expressed lower uncertainty, while women were far more likely to report ‘not sure’, at over **31%**.

This disparity suggests that inclusion efforts are not being experienced as empowering or relevant by women, particularly in contexts where intersectional barriers remain unaddressed. The findings echo those from the Life Chances cohort, where young women, especially those from marginalised groups, were among the most sceptical of employer commitments to equity.

Taken together, these findings illustrate a sharp generational divide, with younger adults showing cautious optimism about equity while older adults remain largely unmoved. Gender patterns further complicate the picture, with men expressing greater scepticism and women registering more visible shifts toward perceived fairness. Across all groups, the persistence of neutrality and uncertainty underscores a critical challenge: EDI efforts are not yet translating into widespread trust or lived impact. For policymakers, employers, and educators, the message is clear: progress must be made more visible, more credible, and more evenly distributed if equity is to be felt, not just proclaimed.



“Behind the Numbers: Voices of Resilience and Exclusion”

Listening Beyond the Survey: Focus Group Insights

Alongside the survey data, a focus group with young adults aged 18-30 provided more profound insight into the lived experiences of inequality. Participants, drawn from ethnically diverse and socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds, spoke candidly about the barriers they face in education, employment, finance, and wellbeing. Their voices reveal how structural challenges play out in everyday life, highlighting both exclusion and resilience. Their accounts do not read as isolated anecdotes; instead, they illustrate the systemic patterns identified throughout this report, placing human experiences alongside statistical evidence.

Education Access and Support

For many, the journey into higher education began with a sense of dislocation. Several participants described feeling underprepared compared to their peers, particularly as first-generation students: **“After seeing my cohort, they were way ahead in terms of planning. I was continuously missing something that they had.”** Financial precarity compounded this disadvantage. Their accounts highlight how structural barriers, such as a lack of prior exposure to academic environments and limited financial safety nets, can amplify feelings of isolation and fear of failure. Research confirms that students from disadvantaged and ethnically diverse backgrounds often experience reduced feelings of belonging and increased dropout risk compared to their peers (Janke et al., 2024).

Employment Barriers

The transition into employment was described as fraught with bias and exclusion. Participants articulated the invisible weight of having to adapt their identities to fit into workplace norms: **“I don’t apply for more corporate office roles as I feel I would have to wax, straighten my hair to be able to fit in.”** Others noted how recruitment practices, even when described as ‘anonymous’, still revealed ethnicity.

Networking emerged as a persistent barrier: **“I was told they had hired someone from their network. It made me question, How do I get into that network?”** These reflections reinforce research showing that social capital and informal hiring practices often perpetuate privilege, leaving young people from racially minoritised backgrounds at a structural disadvantage. The cumulative effect is a sense that success requires disproportionately greater effort: **“Other people might only need to give 1% or 5% effort, we need to give 60 or 65%.”**

Financial Pressure

Financial precarity was a recurring theme across the group. Participants spoke of delaying aspirations and taking on multiple jobs to remain afloat. Others described the overwhelming nature of financial literacy gaps, particularly when family networks lacked prior knowledge of savings or investments: **“Finances have never been spoken about in my family, like an ISA, but my friends have this knowledge.”**

Housing emerged as a particular pressure point, with rent hikes and poor-quality accommodation cited as barriers to stability. One participant put it starkly: **“My biggest financial worry is moving out as I will literally be working to pay rent and I won’t have any quality of life.”** These concerns reflect broader trends of intergenerational wealth gaps and the disproportionate financial insecurity faced by ethnically diverse young adults in the UK (Social Mobility Commission, 2023).

Mental Health and Stressors

Educational and financial pressures were closely tied to mental health struggles. Several participants recalled inadequate support during school and university, leading to feelings of abandonment. Cost also limited access: **“Mental health support is very expensive for me.”**

These accounts reveal how structural inequities extend into the realm of wellbeing, with disadvantaged students both more likely to face stressors and less likely to access effective mental health support (Centre for Mental Health, 2021).

Inclusion in Practice

Conversations about inclusion revealed a gap between rhetoric and reality. For some, EDI had become hollowed out or politicised: **“People like Trump have caused irreparable damage to EDI. EDI is viewed far more negatively now.”** Participants questioned whether diversity initiatives were meaningful, with one noting: **“The term 'diversity and inclusion', I find it difficult actually to define what it should be.”**

However, examples of positive practice emerged in peer-led and voluntary spaces: **“In my volunteering work, in that space, I am included. There is a mix of races, my wellbeing is supported.”** These reflections highlight that inclusion is most effective when experienced as a relational process, rather than merely a procedural one.

Hopes and Concerns

Despite the weight of barriers, participants expressed resilience and hope. Some feared structural inequities would persist but still sought agency within them: **“My fears for the future are on a macro level, no matter what comes my way, I hope I can figure it out.”** These voices remind us that while structural inequality constrains opportunity, young people remain committed to agency, resilience, and transformation. Their accounts demonstrate both the urgency of systemic reform and the enduring hope that underpins demands for equity.



Conclusions: A Generation Worth Investing In

A Generation Shaped by Constraint and Clarity

The Life Chances surveys conducted in 2021 and 2025 provide a lens on the lives of young adults navigating a UK society that has become increasingly unequal, uncertain, and politically volatile. Far from depicting a disengaged or underprepared generation, these findings reveal a group that is deeply perceptive, strategically adaptive, and overwhelmingly frustrated with systems that fail to convert potential into opportunity.

Across all five thematic areas: education, employment, financial stability, mental health and wellbeing, and EDI, the evidence shows that structural disadvantage has remained consistent, while hope in institutional support has eroded. The pandemic and its aftermath did not create inequality; instead, they exposed and amplified existing gaps in policy, practice, and opportunity (Social Mobility Commission, 2023).

Despite these challenges, young people are not passive. They are not simply victims of circumstance but are active critics, reformers, and co-creators. Their responses indicate a demand for meaningful structural reform, not short-term support schemes or motivational slogans, but a system-wide redesign.

1. Intersectionality Matters

Inequalities are not experienced in isolation. Gender identity, race, and socioeconomic background intersect in compounding ways. For example, whilst their inclusion was considered statistically irrelevant, our non-binary participants reported exclusion in both higher education and mental health access. At the same time, Black and low-income respondents consistently faced the highest levels of economic insecurity and institutional mistrust (YFF, 2025).

2. Symbolism vs. Substance

Participants expressed fatigue with performative EDI, vague inclusion statements, and resilience rhetoric that shifts responsibility onto the individual rather than addressing systemic inequity. They are no longer content with representation alone; they call for redistribution, transparency, and accountability.

3. Precarity is Structural, Not Personal

Most participants reject the dominant narrative around resilience and individual failure. Instead, there is recognition that exclusion stems from the structural design of policies, institutions, and cultural norms.

4. Future Anxiety is Rational

The sense of anticipatory stress about the economy, climate, political instability, and social cohesion is not misplaced. It is rooted in lived experiences of volatility and perceived institutional failure. This emotional toll has implications for both personal and collective wellbeing.

The Life Chances surveys paint a clear picture: young adults in the UK are navigating a world shaped by uncertainty, exclusion, and unmet promises. However, they are also offering a blueprint for renewal, calling for education systems that support retention, labour markets that reward potential over privilege, and institutions that deliver on the rhetoric of inclusion.

Our Blueprint for the Future: Recommendations -Turning Insight into Action

The Life Chances 2025 survey shows that many young people face unfair barriers because of race, gender, or family background. However, the findings also show a generation that is clear about what needs to change. The recommendations below outline necessary actions, categorised by educators, employers, and policymakers, with suggested timeframes for delivery.

1. For Educators: Making Higher Education Work for Everyone

Higher education continues to represent a key pathway to opportunity and social mobility, yet our findings show that it does not work equally for all. Students from low-income or ethnically diverse backgrounds continue to face barriers not only to entry but also to persistence and success once enrolled. These barriers are multifaceted, including financial, cultural, and institutional obstacles, and are often compounded by a lack of tailored preparation, limited access to role models, and insufficient support for first-generation students.

It is equally important to recognise that higher education should not be regarded as the only or superior route to success. Persistent social hierarchies that privilege university degrees over technical, vocational, or apprenticeship pathways continue to stigmatise alternative routes, particularly for working-class and ethnically diverse young people (Department for Education, 2023; Social Mobility Commission, 2022). A rebalancing is needed. Educators, employers, and policymakers must collaborate to promote parity of esteem between academic and technical education, ensuring that both are valued, well-resourced, and clearly linked to meaningful employment outcomes.

Educators therefore have a dual responsibility: to make higher education genuinely inclusive and supportive for those who pursue it, and to help reshape societal perceptions so that all post-18 pathways are seen as valid, aspirational, and respected.

Recommendations for Educators:

Immediate (within 12 months):

- 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.

Medium-term (1–3 years):

- 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.

Long-term (3–5 years):

- 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.

2. For Employers: Turning Equal Entry into Fair Outcomes

Employers play a crucial role in ensuring fair access to opportunities, progression, and inclusion in the workplace. Many have already introduced initiatives such as mentoring, anonymised recruitment, and awareness training. However, the Life Chances 2025 findings reveal that these efforts are often perceived as inconsistent, tokenistic, or ineffective in producing meaningful change. Young people continue to report a fear of discrimination, exclusion from networks, and pressure to assimilate. This highlights that the challenge is no longer the existence of initiatives but rather their effectiveness, consistency, and accountability.

Our previous research indicates that many young people from disadvantaged backgrounds are hesitant to pursue university education due to the perceived burden of student debt and uncertainty about graduate outcomes. For these individuals, high-quality apprenticeships and employer-led training schemes offer meaningful alternatives that can lead to long-term success and stability. By investing in well-structured, fairly paid apprenticeships that offer progression opportunities and parity of esteem with graduate routes, employers can play a transformative role in enhancing social mobility and bridging equity gaps in access to employment.

Employers must therefore focus not only on embedding fairness into everyday practice but also on expanding the range of accessible pathways into employment. This requires moving beyond short-term initiatives toward systemic reform that ensures inclusion, accountability, and genuine opportunity for all.

Recommendations For Employers:

Immediate (within 12 months):

- 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.

Medium-term (1–3 years):

- 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.

Long-term (3–5 years):

- 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.

3. For Policymakers: Building Stability, Equity, and Trust

The challenges young people face are not about personal failure. They are structural, built into systems of housing, welfare, healthcare and employment. Many policy initiatives already exist, but they are often fragmented, short-term, or underfunded. Young people report continued financial precarity, limited access to culturally competent wellbeing support and deep scepticism about EDI commitments. Policymakers must therefore move from piecemeal measures to coordinated action that is visible, accountable and sustained over time.

Recommendations for Policymakers – Financial Stability

Immediate (within 12 months):

- Guarantee emergency hardship funds for students and young workers.
- Raise the minimum wage for under-30s in line with the cost of living.

Medium-term (1–3 years):

- Introduce youth housing guarantees and rent controls.
- Pilot graduate debt relief schemes for disadvantaged groups.

Long-term (3–5 years):

- Scale housing and financial programmes nationally to reduce intergenerational inequality.

Recommendations for Policymakers – Wellbeing and Mental Health

Immediate (within 12 months):

- Fund culturally competent mental health services⁶ With input from diverse communities.

Medium-term (1–3 years):

- Develop combined mental health and career programmes for NEET young people.
- Invest in community-led safe spaces and networks.

Long-term (3–5 years):

- Establish national standards for equitable youth wellbeing services across education, employment and community settings.

Recommendations for Policymakers - EDI

Immediate (within 12 months):

- Require large organisations to publish pay, promotion and retention data by demographic.
- Protect funding for EDI programmes during economic or political shifts.

Medium-term (1–3 years):

- Link senior leader appraisals and budgets to EDI outcomes.
- Create youth advisory panels to co-design and review strategies.

Long-term (3–5 years):

- Build cross-sector resilience against political or international backlashes.
- Establish statutory duties for organisations to demonstrate sustained progress on inclusion.

⁶ - Culturally competent mental health services are designed to reflect the cultural and social contexts of diverse communities, improving access and outcomes for under-represented groups (Centre for Mental Health, 2021).

Looking Towards an Inclusive Future

This generation is clear: young people want education systems that support success, job markets that reward potential over privilege, and institutions that deliver fairness in practice. By sequencing these recommendations into immediate, medium-term, and long-term actions, we demonstrate that systemic change is achievable and measurable. Acting on them is not only about supporting young people; it is about unlocking national talent and building a fairer, more resilient society for all.

To overlook these findings and recommendations is to knowingly waste talent, exacerbate inequality, and alienate an emerging electorate. These young people are not asking for charity. They are asking for fairness, transparency, and the opportunity to thrive in a society that matches their efforts with opportunities. If there is one message that funders, policymakers, and education and employment stakeholders should take from this report, it is this: listen with the intent to act. These voices have spoken clearly. **The next move is ours.**

-End-

Appendices

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Full Methodology

Study Design and Purpose

The Life Chances research programme, commissioned by Blueprint for All, comprises two survey waves (2021 and 2025) designed to capture the experiences, aspirations, and perceptions of young adults in the UK. The central purpose of both surveys was to understand how race, socio-economic background, and intersecting identities shape opportunities in education, employment, and public life.

The original 2021 survey sought to assess the immediate impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on disadvantaged young adults' access to education and professional careers. The 2025 follow-up builds on these findings by tracking longitudinal shifts and examining post-pandemic recovery, persistent structural barriers, and emerging anxieties. Taken together, the two datasets offer a rare comparative lens on the lived experiences of minoritised youth during a period of significant socio-political transition.

Data Collection

Life Chances 2021 Survey

- Conducted by Censuswide between 25 March and 30 March 2021
- Sample size: 502 participants aged 18-24
- Eligibility: Participants who had attended or were currently attending university
- Definition of disadvantage: Receipt of free school meals during schooling
- Mode: Online self-completion questionnaire

Life Chances 2025 Survey

- Conducted by Censuswide between 28 March and 3 May 2025.
- Sample size: 500 non-white participants aged 18–30
- Recruitment targeted ethnically diverse and socioeconomically disadvantaged groups
- Sampling achieved diversity across gender identity, ethnicity, income background, educational background and UK region
- Mode: Online survey (self-administered), with mixed closed- and open-ended items

Comparator 2025 Survey

- Conducted by: Censuswide between 28-31 March 2025
- Sample Size: 1,000 nationally representative UK adults aged 18 and over
- Sampling Method: Stratified random sampling to achieve a nationally representative profile by age, gender, region, and socioeconomic status
- Survey Mode: Online self-completion survey

Focus Group

Conducted by Blueprint for All, one session with non-white participants (18-30), providing qualitative depth through discussion of lived experiences.

Glossary of Terms

Comparator sample

A group of people used to compare findings from the main sample to the wider UK population.

Demographic group

A group of people categorised by shared characteristics such as age, gender, ethnicity, or income.

Disaggregated data

Data that is separated into sub-groups (e.g. by gender or ethnicity) to understand patterns better.

Early career

The first few years after entering the workforce are typically spent following the completion of education.

Ethnically diverse

A term used to describe individuals or groups that come from a variety of racial and cultural backgrounds.

Equity vs. Equality

Equity refers to providing individuals with the resources they need to succeed, whereas equality entails treating everyone fairly and equally.

Free school meals (FSM)

A UK government programme that provides meals to school children from low-income families. Often used as a measure of socioeconomic disadvantage.

Intersectionality

The way different aspects of a person's identity (like race, gender, and class) combine to create unique experiences of discrimination or privilege.

Labour market

The supply and demand for jobs, including how people find work and how employers hire.

Lived experience

Knowledge gained through direct, personal experiences, rather than data or statistics.

Minoritised

Groups that are marginalised or placed in a minority position by social, political, or economic systems, not simply by population numbers.

NEET

Acronym for 'Not in Education, Employment, or Training'; used to describe young people not currently engaged in work or study.

Perceived fairness

How fair or just something feels to people, even if the facts or outcomes may differ.

Post-pandemic recovery

The period after the COVID-19 pandemic focused on rebuilding economic, social, and health systems.

Socioeconomic background

A person's social and economic position, typically based on income, education, and occupation.

Structural barriers

System-level obstacles that hinder the success of certain groups, such as discrimination or unequal access to resources.

Tick-box EDI

Refers to diversity and inclusion efforts that appear to be symbolic or superficial, rather than genuine or impactful.

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