

# A Generation Under Strain

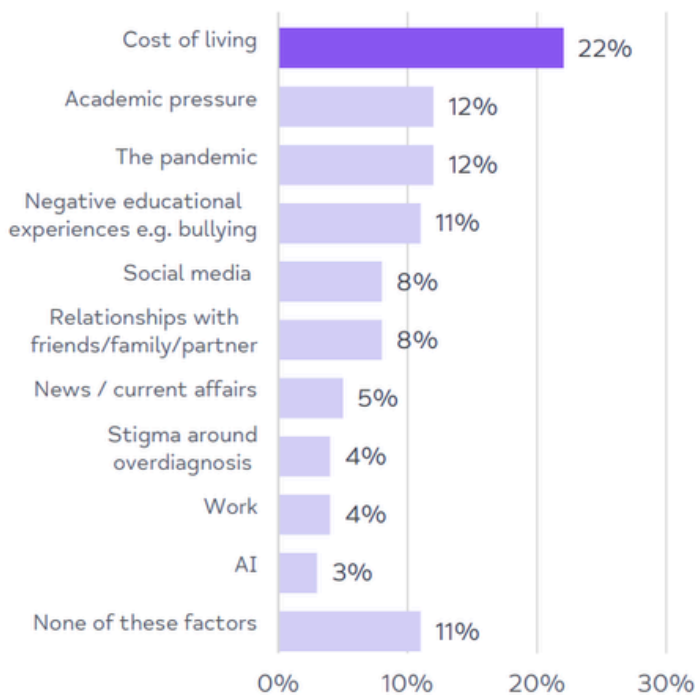
Supporting Young People in  
a Changing World

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## The Impacts Cost of Living on young people

Overall, cost of living has been an underlying cause in lots of the negatives that young people experience in their day to day lives. In 2025, Young Minds reported in a survey that cost of living affected young people's mental health more than other problems such as academic pressure, with 22% stating it was the biggest impact (Young Minds, 2025). Moreover, Young Minds also found that young people as young as 11 from low-income families are 4 times more likely to have a mental health problem. Furthermore, young people have experienced high household costs with rents having soared by 6.7% in the past year to an average of £1,344 a month (Herts Young Homeless, 2025). As a result, almost half (47%) of young people are unable or just about managing to make ends meet each month (RSA, 2024). Consequently, these pressures that young people experience can also be felt in wider society. With 75% of young people being in some form of debt by the time they turn 22, it can be portrayed that young people will focus more on relieving the effects of economic hardship through prioritising mental and physical health. This has caused pessimism amongst young people for long term future goals with just 41% of young people believe others like them will ever be able to buy their own home, and only 51% think they will ever earn enough to support a family (RSA, 2024). This impacts wider society as it lowers birth rates, reduces economic growth, and puts more strain on physical and mental wellbeing services.



Graph showing which problems negatively impacted young people's mental health the most (Young Minds, 2025)

## Impact of Social Media on Young People

Social media has also had a profound mental impact on young people as well. The Office of National Statistics found that 27% of children who spent three or more hours on social media on a normal school day had symptoms of mental health problems, compared to 12% of those who spent no time at all (reference here). Mental health problems could stem from the increased exposure to cyberbullying, constant comparing of peers, and sensitive content that can be accessed by young people online. A survey found that 27% of its respondents reported encountering sexually violent content or threats, causing young people to feel less safe online. Furthermore, nearly half of young people (11 to 18), as a result of the comparing to peers in places, report that they regularly feel lonely. This has caused social media to normalise difficulty for children and young people to navigate issues such as community safety, identity, and belonging (Sam Gichki, Manchester, Youth Advisory Group Member) (Department for Culture, Media, and Sport, 2025). This growing body of evidence underscores the need for more robust safeguarding measures, clearer platform accountability, and targeted support systems to protect young people's wellbeing in an increasingly online world.



# Young People and Employment

The amount of unemployed among young people is increasing. In 2026, the Office for National Statistics reported that 928,000 young people weren't in education or employment, the highest recorded number in 12 years (BBC News, 2026). This is due to the fact that opportunities for young people are "less plentiful", and combined with "more remote, more automated" recruitment processes means there are fewer opportunities. This has especially impacted young people with additional needs and young people from minority backgrounds too as they need increased opportunities the most due to living in more deprived areas. Furthermore, of those young people in work 47% say they have experienced an increased workload and 49% say they are contacted outside of work hours at least some of the time (Youth Employment UK, 2025). Young people are also worried about the future of employment, with more than half (53%) fearing AI will take their jobs (Youth Employment UK, 2025). This has increased fears of insecurity and exclusion rather than boost hopes for innovation which young people should have. There is also a gender divide with young people's hopes for the future, with young women reporting they are less likely to feel confident about career progression (41%) than young men (55%) (Youth Employment UK, 2025).

## Inside the Mind of a NEET - Report

### School and Education

- Young people almost unanimously agreed that school did not prepare them for work or adult life. This was true regardless of whether their overall school experience was positive or negative.
- A majority of young people in recent polls felt the curriculum failed to prepare them for work. 64% said soft skills like speaking would have a very positive effect on job applications, versus 18% who disagreed.
- Isolation rooms were repeatedly raised as harmful with young people placed alone for entire days with no support, which some described as "just depressing."
- Most NEETs had done little or no work experience at school.

### The Bedroom Generation

- Many young people spent not months but years at home after leaving school at 16 with short stints at college/university or work punctuated by long periods of nothing.
- When researchers asked young people aged 20–24 what they had been doing since leaving school, the answer "too often was 'nothing really.'"
- The system treats young people as either ready for full-time work or not ready at all. Many wanted to start with 5, 10 or 15 hours a week and build up — an option rarely available to them.

### The worry of transitioning

- Every major transition, whether it was primary to secondary, school to college, college to work, care to independent living, was described as a potential point of abandonment.
- Many college dropouts resulted from poor guidance: young people picked courses randomly, with no one helping them find the right fit.
- A Bradford student missed his electrician qualification by two marks. At 19, resitting would have cost around £3,000.
- Care leavers often hit the hardest during periods of transition, with lots often ending up in hostels without support and fragmented CVs. The result of these repeated moves has been misinterpreted by employers as unreliability.

## Employer gap and Rejection Economy

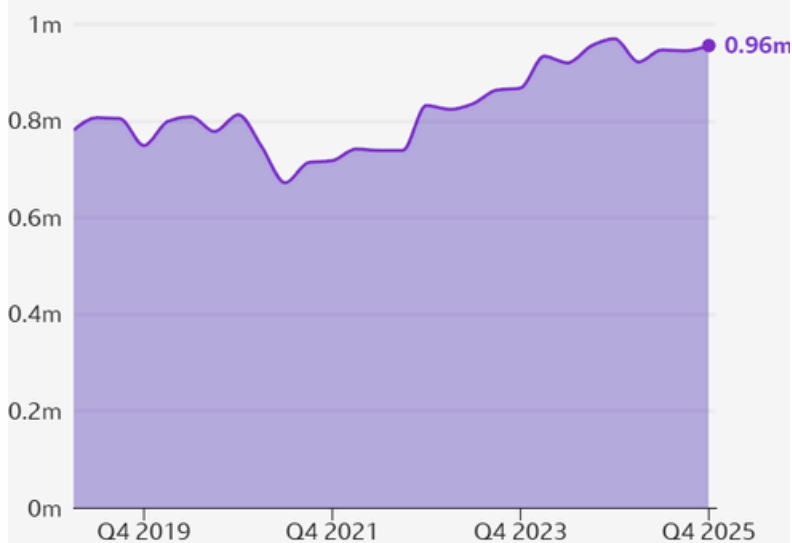
- A "Rejection Economy" is the process of submitting hundreds of applications and hearing nothing back. This is apparently down to a fear of litigation causing employers to rarely give feedback, even after interviews.
- Employers say they hire on potential whilst young people believe experience is what actually matters. Even though both have elements of truth, job descriptions are often written as if they want the "finished article" even for entry-level roles.
- One employer acknowledged: "Getting a job has almost become a skill in itself." Young people without networks or guidance are disadvantaged before they even start.

## Mental Health, Loneliness and Covid

- Many young NEETs did not sit GCSEs or A-levels during Covid. Lockdown cancelled year 10 work experience, closed volunteering positions, and created lasting habits of withdrawal.
- Young people described a specific kind of loneliness. They recorded it not totally isolation, but all contact mediated through screens, making eye contact, phone calls and walking into rooms increasingly difficult.
- In Belfast, bedtimes among young NEETs went round the room: midnight, 1am, 2am, 3am, 4am. These disrupted sleep patterns have become a key symptom of lost structure.

### Close to 1 million young people are Neet

16-24 year olds not in employment, education or training by quarter, 2019 to 2025



Source: Office for National Statistics

BBC

Graph showing  
NEET Young People  
(BBC News 2026)

## Young people and the pandemic

When it comes to the post-covid effects on young people, 76.2% of young people believed the government's response was either bad or very bad (Partnership for Young London, 2021). This is due to social aspects that were impacted by the pandemic not being addressed by the government that, as a result have severely limited young people. For example, around two thirds (66.6%) of young people said that the Covid lockdown impacted their employment and half (51.4%) said that their future employment plans had to change as a result of the pandemic (Partnership for Young London, 2021). Moreover, the governments disappointing response to the Covid pandemic allowed for the creation of conditions that caused more economic hardship, with one in five young people (20.2%) surveyed stating that their financial situations, because of the pandemic, meant they had to go without basic essentials (Partnership for Young London, 2021). Furthermore, the pandemic also had heavy impacts on mental and physical health, with young Londoners facing a mental health crisis as surveys show a third (34.4%) reporting wellbeing scores indicating depression, and a majority (75.5%) indicating poor wellbeing (Partnership for Young London, 2021). With all these problems being emphasised by young people, there have been calls for greater support through things such as mental health services. However, there is speculation of the efficiency of these youth services with nine out of ten (88%) (Partnership for Young London, 2021) of those surveyed say they do not feel that they have a say in how these services are set up and run.

## Young people and creativity

Young people's creativity isn't being utilised enough and in some cases is actually being suppressed. Since Covid, extracurricular activities that encourage creativity and participation for young people have decreased from 46% pre-pandemic to 37% post pandemic (Centre for Young Lives, 2025). Little has been done to encourage young people back into creative subjects, with the lack of funding of state schools resulting in 93% of children being excluded from arts and cultural education (Centre for Young Lives, 2025). This has resulted in 42% of pupils not entering GCSE's Music, 41% of schools not entering GCSE Drama, and 84% of pupils entering GCSE Dance. When it comes to employment of creative people, there aren't enough encouraging opportunities for young people with 86% of interns in creative industries being unpaid (Centre for Young Lives, 2025).

Culture enhances creativity through promoting economic, social, and personal wellbeing. Because of this, they also develop stronger communities through facilitating the ambitions, opportunities, and outlooks of local communities (Centre for Young Lives, 2025). However, not enough is being done to strengthen this with four out of five surveyed teachers saying more can be done to celebrate diverse cultures in schools. With less emphasis on culture, school pupils are more likely to disengage in their education.

## Young people and education

Since Covid, school absence has risen significantly with one in five pupils persistently absent from school. This has been happening due to poor mental health, with 68% of young people surveyed saying they have taken time off school due to negative mental health issues. This problem has been found more commonly in year 11 students, who are more likely to spend days off due to ill mental health (APPG, 2025). Furthermore, a study for the Department of Education found that 84% of the variation in GCSE attainment is explained by individual pupil factors or factors outside the school gates (Department for Work & Pensions, 2026). This shows that whilst schools do matter, they can only minorly shape student outcomes when it comes to attaining GCSE grades. This is because young people in school spend the majority of their time at home where their domestic learning environment plays a major part in the GCSE's they attain. And when families don't start from equal positions with some families enduring poverty, there must be more work done to improve the outcomes of young people. A study done of 8,000 young people in Bradford discovered that children who were not school-ready at ages 4 to 5 were nearly three times as likely to be NEET at ages 16 to 17 years old (Department for Work & Pensions, 2026). This emphasises the importance of looking after young people at home and getting them into education.