



Great Expectations

The next steps for a new generation

Dr Claire Mansfield



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Dr Claire Mansfield

NLGN

Foreword

As a leading public sector insurer, Zurich Municipal does far more than simply provide insurance for our customers. With much risk uninsurable, we are keen to help customers understand, manage and, where possible, mitigate the totality of risks they face. Much of this goes further than the here and now, and so identifying emerging and future trends forms a key part of our work.

Today, the public sector faces some of its greatest ever challenges. A combination of austerity, demographic change and technological advance is comprehensively and permanently affecting the sector's landscape. To successfully manage these long-term risks, challenges and opportunities, a focus on young people is required. They are tomorrow's electorate, the workforce of the future, drivers of businesses, and leaders of communities.

Yet, today's generation of young people are themselves facing significant and specific challenges. These include high unemployment, changes to the welfare system and increasingly unaffordable housing. Reductions in spending on services for young people will only magnify these issues in the coming months and years. Securing the future for young people should therefore be a key consideration for all public sector organisations.

This report seeks to provide further understanding of today's younger citizens in the context of austerity and cuts. It challenges oft-used stereotypes of a disaffected and even 'lazy' generation, and considers how the public sector can engage and work with these young people and their local communities. Manage this next generation correctly, and some important opportunities can be unlocked. However, failing to do so could mean young people will eventually live up to stereotypes and become disaffected. Ultimately, this would lead to a less cohesive society and further compound the challenges faced by the public sector.

We are delighted to sponsor this report. Though it does not claim to have all the answers, it is our hope that the report can provide real value to a key discussion for the public sector, and for younger generations to come.

Andrew Jepp, *Director of Public Sector, Zurich Municipal*

1 Introduction

Young people have been amongst the hardest hit by the economic downturn of recent years. At the same time, some parts of the media stereotype of youth as disaffected hoodies – crystallised in the riots of August 2011 – has become ever more ingrained. Yet there is much more to this generation than being the victims of unemployment or the villains of anti-social behaviour. This report explores the values, attitudes and behaviour of today’s young people, assessing the challenges and opportunities they face and proposes potential responses that we can employ to mitigate the former and realise the latter.

After one of the longest periods of economic growth in British history, the last five years have seen a dramatic downturn, economically and socially. Although the unemployment figures are significant across the whole population, young people have been particularly affected by the stagnation of economic growth. Although the UK has fared better than other European countries, the youth unemployment figures are still daunting: in the period July - September 2012, 963,000 young people aged 16-24 were unemployed.¹

These challenges emerge against the backdrop of a large scale reduction in the public services available to young people. Government is radically reducing the capacity of the state, in order to make £6.2 billion of savings and to reduce individual dependency, transferring risk to individuals and communities. This reform programme will have a lasting impact on today’s young people. Hikes in university fees and cutbacks to youth services, amongst other changes to the welfare state, will reduce the opportunities available to young people and increase the proportion of young people falling through the net and never recovering.

High youth unemployment and the perception of high rates of youth crime in the UK² has led to the persistence of negative views of young people often

¹ <http://www.parliament.uk/briefing-papers/sn05871.pdf>

² Home Office British Crime Survey. <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/publications/science-research-statistics/research-statistics/crime-research/hosb1011/hosb1011?view=Binary>

described as 'lazy', or as 'hoodies' and 'louts'. An EU social survey involving 57,000 interviewees found that young people in Britain are less likely to be viewed with respect and more likely to be viewed with contempt than in any other European country. Britain is also less likely to view our young people as friendly, competent or possessing 'high moral standards'.³

The riots in August 2011 became totemic of the perceived moral decline of the young. But Britain's youth have rioted before, in the 1930s as much as the 1980s, and then, as now, extreme cases make bad guides to future behaviour. For this reason, NLGN set out to explore the values, attitudes and behaviour of today's young people as a whole, to investigate whether they differ from previous generations in any meaningful way. We wanted to understand, beyond the headlines and the moral panics, what makes the vast majority of today's young people tick. In doing this we have deliberately looked at the attitudes and actions of young people as a whole. This is not a report about young people who are especially vulnerable or troubled, but rather an indicator of the risks and opportunities that the next generation may pose for society as a whole.

Contrary to the popular stereotype of 'the youth of today', being presented as a 'problem', we found that the views of this generation are rarely different to those of previous generations of young people; in fact, this generation tends more towards industrious aspiration. The findings of this report suggest that, rather than being concerned about the moral decline of our young citizens, we need to capitalise on the opportunities that these high aspirations present and particularly make use of the strong connection to their local area that was found.

However, we have also identified a number of risks that need to be addressed. Future citizens may experience what we call an 'expectation gap' – when the aspirational youth of today, have not, and cannot achieve their hopes and expectations. There is a danger that this 'expectation gap' may lead to resistance, withdrawal or disengagement from society. Clearly there is a role for local government, along with wider civil society, in developing support and opportunities now to see off these long term risks.

³ Intergenerational Foundation (2011). http://www.if.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2011/08/The_Poor_Perception_of_Younger_People_in_the_UK_17Aug3.pdf

The aim of this report is to understand the longer term implications of the changing values and characteristics of our future citizens, and to forecast the opportunities, as well as the risks, that these present to society. This report can be considered in three parts. First, it examines in detail the values, attitudes, and behaviour of today's youth, it will then continue to examine the risks and opportunities that these attitudes and behaviours present, before finally giving recommendations that will help offset the risks whilst seizing on the opportunities.

2 *Values, attitudes and behaviours - what's changed?*

The views of this generation are, in fact, rarely different to those of previous cohorts of young people. When the views do differ, it is not because young people today are less 'moral' than older generations, but often because they tend to be more conservative in their attitudes and behaviours. Today's youth tend towards industrious aspiration, rather than expecting something for nothing.

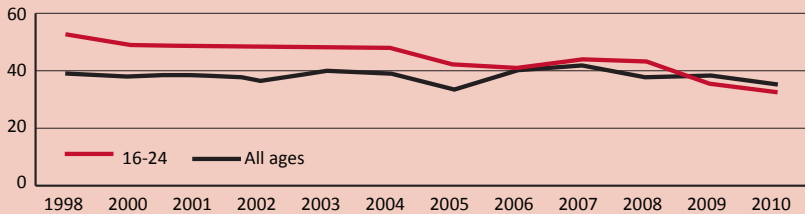
There have been a number of changes in both attitudes and behaviours that lead us to believe that, contrary to expectations, this generation could be considered less socially liberal, or at least less libertine, than previous generations. We looked at data on sex and drugs, and on crime and punishment, to assess the real extent of the 'moral decay' of the youth of today, which is so often caricatured in some parts of the media. What we found was an increasingly sober generation, whose views are not wildly different from those of their parents.

The following charts demonstrate the changing (or not) values and behaviours of young people and reveal their attitudes towards civic engagement and responsibility.

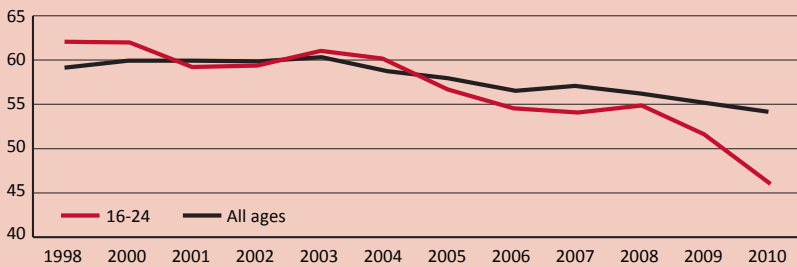
2.1 Values and behaviours

Alcohol and Drug Use

Despite the media portrayal of binge drinking young people, alcohol intake, both on a regular basis and binge drinking, has reduced. As can be seen in Fig. 1 and Fig. 2, this has been observable for both young men and women.

Figure 1 Men that drank more than 4 units on at least one day last week

4

Figure 2 Woman that drank last week

5

The trends are similar for 11 -15 year olds: the proportion of school pupils who had never drunk alcohol rose from 39 per cent in 2003 to 55 per cent in 2010. Fewer than half (45 per cent) of pupils aged between 11 and 15 said that they had drunk alcohol at least once in their lifetimes, although the proportion who have tried alcohol at least once increases rapidly with age: from 10 per cent of 11 year olds to 77 per cent of 15 year olds.⁶

Following on from this, it is often assumed that young people will be much more liberal about drug use than other older groups, however the data shows that they are more concerned about drugs than the population at large. Fig. 3

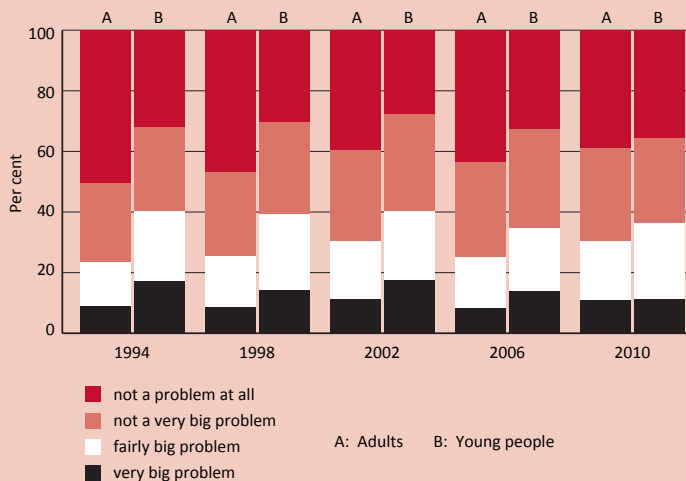
4 The NHS Information Centre (2012). [http://www.ic.nhs.uk/statistics-and-data-collections/health-and-lifestyles/alcohol/statistics-on-alcohol-england-2012-\[ns\]](http://www.ic.nhs.uk/statistics-and-data-collections/health-and-lifestyles/alcohol/statistics-on-alcohol-england-2012-[ns])

5 The NHS Information Centre (2012). [http://www.ic.nhs.uk/statistics-and-data-collections/health-and-lifestyles/alcohol/statistics-on-alcohol-england-2012-\[ns\]](http://www.ic.nhs.uk/statistics-and-data-collections/health-and-lifestyles/alcohol/statistics-on-alcohol-england-2012-[ns])

6 The NHS Information Centre (2012). http://www.ic.nhs.uk/webfiles/publications/003_Health_Lifestyles/Smoking%20drinking%20drug%20use%202010/Smoking_drinking_and_drug_use_among_young_people_in_England_2010_Full_report.pdf

demonstrates that over the last two decades, around 60 per cent of 16-24 year olds have consistently considered the use or sale of drugs not to be a problem, and while there has been a slow increase in concern among the population as a whole, young people are still markedly more concerned about drug use.

Figure 3 Attitudes towards drug use



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Drug use itself has decreased among young people, from 48.6 per cent in 1996 to 40.1 per cent in 2010/11. In 2010/11, 6.6 per cent of young adults had used Class A drugs in the last year, compared with 9.2 per cent in 1996.⁸ Drug use has also decreased for younger children: in 2011, 17 per cent of 11-15 year olds had ever taken drugs, compared with 29 per cent in 2001.⁹

These encouraging trends on drug and alcohol use could have a number of causes. Those we spoke to during our research felt that both national and, particularly, local drugs and alcohol awareness campaigns had influenced these figures. There are other factors too. One councillor noted that the price of drugs and alcohol is now too expensive for young people and some

7 British Crime Survey

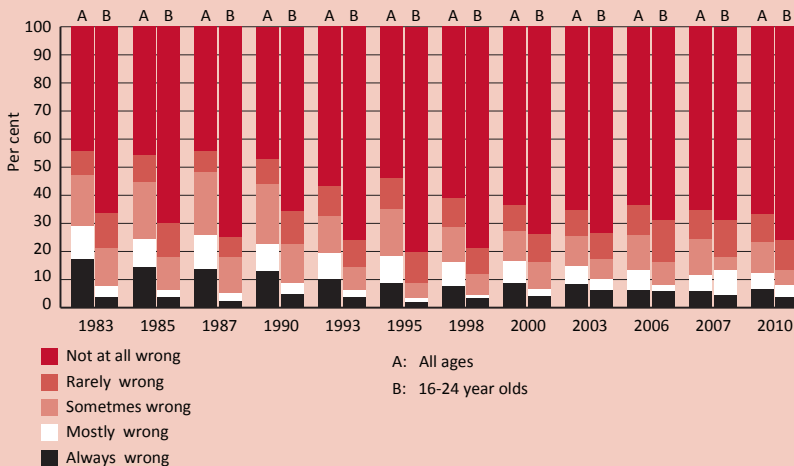
8 Eastwood, P (2011). NHS The Information Centre. Statistics on Drug Misuse: England. http://www.ic.nhs.uk/webfiles/publications/003_Health_Lifestyles/Statistics%20on%20Drug%20Misuse%20England%202011/Statistics_on_Drug_Misuse_England_2011v3.pdf

9 Valdeep et al., (2012). Smoking, Drinking and Drug Use Among Young People in England in 2011 NHS The Information Centre. <http://www.ic.nhs.uk/pubs/sdd11fullreport>

drugs, such as cocaine, are seen as an 'old person's' drug. It is also possible that immigration has played a part in these figures falling. Many immigrants have more conservative views towards drugs and alcohol and these will influence the overall statistics.

Marriage and premarital sex

Figure 4 Attitudes towards premarital sex



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The traditional view of marriage as the gateway to adulthood and independence has become less prevalent over the last generation. The attractiveness of marriage used to lie partly in the fact that it provided 'a package of rights' guaranteeing immediate transition to adulthood, however it is now more socially acceptable to set up home and have children with a partner, without getting married.¹¹ This has naturally affected young peoples' views on premarital sex. Young people have remained more liberal than the overall population in their attitudes towards pre-marital sex, however, the gap between the attitude of young people and all adults has narrowed. Teenage pregnancies are the lowest they have been since 1969 with reductions in conception rates for those under 16 and under 18.¹²

¹⁰ British Social Attitudes Survey 1986-2010

¹¹ One Plus One. <http://www.marriedornot.org.uk/PDF/ChangingMarriage.pdf>

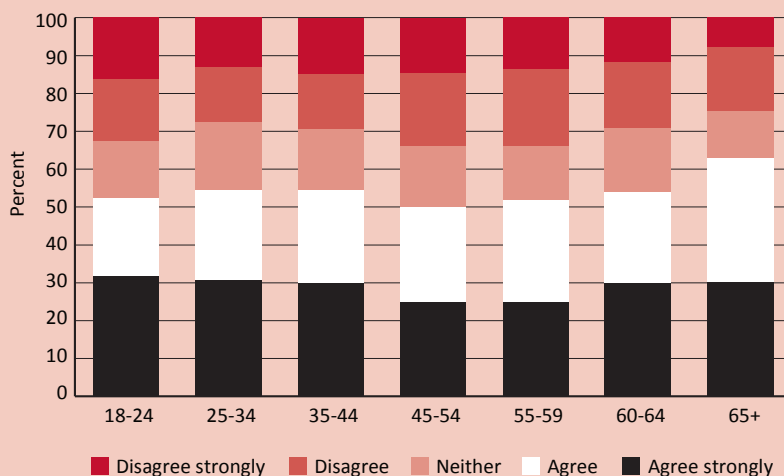
¹² Conception Statistics, England and Wales (2010). <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/vsob1/conception-statistics--england-and-wales/2010/index.html>

There has been a similar decline in abortions. However, as the reduction in teen pregnancies has been coupled with an increase in sexually transmitted diseases, it may in large part be due to the availability of new methods of contraception. In addition, from discussions with our focus groups, it was clear that the young people we spoke to had a moralistic attitude to relationships, and held a dim view of adultery: "I'm not religious, and think that morals come from inside. Some things are just wrong, like adultery."¹³

Crime

Attitudes towards crime have not seen significant changes since 1998, although there has been a convergence of attitudes towards the punishment of young offenders between young people and all adults. Support for capital punishment is similar amongst young people and adults of all ages (Fig. 5). Indeed, while the over 65s are the most likely to agree with the death penalty, 16-24 year olds are the most likely to agree strongly.

Figure 5 Sometimes the death penalty is the most appropriate sentence



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¹³ Sunderland focus group

¹⁴ British Social Attitudes Survey 1986-2010

Faith

Young people tend to be less likely than their predecessors to define themselves as religious and to identify with communities of faith. This was evident in the 2011 census results when those stating they have 'no religion' increased by 10 percentage points from 15 per cent in 2001 to 25 per cent in 2011. Other studies have also shown an increasing proportion of the population stating that they have 'no religion' and, in particular, noted that a higher proportion of young people than the general population state that they have 'no religion'.¹⁵ Since people tend to maintain this characteristic as they get older, the proportion of people in Britain who see themselves as belonging to a religious group will, likely, continue to fall over time.¹⁶ The implications of an erosion of religious belief and association are unclear. However, we do know that only 50 per cent of those young people who belonged to no faith group reported that their life had a sense of purpose, compared with 51 per cent of Sikhs, 61 per cent of Christians, 62 per cent of Hindus, 64 per cent of Jews, and 68 per cent of Muslims.¹⁷

Activities

We also looked at data on the way that young people spend their time on a normal day. Around 50 per cent of young people spend time either working, or looking for work (Fig. 6). Unsurprisingly, there is more of a variety in the range of activities NEET (not in education, employment or training) young people take part in. In particular, a high percentage of NEETs (69 per cent) and non-NEET (31 per cent) state that one of their main daily activities is 'surfing the internet'. This generation of young people are perhaps the first 'digital natives', never having known a world without the internet. They grew up with social media and it is a dominant presence in their lives, a large part of which are lived online. The internet has overtaken the television, both in terms of the attention of the young that it absorbs and as the perceived cause of the 'moral decay' of children and teenagers. This has prompted a number of concerns regarding the long term influence of technology on behaviour, including a loss of empathy, a focus on instant gratification, shortened attention spans, and greater impatience.

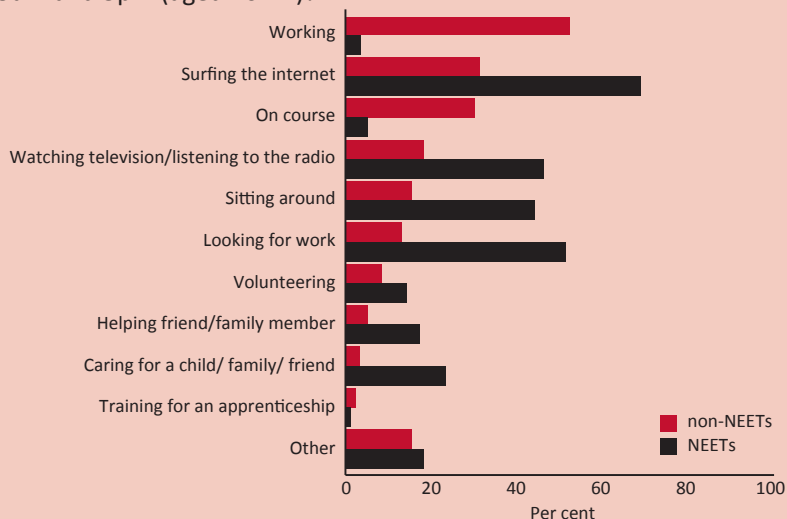
¹⁵ British Social Attitudes Survey 1986-2010

¹⁶ Park, A. (2000), 'The generation game', in Jowell, R., Curtice, J., Park, A., Thomson, K., Jarvis, L., Bromley, C. and Stratford, N. (eds.), *British Social Attitudes: the 17th Report*, London: Sage.

¹⁷ Robbins, M and Francis, Leslie J (2010). "The Teenage Religion and Values Survey in England and Wales: an overview" *British Journal of Religious Education*. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01416200.2010.498623>

There are also relatively long-standing concerns about an emerging digital literacy gap. But this is to overlook the opportunities of technology for fostering new skills employment and for navigating the services and relationships of the future. While it is clear that social media and the internet revolution will have differential impacts on different groups of young people, with a potential for the formation of digital skills gaps, it is too early to tell whether the fact that NEETs spend most of their day online is a cause for concern or for hope.

Figure 6 What are the main activities that make up your day between 9am and 5pm (aged 16-24)?



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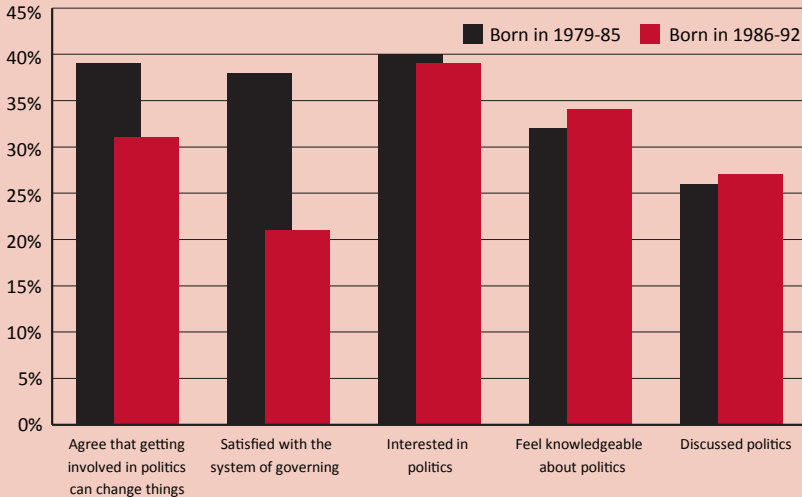
In summary, our analysis of young people's values and behaviours suggests that this is a generation of 'upright citizens'. Young people are drinking less, taking fewer drugs and are no less strict on punishing criminals than previous generations. There is an early indication that while young people may not be involving themselves in formal institutions and ties such a religion or marriage, this does not seem to impact on young people's sense of duty, morals or purpose. The next section will specifically look at young people's attitude and engagement with their local area and political life.

2.2 Civic engagement and responsibility

Discerning democrats?

There is a widely-held view that today's generation of young people is unwilling to participate in the political process and increasingly places a lower value on doing so. However, data collected from several cohorts of young people shows that – while by no means a majority – this generation is just as interested in politics as their predecessors were 20 years ago. For example, well over a third remain interested in politics and there has been a slight increase in the number of young people that feel knowledgeable about political issues.

Figure 7 Attitudes towards politics



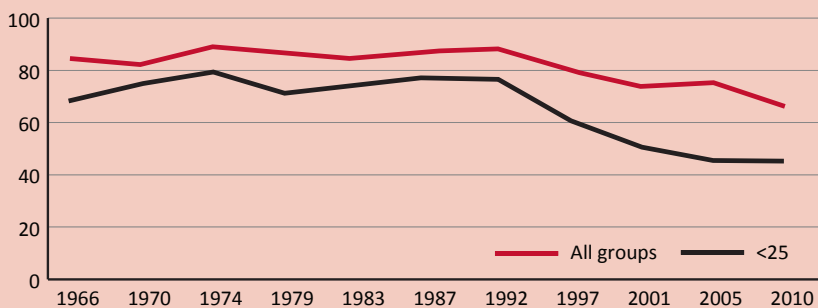
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That said, there is a clear and growing disillusionment with the current political system. This is not, of course, solely a trend of young people but

that of the UK population on the whole; however the speed at which disengagement from formal politics is occurring among young people is remarkably fast. The same study found that satisfaction with the system of government has almost halved compared with the preceding cohort.

Another key indicator of political engagement is the level of participation in elections. Again this has been falling for the general population, but general election turnout has decreased faster for under 25 year olds than it has for other age groups. This is not a general disengagement; in 2011, the majority of young people still said that they feel a sense of satisfaction when they vote and see it as a duty of their citizenship; but 32 per cent of young people in the same survey said that “most elections are just a big waste of time and money” compared to 24 per cent that agreed with the statement in 2002.²⁰

Figure 8 General election turnout

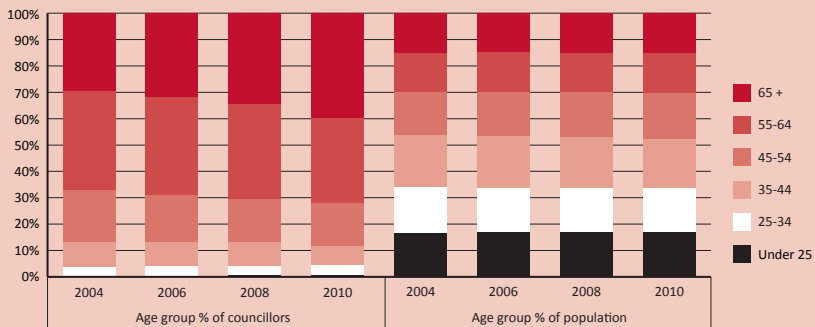


It is apparent that this alienation from the mainstream political system is deep-seated. While over 40 per cent of young people still turnout for general elections, only 13 per cent feel that they have a meaningful channel to influence politics compared to 75 per cent who do not.

²⁰ Nottingham Trent University (2012) Young people and politics in Britain. http://www.academia.edu/1895860/Young_People_Political_Participation_and_Trust_in_Britain

This disengagement could be a result of how unrepresentative politicians are of young people. The average age of MPs is 50 years old²¹ and the proportion of councillors over the age of 55 has been increasing in the last decade as the actual age distribution of the population in the UK has remained stable and this exacerbates the sense that “only older people get represented.”²² The vicious circle of political disengagement has potential to get even worse. As the number of young people turning out for elections decreases, the effort politicians will put into listening to the view of young people might decrease as well.

Figure 9 Age group % of councillors



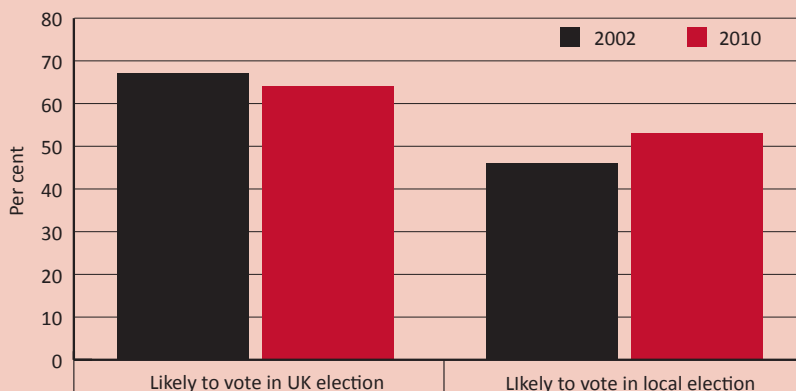
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There are glimmers of hope, however, at least at the local level where young people often feel more of a connection. The young people we spoke to in our focus groups expressed a real appreciation of the positive influence local politicians can have on the community. And while the likelihood of voting in general elections has decreased since 2002, the intention to vote in local elections appears to have increased, albeit from a low base.

²¹ Characteristics of the New House of Commons. UK Parliament Website. <http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/research/key-issues-for-the-new-parliament/the-new-parliament/characteristics-of-the-new-house-of-commons/>

²² Sutton focus group

²³ Calculated from National Census of Local Authority Councillors and ONS population projections. Accessed at: <http://new.lga.gov.uk/lga/core/page.do?pageId=15003600>

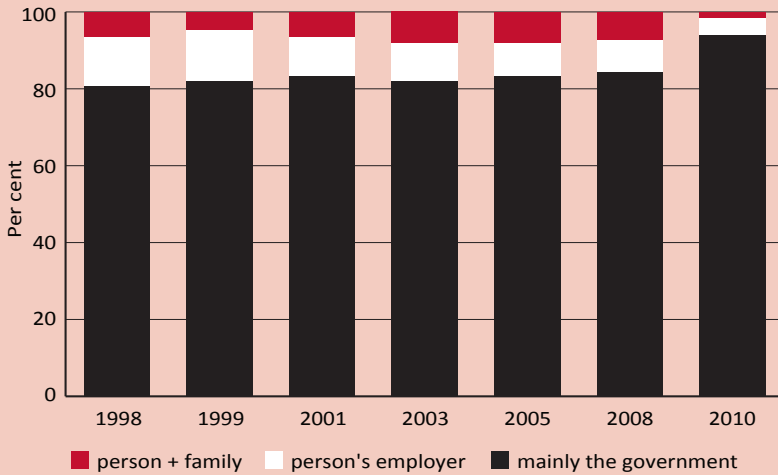
Figure 10 Voting intentions

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It is easier for voters, and especially young voters, to see how local issues will affect their lives and feel that their vote will count on a local level. Local authorities, in particular, can capitalise on this connection and attachment to the local area and use it as an opportunity to engage residents locally.

Public Spending

Young people's attitudes towards government and public service are, for the most part, in line with the attitudes of the wider population. Government priorities for 18-24 year olds remain unchanged and there is continuing support for health, housing and education to be the top three spending areas of government. In 2010, a higher proportion of 18-24 year olds believed that government should pay for healthcare than they did in 1998 (Fig. 11).

Figure 11 Who should pay for healthcare?

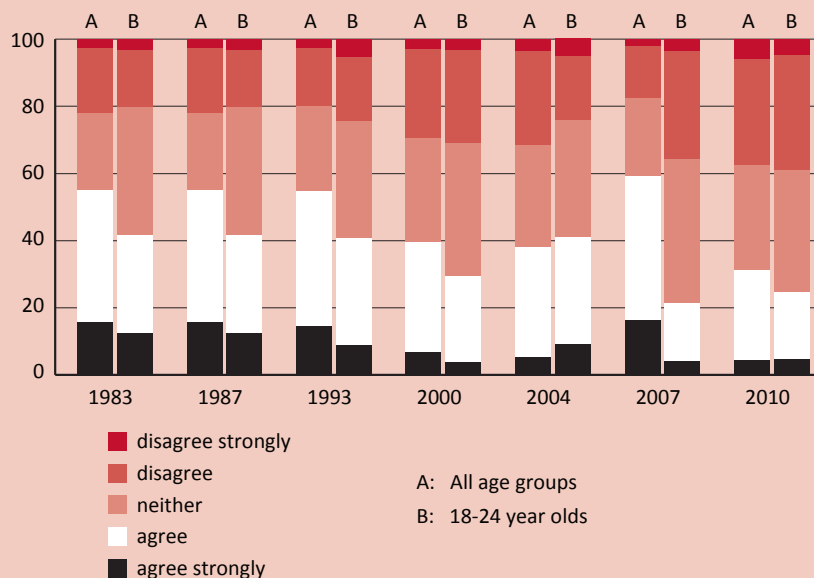
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However in relation to welfare spending, we have seen reductions in the level of support for unemployment benefits and pensions. This reflects a wider societal shift: support for welfare benefits has declined among young people and all adults alike, but young people have historically been less generous on welfare (Fig. 12). Perhaps this illustrates a longstanding tendency towards greater self-reliance among the young, certainly something we saw in the focus groups: when asked about the problems facing Britain, we were told that “people aren’t self-reliant, they rely on the state too much”.²⁶

²⁵ British Social Attitudes Survey 1986-2010

²⁶ Sunderland focus group

Figure 12 Government should spend more money on welfare benefits for the poor

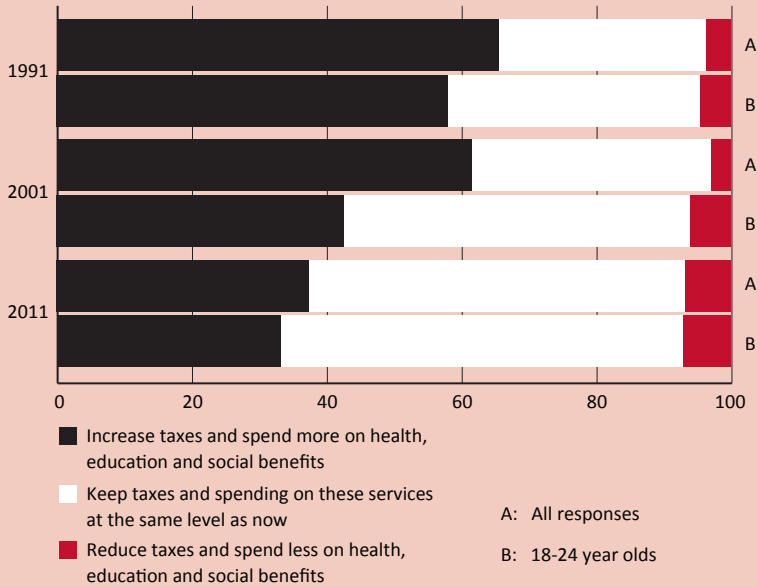


27

When asked about whether the government should increase taxes and spend more on benefits, young people expressed more conservative views than all adults. Only 33 per cent of 18-24 year olds believed in higher spending and higher taxes compared to 37.4 per cent of all adults (Fig. 13).²⁸

²⁷ British Social Attitudes Survey 1986-2010

²⁸ British Social Attitudes Survey 1986-2010

Figure 13 View towards taxes and spending

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A recent report by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation found that only 25 per cent agreed that “Most people who receive benefits now will make a contribution back to society in the future, through activities like employment or caring for others.”³⁰ This suggests a hardening of attitudes towards claimants and while support for welfare has decreased most rapidly amongst those better off,³¹ young people remain less likely to believe that government should be spending more money on welfare benefits.

If we look at support for different types of benefits, there is considerable volatility in the priorities of young people, especially when compared with

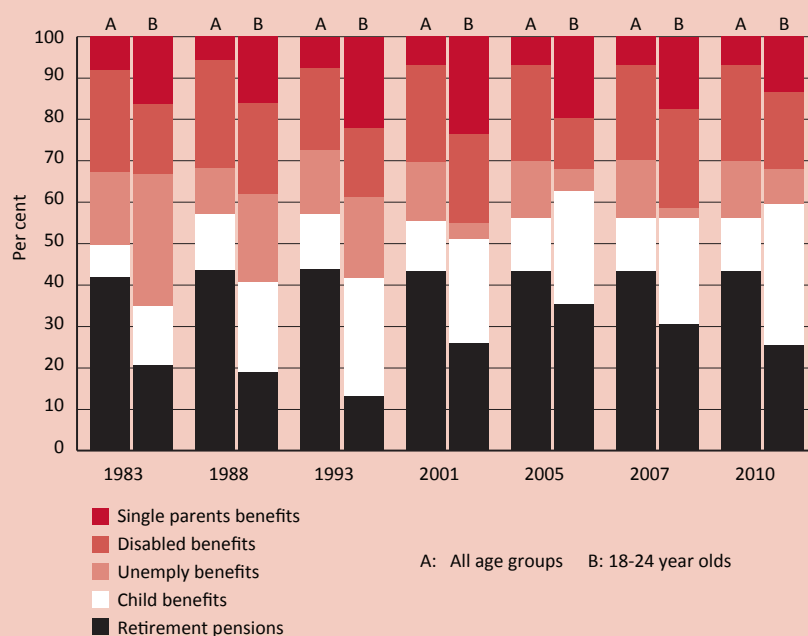
²⁹ British Social Attitudes Survey 1986-2010

³⁰ Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2009). Understanding Attitudes to Tackling Economic Inequality. <http://www.jrf.org.uk/publications/attitudes-economic-inequality>

³¹ British Social Attitudes 29. Anxiety Britain: Worries on cuts and public services present big challenges for Cameron's Coalition. <http://bsa-29.natcen.ac.uk/read-the-report/welfare/changes-in-views.aspx>

the relative stability of the priorities of the population as a whole. However, the most recent shift in young people's views has been to deprioritise spending on retirement pensions; declining support for spending on unemployment benefits appears to have been reversed since the economic downturn, and it will be interesting to see how the full effect of youth unemployment is reflected in the next set of figures.

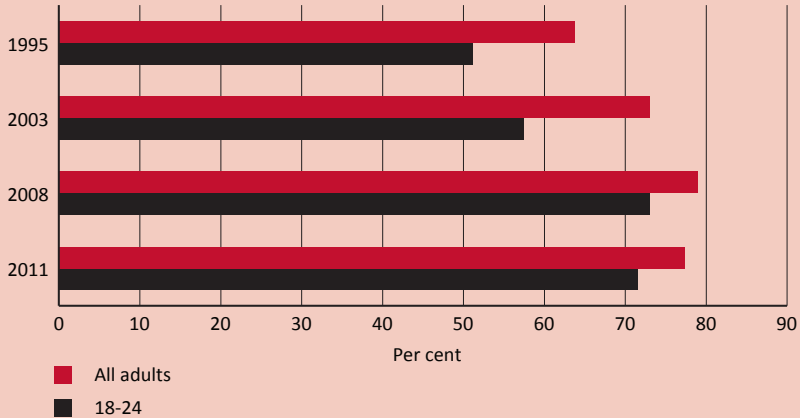
Figure 14 Priorities for social security spending



Perhaps unsurprisingly in an economic downturn, young people have also become less tolerant of immigrants (Fig. 15). Although the proportion of people who believe the number of immigrants to Britain should be reduced has slightly decreased between 2008 and 2011, over 70 per cent of young people and of the wider population are still in favour of reduced levels of immigration. The views amongst our focus group were that tolerance for immigrants depended on 'why they were coming here'.³²

³² Sutton focus group

Figure 15 Proportion of people who believe the number of immigrants in Britain should be reduced.



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Alongside an apparent intolerance of dependency, however, our analysis has identified a strong work ethic amongst young people. This was evident in the focus groups, where the idea of success was often framed in terms of a future career. At the same time, surveys show that the attitudes of 19 year old benefit claimants and non-claimants barely diverge: for example, the same proportion of claimants and non-claimants strongly agreed with the statement “having almost any job is better than being unemployed.”³⁴ Our focus groups demonstrated that many young people are highly aspirational and prepared to study hard and work industriously to fulfil their expectations.

We found young people to be self-reliant and to have a strong work ethic. This offers society a number of opportunities; these industrious attitudes can be seized upon to reinvigorate the economy. However, as will be discussed later, problems may occur when these industrious attitudes do not lead to the hoped expectations and aspirations. This, coupled with young people’s views on those that need to claim benefits and rely on the state, raise concerns that those in the next generation are at risk of feeling that they have failed.

³³ British Social Attitudes Survey 1986-2010

³⁴ Youth Cohort Survey (2011), <http://www.education.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SBU/b001014/b01-2011v2.pdf>

Pillars of the Community

The apparent commitment to self-reliance does not, however, equate to selfishness: this is not a distinctly 'me first' generation. Young people are no less concerned with community than their predecessors or their older neighbours. In the focus groups, we found strong attachment to the local area, strong family links, and strong support for community and sense of belonging.

In terms of attitudes to volunteering, 92 per cent of young people believe that volunteers are 'saviours' whereas only 8 per cent said that they were 'suckers'.³⁵ This shows that contrary to the stereotype of young people often portrayed in the media, they value community participation. Their behaviours do not always match their aspirations for volunteering, of course. Only 23 per cent undertake formal volunteering at least once a month,³⁶ however, these rates of volunteering are not significantly different from other age groups and young people are just as likely to get involved and aid the community as other generations. On average, young people spend 5 hours a week doing community work of some kind.³⁷ Later sections of this report will point to ways in which local authorities in particular can capitalise upon the community and voluntary work of young people to develop the already clear links that young people have to their local area.

2.3 The expectation gap

The analysis of this data has shown that young people are still suspicious of formal politics, and are not fastidious in voting at elections. They believe in community and many of them contribute to make the places where they live successful. They are largely clean-living, and are less likely to use drugs or alcohol than did their older cousins, or even their parents. They are intolerant of crime. They are hard-working and aspire to a good education, a good job and a good home. Unsurprisingly, they are immersed in new technology and media, and where their attitudes are changing, for example in relation to welfare benefits, this is largely with the grain of the population

³⁵ Voicebox. <http://voicebox.vinspired.com/>

³⁶ Department of Communities and Local Government Citizenship Survey (2010) <http://www.communities.gov.uk/communities/research/citizenshipsurvey/>

³⁷ Voicebox. <http://voicebox.vinspired.com/>

as a whole. Neither in the data nor in our focus groups have we found any evidence of the media stereotypes of disaffected, immoral and irresponsible hoodies. As with every generation, there are, of course, some that could fall into this category but for the vast majority this is not a something for nothing, selfish generation.

This suggests that the next generation are much like previous generations in terms of their values and attitudes, and in terms of their behaviours. Importantly, they're also not that different to their parents, something recognised by some of the young people we spoke to in our focus groups: "As I get older, I think I'll become more like my parents"³⁸ Where our analysis does suggest a marked difference is the emergence of a potential expectation gap. Previous generations either did not expect to see their living standards and quality of life exceed their parents or, more recently, were able to see many of their expectations in those terms met. This is perhaps the first generation in modern times to be faced with a very real chance of having lower living standards, and a lower quality of life, than their parents' generation, and yet the evidence suggests they remain optimistic about the future, and have high expectations for and of themselves.

The current generation have come of age during the long boom. They saw their parents' generation living an apparently limitless lifestyle in material terms; certainly one far beyond the means that will likely be available to them, at least in the near future. Given the (relatively) charmed nature of their early life, it is perhaps unsurprising that we found clear optimism about the future, a sense that success and fulfilment were not only achievable but within their control.

The young people we spoke to in the focus groups felt that their future success was within their hands: "If you want to succeed, if you make the effort, you can get on."³⁹ The majority were highly confident that they could control their destiny and, when asked to put a figure on the degree to which they could determine their own futures, responses ranged from 75 per cent up to 95 per cent. Young people are similarly optimistic about the prospect of sustainable home ownership early in life, and about the rewards

³⁸ Sunderland focus group

³⁹ Sutton focus group

of pursuing higher education in securing a good job. In the focus groups, success was often defined in terms of employment, both as something that would provide for a comfortable standard of living, but also job satisfaction: “Success is doing a job that isn’t just for the money”,⁴⁰ or even “doing something you love”⁴¹

Such optimism is both welcome and unsurprising – the confidence of possibility is rightly the province of the young. Aspiration is rightly valued, and we regard the ambition evident among this generation as something to celebrate. Yet there is a difference between aspiration and expectation, and where expectations do not match likely outcomes, there is a risk of disappointment.

We found concern that the disappointment of unrealised expectations was more likely to lead young people to withdraw and disengage from society rather than to become disaffected and angry. The possibility of social isolation and disengagement was considered to be the most likely consequence of the expectation gap and to have the highest impact. The prevalence of mental health problems has already been increasing over the last decade (1 in 4 adults will experience some kind of mental health problem in a year)⁴² and the psychological impact of failure, when success was felt to be dependent primarily on one’s own efforts, could be significant.

We have identified education and employment as well as home ownership as the two key areas for which young people have high expectations but, in reality, may not fulfil. Given the current economic landscape, we predict that many young people will not get the job or salary they expect and have educated themselves for. In addition, they may not be able to buy a home until much later in life. The next section will look more closely at these issues. We will suggest ways, given that we are now informed of young people’s values, attitudes and behaviour, that society and local authorities can act now to mitigate future problems and make the most of opportunities.

⁴⁰ Sutton focus group

⁴¹ Sunderland focus group

⁴² <http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/help-information/mental-health-statistics/UK-worldwide>

Risk register

Our analysis of the values, attitudes and behaviours of the next generation has shown that by and large, young people are upright and industrious citizens who are increasingly sober and self-reliant. The next generation presents a number of opportunities for society to seize upon. There are, of course, some risks that go hand in hand with these opportunities. In particular, we believe that, although a positive, self-reliant and industrious youth is an asset to society, steps need to be taken to ensure that today's youth can fulfil their expectations or that strategies are in place should they not. The table below, details the key areas that, from our research, we believe will present risks and opportunities for the next generation and society as a whole.

	Issue	Opportunity	Risk
Education and Employment	Young people are placing ever greater value on education and are optimistic about the reward of pursuing higher education in securing a good job	The general population will become more educated and this has the potential to increase social mobility and cohesion	There are a growing number of graduates and fewer graduate jobs. This could lead to a sense of failure and depression amongst those that have worked hard to get a 'good' job but have not secured one.
Housing	Young people are optimistic about sustainable home ownership; however, the number of mortgage approvals and first time buyers has been declining since the start of the economic downturn. Potentially there could be an increasing number of young people living with parents and greater reliance on parents for direct help with first time buys.	An increasing number of generations living together could reduce the growing needs to provide elderly accommodation and care	There is a risk that there will be an increasing class divide between those that can afford a home earlier in life and those that can't. This would have a negative effect on social cohesion and social mobility.

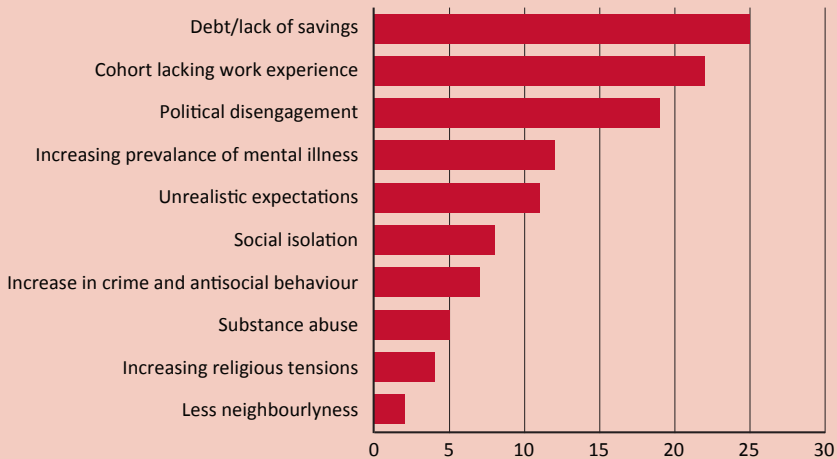
Civic Engagement	Young people are involved in their community and have a strong attachment and sense of belonging to their local networks and area. However, they are increasingly disillusioned and disengaged with formal political structures.	Opportunities for young people to become engaged on a local level could give them a sense of purpose that they may have lost from a lack of employment and independence.	Disengagement from formal politics could lead to a vicious circle of political engagement, where politicians are not involved with people because they do not turn out to vote. This could increase the risk of social isolation.
Attitudes and Actions	In general, young people have become less libertine in their views towards sex, drugs and alcohol. At the same time they have also become less tolerant of those claiming benefits and support for government spending on pensions and unemployment benefits has reduced.	These overall conservative views are clearly beneficial in terms of drugs and alcohol. Less reliance on benefits could also be positive, not only for the economy, but for people's sense of wellbeing.	In some cases, more conservative views indicated less tolerant views, particularly in regard to immigration and those on state benefits. Less tolerant views could potentially lead to a less socially cohesive society.
Sense of Purpose	Young people have high aspirations and a strong work ethic and believe that their future is in their hands.	A young generation that has high aspirations and actively wants to work and gain employment has the potential to help the UK out of the current economic circumstances and economic downturn.	In years to come, when this aspirational generation have not, and cannot, achieve their hopes and expectations this may lead to withdrawal, disengagement or resistance. The psychological impact of failure could be significant and could lead to mental health and depression problems.

3 *Local perspectives*

The ‘expectation gap’ between the lifestyle young people believe they will have and the reality of the lifestyle they can expect, has been identified as the clearest issue to come out of our analysis of the values, attitudes and behaviours of young people. Much of the response to the ‘expectation gap’ is far beyond the local authority’s control or influence and will need a change in cultural norms, the market and civil society. But there are some things that local authorities can do to offset risk and likewise some of these present opportunities for local authorities.

As part of our research, we asked local authorities what they felt should be their main priorities in planning for the next generation and how prepared they felt they were for the potential risks and opportunities to come. Seventy seven per cent of respondents felt that young people’s values, behaviours and expectations will present a challenge for local authorities by the time they reach 30 years old .

Figure 16 Local authorities’ main concerns for the next generation

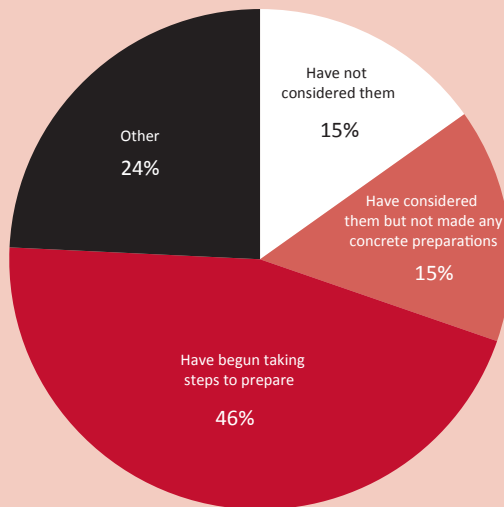


In particular, local authorities had an array of concerns for the next generation (Fig. 16). Key concerns related to young people having a lack of savings or high debt, a lack of work experience and a lack of political

engagement. Concerns that there would be an increase in criminal behaviour or a reduction in neighbourliness and social isolation, together contributing to disengagement with the community, comprised 17 per cent of total concern. The spectrum of concerns also included increases in the prevalence of mental illness, substance abuse and religious tensions.

Whilst these, undoubtedly, should be of concern, our research shows that the issues are more nuanced than simply issues of debt, work experience and political disengagement. These problems are more fundamentally tied into issues of education and employment and, as we have discussed, need to be dealt with as part of a wider expectation gap.

Figure 17 The approach of Local Authorities in responding to these challenges



Forty six per cent of the authorities surveyed had begun to take preparatory steps to prepare for the predicted future challenges for the next generation; 15 per cent of authorities had considered future challenges but had not made finalised preparatory steps; and a further 15 per cent had not considered such challenges (Fig. 17). Approximately 86 per cent of the authorities in question who had the response of 'other', appeared to have made more detailed consideration of the future challenges than the suggested stages of approach.

These included acquiring a deeper understanding of youth needs; creating strategies, e.g. establishing an independent commission and developing a three year corporate skills and employment framework; and turning understanding and strategies into action, for example directing funds and conducting outreach work.

From our survey, the top three steps being taken (encouraging apprenticeships, working with schools and raising community and political awareness) are all appropriate given the top three concerns of debt, lack of work experience and political disengagement.

Targeting training and employment was the most common step taken by local authorities in responding to the challenges presented by young people. More explicitly this included entering partnerships and collaborating with local organisations as well as assessing the employment needs of young people and facilitating appropriate development. Six local authorities gave examples of the steps they had made through working with schools. These included the promotion of charities who offer advice to young people at school fairs as well as the development of apprenticeship schemes. In terms of tackling political engagement, many authorities already promote ventures such as youth councils and one authority that we spoke to specifically directs its staff to spend some hours a week engaging with young people to encourage greater engagement. In addition to this, councils and politicians are also experimenting with new channels, such as social media, to gauge young people's views about their policy.

While these steps are undoubtedly useful, we feel that the expectation gap created by the attitudes and behaviours of the next generation present more nuanced risks and opportunities for local authorities. The next section will discuss how local authorities can address the risks presented by young people's expectations of education and home ownership (the two aspects that we feel will contribute most to 'the expectations gap'). Finally this report will discuss how local authorities can seize upon the opportunities presented by young people's attitudes, actions and behaviours.

3.1 Offsetting risks

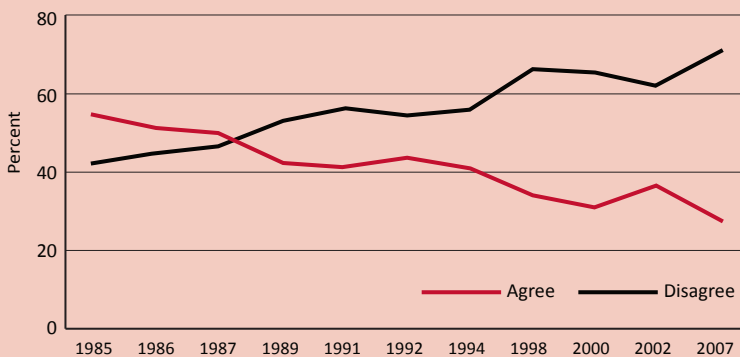
3.1.1 Education and Employment

Education has an important role to play in any society. An educated citizen can make essential, informed judgements about the way society can develop.

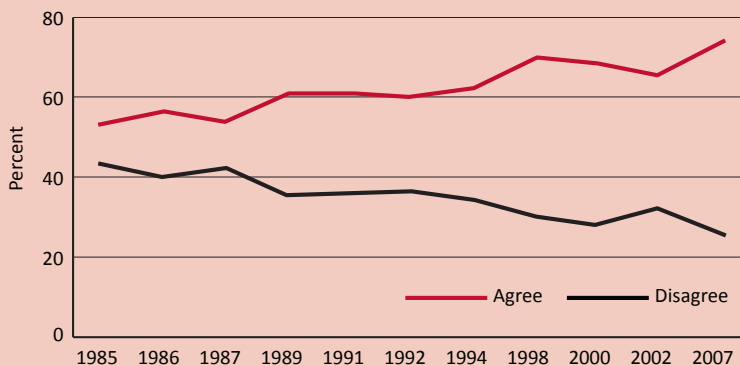
Since Blair's 'Education, education, education' speech, if not before, policy makers and public opinion have seen education as essential for the nation's economic success and social cohesion.

It is clear that this drive to greater education has, in many cases, worked. Young people are placing ever greater value on education, both at school and university. More 16-17 year olds disagree with the statement that "school has done little to prepare them for life when they leave school" and agree with the statement "school has taught me things which would be useful in a job" than at any point since 1987 (Fig. 18).

Figure 18 School has done little to prepare me for life after I leave school

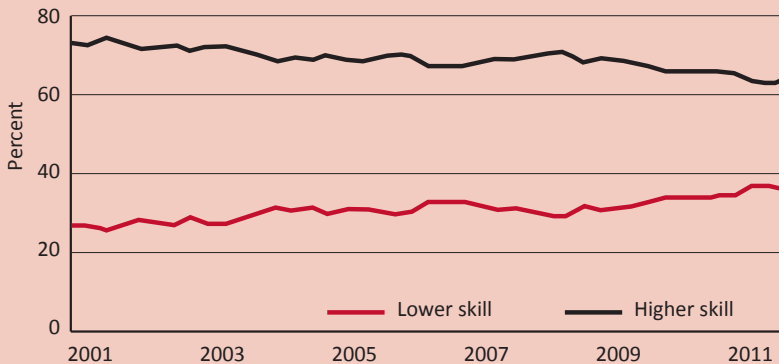


School has taught me things which would be useful in a job



University is now widely seen, by almost everyone, as a prerequisite for a good job in adult life. When we asked focus group participants whether they were put off going to university by the rise in fees, the common view was “No because a degree leads to higher wages, making it less difficult to pay off debts”; another was more blunt: “You can’t afford not to go to university”. The number of graduates has risen dramatically over the last 10 years. This rise is likely to continue as education is seen as an alternative to working when there are few job opportunities available. However, in reality graduates are increasingly taking on lower skilled jobs. The trend lines in the chart below are a telling indication of the widening expectations gap, and the disappointments to come.

Figure 19 Recent graduate employment by skill level of occupation



Today’s 16-25 year olds have high expectations of themselves and for themselves. This is evident in the confidence that the young people we spoke to had in their ability to control their own destiny and to achieve success: a good job, a nice car and a comfortable home. We heard repeatedly that, through hard work, application and their own ability, young people believed that the future was in their hands, that they could realise their aspirations. Yet, in a longitudinal study of young people between 2006 and 2009 only 7 per cent of 19 year olds had fulfilled their expectations stated when they

were 16, 3 years earlier.⁴³ As long as the economic downturn continues there are few reasons to believe that this situation will improve in the short term. The expectation gap between education and employment is clear, and measures need to be taken to minimise the damage that may be done if young people feel that after studying for many years, they fail to secure the employment that they want.

Parents, policy makers and employers place much greater emphasis on education. In many cases, a university degree is needed to secure a job that would never previously have required one. The more people that obtain university degrees, the more that people need university degrees to have a chance of progressing, and the more masters and doctorates are needed to set anyone aside from the crowd. With university fees set to throw new graduates into around £40,000 of debt as they graduate, the individual economic advantages and thus the societal social cohesion made possible by greater education are, perhaps, being challenged.

The high aspirations of young people are positive; however, we need to act to ensure that young people are aware that, in today's economic climate, a university education does not guarantee more lucrative employment, or indeed employment at all. We recommend that greater emphasis should be placed on fostering an individual's educational journey and illuminating all the many pathways open to him/her (rather than just focusing on academic achievements). In addition to this, for those that do still aspire to go to university we need to ensure that there are channels available to fund their education and secure employment afterwards. Changing the attitudes of young people, and indeed society, will not be easy. Traditionally, a university education set you up for life and differentiated you in the labour market from everyone else. Amongst many young people, aspiring to go to university has almost become the norm.

Fostering the Individual

Many of those that we interviewed during our research, noted that higher education is considered important to demonstrate that you are a success.

43 Youth Cohort Study 1986-2010

Most schools promote going to university and the number of students a school has ‘progressing’ to university is often seen as a mark of quality for a school. Whilst it is important that young people value their education, there is growing concern that schools need to foster the individual student’s journey more than has been done previously. It was suggested that a cultural change within society and schools are needed. In the 1980s the US psychologist Howard Gardner divided human intelligence into seven categories: kinaesthetic (broadly, athletic ability), music, visual-spatial, interpersonal (for example, social skills), intrapersonal (personal insight), linguistic (facility with words/syntax) and logical-mathematical and yet, the traditional intelligence test (IQ test) specifically measures linguistic, logical-mathematical and visual-spatial intelligences, the intelligences that broadly equate with academic ability.⁴⁴

Those that we interviewed felt that we needed to foster the individual’s journey more and focus on the array of skills that many students show. One stakeholder noted that he felt that children were born with an array of skills, but that after attending schools they felt that only the academic skills were important. He felt that schools need to foster the entrepreneurial spirit of some students. Students that demonstrate leadership skills and social skills need to be celebrated as much as those that achieve academic excellence. Economic downturns often breed innovation and it is these students that may come to the fore in the next 10 years, that is if they have not been made to feel a failure at school.

In order to focus on the individual’s journey, more emphasis needs to be placed on achievements outside of the academic e.g. setting up entrepreneurial ventures such as ‘mini-companies’ in schools or celebrating social and leadership skills of students. In particular, more attention needs to be given to the role of careers guidance in schools. A number of stakeholders noted that careers guidance teachers had themselves often followed the traditional school-university route and whilst they may be aware of other options, may not have first-hand experience. In a recent study by the Association of Colleges, of 500 teachers questioned, more than 8 in 10 felt that they did not have the appropriate knowledge

⁴⁴ Gardner, H., (1983), *Frames of mind: the theory of multiple intelligences*, Basic Books , New York.

to give jobs guidance. 'Half of teachers also admitted to having given bad past advice to one or more pupils and say they felt obligated to encourage pupils to stay on at their school post-16, rather than advising on alternatives. For the majority there was a sincere belief that staying put is the best option for students. However, research has also found that a quarter of respondents noted that advice was influenced by pressure from management and 16 per cent said they were motivated by a fear they might lose their job if student numbers declined.'⁴⁵

Careers guidance and advice needs to be reinvigorated in schools. It should have a prominent role on the timetable and the myriad of the possible career opportunities should be presented to students. The different pathways available should be presented to all students. Even if a particular career is not relevant for a student, it would be a useful exercise to ensure that students will value and understand all possible pathways that they or their peers may take.

Schools and local authorities need to work together with employers to ensure that young people are aware of all possible education and employment opportunities available to them. Over 93⁴⁶ per cent of teachers surveyed by the Association of Colleges felt that they want pupils to have better access to employers and businesses while at school. Employers can give career talks and opportunities of work experience. They should also work with the local authority to ensure that young people are aware of the businesses that plan to be located in the local area in the next 5-10 years. That way, young people can make an informed decision of the subjects and pathways that they may need to take if they wish to gain local employment. In addition to this, employers, given the spiralling levels of debt that graduates will soon find themselves in, need to be encouraged to reevaluate the often used minimum requirement of a university degree for employment. In some cases employers and young people alike may find it more beneficial to train school leavers for a specific role.

⁴⁵ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/teacher-network/teacher-blog/2012/nov/19/teachers-struggle-jobs-career-advice>

⁴⁶ Gardner, H., (1983), *Frames of mind: the theory of multiple intelligences*, Basic Books , New York.

Funding through university

However, there will rightly be those who, aspire to attend university to build on their education. Unlike previous generations who neither had to pay such high university fees, nor had the arduous task of pinning down an elusive job after they graduate – this generation will need to think more about funding their way through university than ever before. It is important that this issue is addressed, otherwise young people who had aspired to attend university, but are overwhelmed by the prospect of the debt they may face, may feel that they have no option but to not go to university. A number of possibilities are presented.

Local authorities and local businesses should more widely adopt schemes whereby they sponsor a student through university. Companies such as PwC and KPMG already run schemes such as these, but at present, many of these are within the fields of accountancy and business. These could be broadened by other companies to include engineering, medicine, science etc. Students that show aptitude for working in particular sectors, whether it is private business or local authority, could be sponsored to attend university. In return, students would spend part, or all, of their summer holidays gaining work experience from their sponsor. This offsets any debt that the student may incur, whilst also increasing the levels of work experience

Local authorities should facilitate and encourage students to take up part time work to fund their way through university. For example, the possibility of online micro businesses could be developed. As we have identified, young people spend much of their time online. In particular, setting up an internet business is monetarily relatively risk free. Local outlets to develop business plans and give advice should be offered free of charge to young people using the scheme to fund their education.

3.1.2 Home Ownership

As a result of reduced employment opportunities and also given the rising cost of home ownership we also predict an expectation gap between the home young people believe they will be able to afford in 10 years time and the reality of what they will be capable of buying, if they will be able to buy property at all.

The crisis of housing affordability of the past decade continues, despite the on-going economic downturn. While previous economic downturns were accompanied by large scale boosts in house building,⁴⁷ this has not been the case during the current economic downturn. The supply of new housing is still at 60 per cent of pre downturn levels,⁴⁸ but the problem for young people looking to own a home lies as much in their ability to get a mortgage as it does in availability of housing. The number of mortgage approvals for individuals has been declining since the start of the economic downturn and the likelihood of successfully being offered a loan is likely to decrease in the coming years.

In the recent census (2011), home ownership with a mortgage or loan decreased six percentage points from 39 per cent (8.4 million) in 2001 to 33 per cent (7.6 million) in 2011, while ownership outright increased by two percentage points from 29 per cent (6.4 million) in 2001 to 31 per cent (7.2 million) in 2011. Renting from the council decreased four percentage points from 13 per cent (2.9 million) in 2001 to 9 per cent (2.2 million) in 2011. Renting from a private landlord or letting agency increased six percentage points from nine per cent (1.9 million) in 2001 to 15 per cent (3.6 million) in 2011.⁴⁹ These figures indicate that, despite the growing population, the number of home owners has remained stagnant and in general a growing number of people are renting from private landlords.

Certainly, the proportion of first time buyers under 25 has been decreasing since 1990 (Fig. 20) and we have seen a much lower incidence of home-ownership amongst younger adults over the past 20 or so years (Fig. 21). Today, barely a fifth of 18-24 year olds are home-owners (17 per cent according to the latest YouGov survey).⁵⁰

⁴⁷ <http://www.centreforum.org/assets/pubs/delivering-growth-while-reducing-deficits.pdf>

⁴⁸ <http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/statistics/pdf/1967957.pdf>

⁴⁹ Census 2011

⁵⁰ Yougov (2012). British Future Survey Results. http://cdn.yougov.com/cumulus_uploads/document/5nfv7cj25l/YG-Archives-BritishFuture-YoungPeople-270712.pdf

Figure 20 Percentage of all mortgages to first time buyers in the UK by age group and average age of first-time buyers (1990-2009)

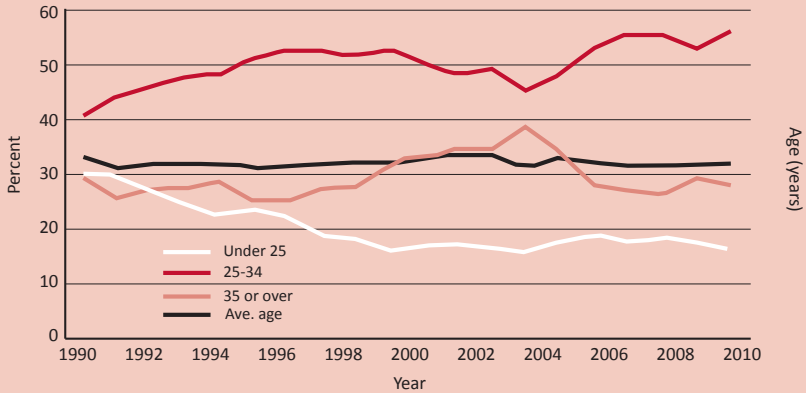
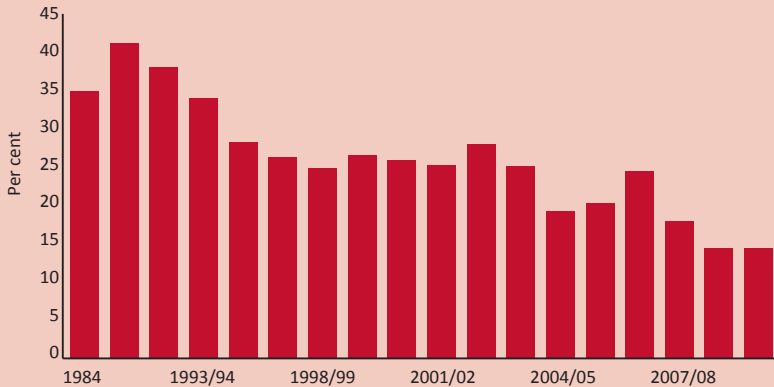
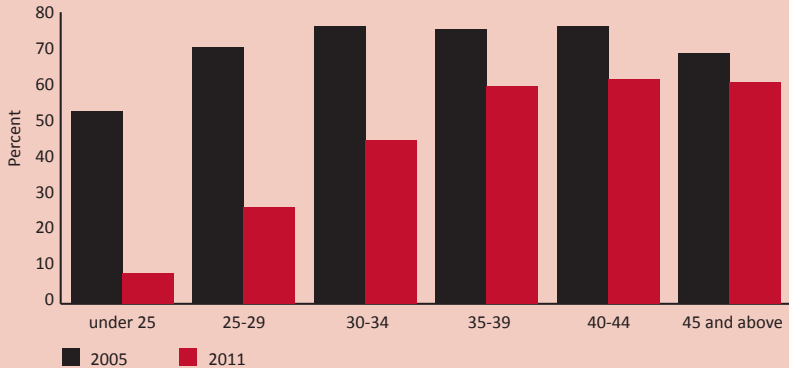


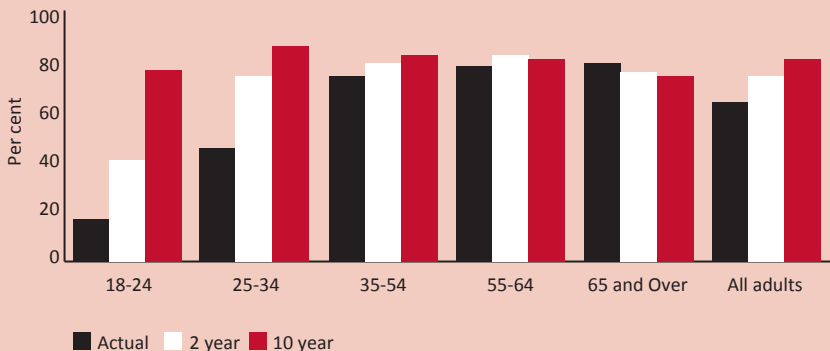
Figure 21 Rate of home ownership for 18-24 year olds



In particular, unassisted first time buys are now a small proportion of house purchases for those under 25 years of age (Fig. 22). It seems likely that many potential first-time buyers will continue to rely on their parents for direct help with the necessary deposit and/or indirect support via subsidised accommodation while savings can be built.

Figure 22 Unassisted first-time buyers by age, 2005-2011

Although there has been a decline in the degree of optimism over the last few years, there remains a gap between the expectations of young people and the realistic situation of home ownership in 10 years' time. If those currently aged 18-24 are to fulfil their 10-year home ownership aspirations, it would mean them achieving a much greater rate of home-ownership than their current 25-34 counterparts have done.

Figure 23 Preference for home-ownership in two and ten years time

As a result, the number of young people living with their parents is likely to continue to rise. Currently 77 per cent of 18 -20 year olds live with their parents, as do 52 per cent of 21-24 year olds.⁵¹ This will be further exacerbated if the government decides to cut housing benefit to young people as part of its plan to reduce the welfare bill.⁵²

As the economic downturn impacts on people's ability to find a job and purchase a home, their entry into adulthood may be delayed. Although the expansion of training and education in the last two decades has already factored into the trend, often young people will return home after education and live with their parents, potentially denying their parents important years without dependents. What is more, this trend has the potential to lead to a delay in family formation. There are a number of ways that local authorities can help ease this housing crisis, but a cultural change in the way society views housing and home ownership will also be needed. As outlined, young people feel that they can expect to own a home soon after they have left their parental home. For many it is an important step in becoming an adult. Also, in addition to this, owning a home is considered an important savings vehicle. Given the inability of young people to get on the property ladder it is essential that alternative saving mechanisms are considered.

For example, local authorities could link bond issues to renting, to create a long term savings vehicle to housing, particularly – but not exclusively – in the private-rented sector. Such bonds could be directly tied to specific new housing developments, comprising a high percentage of rented homes, with the proceeds allocated to the development itself or associated infrastructure. Tenants would pay into the bond through a surcharge on their rent, linking housing costs to the long term accumulation of capital in the same way that owner occupation and part-ownership do. Importantly, such schemes would make secure, high quality renting a more widely attractive tenure, with comparable advantages to owner-occupation. Furthermore, they would give renters a stronger rootedness in their locality through their financial stake in it.

⁵¹ Yougov survey

⁵² <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-18567855>

It is, then, clear local authorities need to start planning for the changing housing needs. From our research it is apparent that, to date, local authorities have been planning for the needs of an ageing population, but from now on, this will need to be done in tandem with planning for the younger generation. Local authorities will need to analyse the specific demographics of their own area to assess the most appropriate housing plan for their area.

In some areas, where parents have the space and can afford to continue to accommodate their children, intergenerational housing could be considered, and may also offset the challenges of caring for and accommodating the elderly. Some of those that we interviewed noted that ‘intergenerational housing’ may even be healthier. One issue that would need to be addressed for this to succeed, however is an attitude, amongst young and old alike, that young people have somehow failed should they be living with parents. One particular stakeholder noted that, outside Western culture and even some European countries such as Italy, living with parents is a social norm. The feeling amongst stakeholders was that, should it become the social norm for young people to stay at home longer, then the less it would be seen as a failure.

On the other hand, there will be areas and situations where the above model will be impossible either because there is not room in the parental home or there are domestic problems. In the case of these situations, local authorities need to plan for more affordable homes. One stakeholder suggested building co-housing for younger people, similar to those that are more common for older people. Small flats in a block that share some facilities could also encourage greater levels of social capital and cohesion – thus, also, tackling issues of disengagement and isolation of young people. In addition, if this type of accommodation is also provided, for elderly residents it will have the effect of freeing up family homes for young people to buy.

3.2 Local opportunities

While we have indicated that there are a number of risks associated with the values, attitudes and behaviour of the next generation, there is also a chance for local authorities to capitalise on a number of opportunities presented to them and use their role to become place makers.

It is widely acknowledged that people's attachment to place has declined over the last century. Many people's lives are transient and they do not commit to one time and place.⁵³ Places are special sites where people live and work and where they can form enduring connections and enhance the social capital of an area.⁵⁴ This in turn increases the 'capacity' of residents to engage with local authorities.⁵⁵

Our research has indicated that, despite their portrayal in some parts of the media, young people are morally minded, upright citizens with a strong sense of industrious aspiration and civic responsibility. Local authorities need to capitalise on these civically minded young citizens. Encouragingly, many young people in our focus groups said that in 10 years' time they would like to be 'doing a job that isn't just for the money' and they would also like to be 'making a contribution, doing something worthwhile and making an impact'. They also valued quality of life as well as money and thought happiness was 'following your passions, hobbies, having family' and also 'the relationships you make'.

In general, young people have a strong attachment to their area. This gives local authorities a chance to, not only counteract some of the risks of the expectations gap, but also reinvigorate their area through programmes and policies that focus on place building. We see a number of specific areas that local authorities should address if they are to seize this economic crisis and turn it into an opportunity. These are detailed below.

Competitive Place

The nature of work has changed over the last 50 years and has impacted on the attachment of people to place. Jobs for life are no longer the norm and people are encouraged to change jobs every few years for career development. The ties connecting the worker to the factory or the land are now disintegrating and have been replaced by contracts linking income and job security to ability and performance.⁵⁶ Often people are forced to move from area to area before they have formed any attachment to place. However in contrast to this the

⁵³ Bauman, Z., (2008), *The Individualized Society*, Polity, Great Britain

⁵⁴ Pacione, M., (2006), *Urban Geography*, Routledge, Great Britain.

⁵⁵ Cuthill, M., (2010), 'Strengthening the 'social' in sustainable development: Developing a conceptual framework for social sustainability in a rapid urban growth region in Australia', *Sustainable Development*, Vol. 18, no 6, pp. 362 -373.

⁵⁶ Bauman 2008

majority of young people that we spoke to told us that they would like to stay in the area that they have grown up in, that they value family ties and networks and are proud of their area. These attitudes and values present an opportunity for local authorities to counteract the current trend of workers to move around and capitalise on young people's desire to stay in their local area. Local authorities will need to encourage local businesses and industries into the area whilst also 'selling' the benefits of living locally to young people. Young people may not earn as high salaries by staying in their local area, however, there are other clear benefits such as relationships, family and making an impact that they have already stated are important to them. Local authority stakeholders, that we spoke to, felt that their own local authority needed to become more competitive and encourage businesses and employment opportunities in their area. This should be combined with our earlier recommendation that schools work with local authorities and local businesses to inform students of the qualifications that they envisage being needed in their area in years to come.

Helping Place

Perhaps one of the most surprising findings from our research, and definitely in sharp contrast to the disaffected, selfish, hooded youth portrayed in some parts of the media, was our finding that young people are no less concerned with community than their predecessors (on average doing five hours of volunteering a week, as shown in Fig. 6) and have a strong attachment and sense of belonging to their local area. Local authorities need to more visibly and actively acknowledge the role of the community and voluntary sector. Those that contribute to this sector should be held up as role models and celebrated within the community. As well as the obvious benefits that voluntary work can bring to an area, many stakeholders felt that if the education-employment gap is to occur, and young people are to become disillusioned and feel that that they have 'nothing to lose', voluntary work will instil a sense of purpose. Young people may not be able to attain the high salaries that they have expected, but through giving time and skills to their local area, they would be 'making a contribution and having an impact'. It is important that local authorities visibly celebrate those that volunteer in their local community; otherwise there is a risk that young people become more disillusioned and taken for granted. Schemes should be set up to reward those that take part in community and voluntary activities. For example; local authorities could provide a reward card that gives points for the number of hours of community work that have been carried out.

This could be used to give discounts in local businesses or to allow free access to local authority facilities such as libraries, leisure centres and theatres.

Engaging Place

In addition to young people's strong interest and attachment to community, our findings also hold potentially encouraging results for the future of political engagement. Not unlike the general population, young people, are disillusioned with the current political system. In particular, given the average age of councillors (see Fig. 9), local politicians were thought unrepresentative of young people. With the possibility that the previously detailed expectation gap could lead to young people withdrawing and disengaging from society, it is of great importance that local authorities capitalise on the present level of engagement. There is an opportunity for a new local political revival, both in the real and virtual world.

Local authorities need to encourage a new wave of community leaders, those that spend time working in the community or that have the will to change things locally. Many attempts at re-engaging young people within the democratic system limit themselves to making the existing structures and processes more accessible. But people do not abstain from elections because voting is too difficult; they opt out because they cannot see the point. For some, this will be because they are simply not interested in matters beyond their own immediate concerns, but others feel that elections and the established democratic machinery are ineffective. Providing a space for substantive community leadership on issues that matter to young people is more likely to create a renewed culture of engagement among those disillusioned by the current political system.

Of course, accessibility matters as well. We were told in both focus groups about the centrality of technology to participation: "the internet is a new channel for getting involved, for taking a stand."⁵⁷ There is an opportunity here for local politicians to find new ways to tap into the enthusiasm of the young, as well as their commitment to their communities, to devise new forms of political engagement, not as a replacement for formal democratic processes, but to augment and bolster them. In general, our research has shown that Facebook and Twitter accounts are the absolute minimum that

local authorities need to use to engage with young people. In many cases these were not a success as they are 'faceless' (accounts are set up in the organisation's name, not an actual person) and are normally used as an information feed rather than interactively. Local authorities could, however, create online forums to debate issues and to organise responses to them. Not only does this give the opportunity to engage with a younger generation but it also has the potential to open up council debates to those that work full time – an issue that many cited as an engagement problem as it is often only those that are retired that have the time to dedicate to a political life.

Sustainable Place

While many young people have grounded ideas about what is important in their life in terms of health and happiness, we did find from our focus groups that young people place a high level of value on material goods and are used to having and expecting the latest goods. With reduced employment opportunities, especially on a 'highly skilled' level young people will, inevitably, need to change their attitude towards consumerism and material goods. With young people looking for different avenues and methods to save money, there is a greater potential for local authorities to show leadership in sustainable living and try and change residents attitudes towards material goods. A link has been shown between those that have a strong attachment to place and those that engage in pro-environmental behaviours⁵⁸. Local authorities should capitalise upon this link and actively encourage their residents to act sustainably. Local authorities can promote the use of sites like 'The Freecycle Network' or a local equivalent. The network is a grassroots and entirely non-profit movement of people who are giving (and getting) items such as cupboards, tables and fridges for free in their own towns. It's about reuse and keeping items out of landfills.⁵⁹

'Place Corps'

Many of the issues we've identified could be addressed by councils establishing a local 'Place Corps'. Similar in approach and values to the US 'Peace Corps', Place Corps would focus on the social, environmental and

⁵⁸ Scannell, L., and Gifford, R., (2010: 2), 'The relations between natural and civic place attachment and pro-environmental behaviour', *Journal of Environmental Psychology*: doi:10.1016/j.jenvp.2010.01.010

⁵⁹ <http://www.freecycle.org/>

economic development of the local area and would provide structured opportunities for young people to take responsibility for their place, whether that be through leading on environmental improvements, caring for older and more vulnerable local residents, or providing peer-to-peer mentoring and support for more marginalised young people. Place Corps could take the form of organised and directed volunteering, or even an innovation fund to which self-organised groups could bid to undertake specific projects.

Participation could be incentivised through rewards such as help with the costs of on-going study or training; at the very least, initiatives such as local reward cards, highlighted above, could be included. But Place Corps could also operate as a precursor to apprenticeships, particularly within the authority itself. This could be broadened by partnering with local employers and voluntary organisations, whose participation would be essential anyway: for example, schemes focusing on environmental improvements would benefit enormously through the collaboration of organisations such as Groundwork.

Through the 'Place Corps' local authorities will be able to:

- Reward and encourage local volunteering. Many communities have very dedicated volunteers that give much of their spare time to helping others. On some occasions these residents are nominated for awards but we recommend that local residents that choose to join the 'Place Corps' should not only be visibly held up by the local authority as community leaders but also be monetarily rewarded through discounts at local businesses, cultural and leisure facilities as a thank you from the community that they help.
- Encourage sustainable living. Those that are engaged in their local area are more likely to act sustainably and think of the consequences of their actions for generations to come. Through 'Place Corps', local authorities will more easily be able to promote initiatives such as recycling.
- Create greater engagement with young residents, providing an opportunity for people concerned about their place to shape it, beyond formal democratic participation. By involving motivated young people with a route to change things, it is possible that a new culture of democratic engagement can be built through meaningful community leadership rooted in the optimism and energy of young people themselves.

4 *Conclusion and recommendations*

Young people are increasingly being stereotyped as disaffected, anti-social, rioting, hooded youths. Our research, however, has shown that today's young rarely differ in their values, attitudes and behaviours from previous generations. In fact, in terms of education, employment and lifestyle, the youth of today seem to be more aspirational and have higher expectations than their parents and grandparents. These attitudes and actions present some very positive opportunities for society. We predict, however, that there will be some risks that will need to be dealt with. It is possible given the current economic downturn, that future citizens may experience what we are terming an 'expectation gap' – when the aspirational youth of today, have not, and cannot, achieve their hopes and expectations.

Below we present a number of recommendations for both local authorities and wider civil society that will help to mitigate against these risks whilst also seizing upon the opportunities presented by our aspirational, industrious youth.

4.1 **Offsetting Risks**

Education and employment

Most young people today feel that a university education is necessary to secure a 'good job'. However, our findings have shown that, in reality graduates are increasingly taking on lower skilled jobs. Young people who aspire to attend university should be encouraged, but equally they need to be more realistic about their employment expectations after their degree.

- Local authorities need to work with schools and businesses to identify local businesses that will be employing in their area in the near future. Businesses should be clear about the skills and qualifications that they will need from future employees. This can then influence subject choices of students and give future residents the chance to gain skills and qualifications in areas that will enable them to stay in their local area, should they choose to.

- Local authorities should design sponsorship programmes to encourage local businesses to sponsor young people to go to university. Local authorities themselves could also sponsor local residents to go to university in return for summer work experience and a period of time working for the local authority after their degree. This will not only help to offset some of the increasing debts that young people are experiencing, but will also encourage young people to return to the area that they are from after their degree.

Home Ownership

Our research has shown that young people continue to expect to own their own home early in life, despite the current trend of delayed home ownership.

- Local authorities need to think urgently about the future housing needs of its residents. Each local authority will have different requirements based on its own demographic factors but, in general, local authorities have been focusing on care and housing provision for their older residents than young people. Potentially this may free up some family housing for young people, but local authorities can also encourage intergenerational housing solutions.
- Councils could encourage social enterprises, registered social landlords and others to make direct investment in opening up better private rented options, including a savings option. This could include using the council's own assets to promote mixed tenure accommodation.

4.2 Seizing Opportunities

Reimagining Place

Our research found that, whilst today's young citizens seem to be disengaged from the formal political process, there are indications that they are strongly attached to their local place and area. Furthermore, many young people are involved in and value community and voluntary work.

- Local authorities need to capitalise upon this connection to place to reinvigorate their local area. As discussed, there is a risk that young people experiencing an 'expectation gap' may become disengaged and withdraw from society. Local authorities are in a unique position in which they can

offer a real, tangible opportunity for young people to become engaged in their local area and offer a 'sense of purpose' through community and voluntary work locally.

- Local authorities should establish a 'Place Corps'. Place Corps would focus on the social, environmental and economic development of the local area and would provide structured opportunities for young people to take responsibility for their place. Participation could be incentivised through rewards such as help with the costs of on-going study or training; at the very least, initiatives such as local reward cards, highlighted above, could be included.

Appendix *Methodology*

This report was overseen by an advisory group that met twice and was comprised of the following members:

- Jason Burton; Microsoft.
- Kevin Crompton; Former Chief Executive, London Borough of Haringey Council.
- Andrew Jepp; Director of Public Sector, Zurich Municipal.
- Lindsay Murray; Director of Communities, Neighbourhoods and Volunteering, Gateshead Metropolitan Borough Council.
- Martin Smith; Chief Executive, London Borough of Ealing Council.
- Alison Trew; Head of Corporate Policy and Performance, London Borough of Enfield Council.

The research is based on a rigorous analysis of existing and new data on the values, attitudes and behaviours of the young people in Britain. These data derive from a number of sources:

- 1. National data analysis:** we analysed a wide array of available data, including the Youth Cohort Study 1986-2010 (looking at 13 different cohorts of youth interviewed at ages 17, 18 and 19), the Audit of Political Engagement 2000-2012, the National Citizenship Survey 2001-2010, the British Social Attitudes Survey 1986-2010, the British Crime Survey 1982-2011, Social Consequences of Unemployment 1964-1971, the National Student Survey 2005-2010, data on local and national election turnout and the National Survey of Hours and Earnings 2004-2010. In particular we focused on longitudinal data so that we were able to compare and contrast the values, attitudes and behaviours of differing generations as well as comparing young people with the population at large.
- 2. Roundtable discussions:** we held two 'risk register' workshops with local authority officers, as well as representatives from the voluntary sector and academia working in this field. These sessions, one held in London and one in Manchester, enabled us to explore the issues facing young people and the implications these have for local authorities and wider society.

- 3. Focus groups:** we ran two focus groups with young people, one in Sutton, South West London, and the other in Sunderland. Each involved 5-7 young people (aged 16-22 years) and gave us an opportunity to explore the values and attitudes suggested by the data, as well as to get a more fine-grained understanding of the motivations for the observed behaviour.
- 4. Survey of local authority officers:** we conducted a small survey of local authority officers to gauge awareness of the issue and the nature of any response already being prepared by councils to the impact of changing values, attitudes and behaviours of the next generation.
- 5. Interviews:** We conducted 8 in-depth interviews with local authority representatives, from Chief Executives to youth workers. These interviews assessed the validity of our initial results and findings and investigated what initiatives were on-going and which recommendations those working in the sector felt would work.

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Young people out of work, and the perception of high rates of youth crime in the UK, has led to negative views of youth, often described as 'lazy', or as 'hoodies' and 'louts'. This report sets out to explore the attitudes and actions of today's young people as a whole, and to investigate whether they differ from previous generations in any meaningful way.

The views of this generation are rarely different to those of previous cohorts of young people and when they do differ, it is often because today's youth tend more towards industrious aspiration. From this aspiration, however, comes high expectation. This may lead to an 'expectation gap' between when the aspirational future citizens, have not, and cannot, achieve their hopes and expectations. This report sets out how local government can respond, ensuring that the risks are mitigated and the opportunities seized.