



The Next Generation

The values, attitudes and behaviours of Britain's future citizens

Daria Kuznetsova and Adrian Harvey



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Published by NLGN

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Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the many individuals and organisations that have given their time and insight to help produce this interim research paper.

Particular thanks are due to Zurich Municipal for their support for this project. It has been extremely helpful to be able to draw on their expertise and we look forward to working with them to develop our final recommendations. We would also like to thank Jason Burton, Kevin Crompton, Andrew Jepp, Lindsay Murray, Martin Smith and Alison Trew for their support.

We are very grateful to the young people who attended and contributed to our focus groups. The insights generated helped amalgamate our statistical work and underpinned this project.

We would also like to thank our colleagues at NLGN who have all contributed greatly to this work: Phil Baker, Vivek Bhardwaj, Jenna Collins, Joe Manning, Amy Richardson and Callum Whitaker.

Any mistakes or omissions are of course our own.

Daria Kuznetsova and Adrian Harvey

October 2012

Introduction

Local government is, once again, facing an uncertain future. Austerity, certainly, is the key backdrop for local government for the foreseeable future and ‘doing more with less’ is a familiar refrain. Many authorities are already rising to the immediate challenge, finding new models of delivery and embarking on new forms of collaboration. But in the medium term, councils will have to go much further if they are to meet the changing demands from local residents and services users, remaining relevant as well as viable. Some of these trends are already well understood; others are less clear. Nowhere is this more the case than in the changing attitudes, preferences and behaviours of the next generation.

Long-standing social trends of disengagement and disaffection, particularly among the young, combined with the reduced capacity of the state and civil society, presents a range of potential risks for local government. The well-rehearsed concerns about youth unemployment and anti-social behaviour, which reached their apotheosis in the wake of last summer’s riots, pose questions enough. But beyond the outliers, more general shifts in values and aspiration will likely impact upon the way the future citizen views and relates to the state. In turn, local government will have to accommodate these shifts as it redefines itself for the future.

After one of the longest periods of economic growth in British history, the last 5 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 April-June 2012, 1.01 million young people aged 16-24 were unemployed, up by 5.8 per cent on the previous year.

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. Cuts to housing benefit to those under 25, hikes in university fees, 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.

Young people out of work and the perception of high rates of youth crime in the UK¹ has led to negative views of young people often 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".²

The riots in August 2011, after which more than 1000 were charged, 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 and attitudes 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. This is not then a report about those young people who are especially vulnerable or troubled: there is already a great deal of excellent work available on those groups, and there is little that we can add.

Our aim 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 the next generation presents to society. The first part of the study, reported here, has been based on three research methodologies:

- Analysis of longitudinal secondary data

¹ Home Office British Crime Survey. <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/publications/science-research-statistics/research-statistics/crime-research/hosb1011/hosb1011?view=Binary>

² Intergenerational Foundation (2011). http://www.if.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2011/08/The_Poor_Perception_of_Younger_People_in_the_UK_17Aug3.pdf

- Focus groups with young people in Sutton and Sunderland
- 'Risk register' workshops with local authority representatives and academics

In the second phase of the project we will work with local government to understand their role in responding to the future demands and aspirations of today's young people. Here, we set out our interim findings on the values, attitudes and behaviours of the next generation.

1 *Values, attitudes and behaviours - plus ça change*

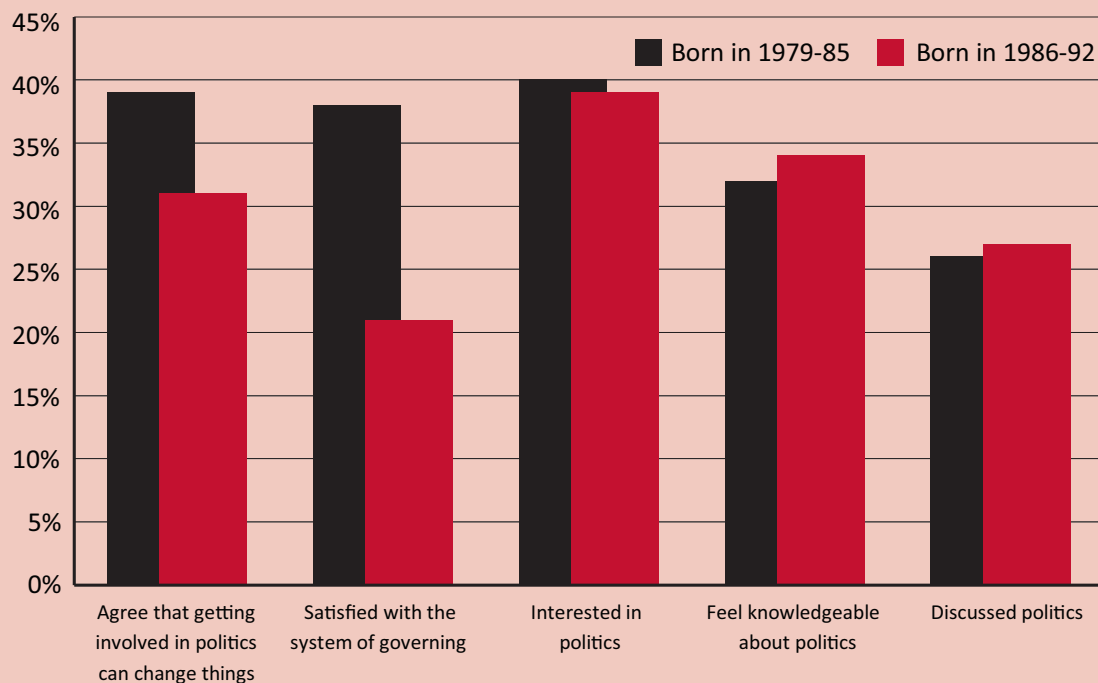
The views of this generation are, in fact, rarely different to those of previous cohorts of young people. When the views do differ, it is not because young people today are less 'moral' than older generations, but often because they tend to be more conservative in their behaviours and attitudes. And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

Contrary to the orthodox view, young people today are just as interested in politics as young people 10 years ago. However, as with the population at large, they have become disillusioned by the current system of governance and the channels through which they are able to engage and influence politicians. While they still expect health care to be tax-payer funded, their support for unemployment benefits appears to have declined; again this is something that is mirrored by reductions in support for welfare among all age groups.

Having grown up in an economic boom and an era of increased public spending, there is a risk that the current generation might be confronted with circumstances that do not match their expectations. The survey data we analysed, as well as findings from our focus groups, suggests that both in their private ambitions as well as the expectations of public services, there is a gap between young people's expectations and the predicted reality.

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 and having a say 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 1 Attitudes towards politics

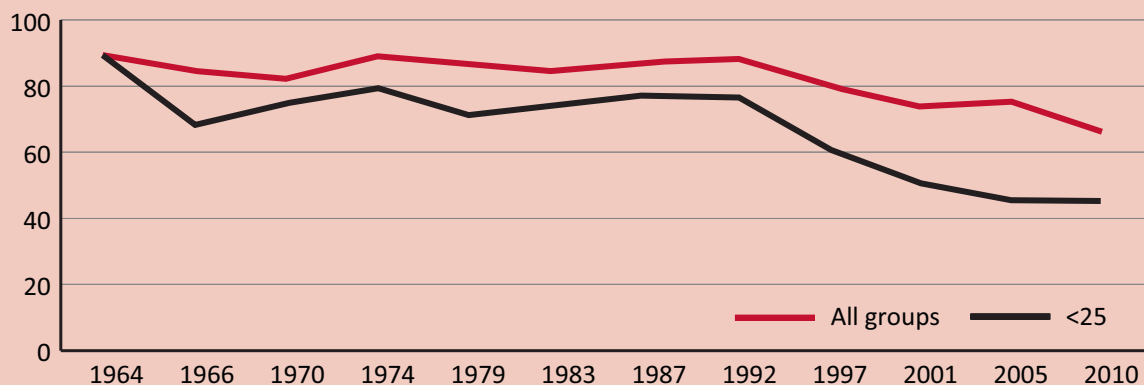
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That said, there is clear and growing disillusionment with the current political system. This is not, of course, solely a trend of young people but that of the UK population on the whole; however the speed at which disengagement from formal politics 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 2002.⁴

3 British Social Attitudes Survey 1986-2010

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

Figure 2 General election turnout

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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.

This disengagement could be a result of how unrepresentative politicians are of young people. The average age of MPs is 50 years old⁶ 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.”⁷ The vicious circle of political disengagement has the 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 views of young people might decrease as well.

⁵ UK Election Statistics: 1918-2004, J. Yonwin, House of Commons Library, 2004. Accessed at: <http://www.parliament.uk/documents/commons/lib/research/rp2004/rp04-061.pdf>.

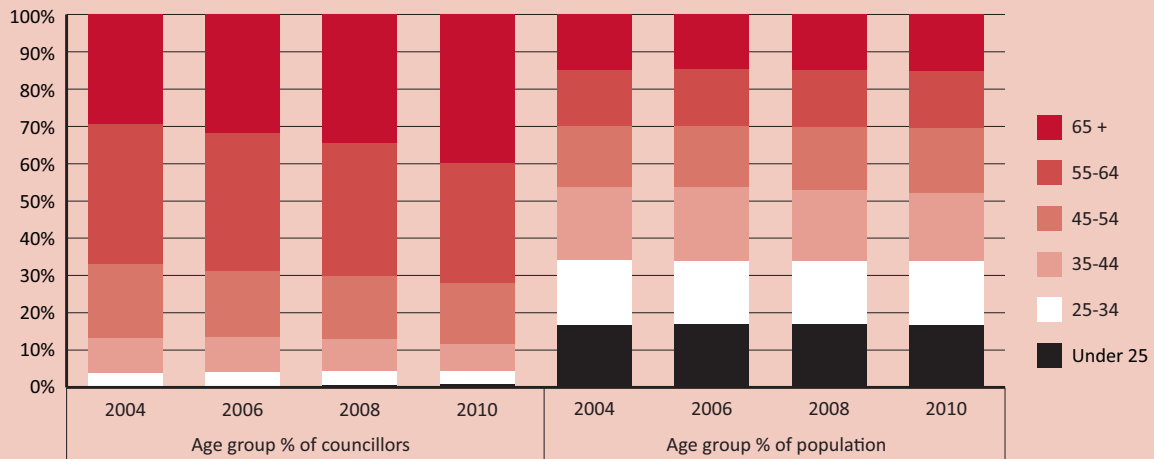
How Britain Voted in 2010 (Ipsos MORI). Accessed at: <http://www.ipsos-mori.com/researchpublications/researcharchive/poll.aspx?oltemId=2613>.

How Britain Voted in 2005 (Ipsos MORI). Accessed at: <http://www.ipsos-mori.com/researchpublications/researcharchive/poll.aspx?oltemId=2252>

⁶ 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/>

⁷ Sutton focus group

Figure 3



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But there are glimmers of hope, 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. Whether this will manifest itself in greater local election turnout from young people is yet to be seen.

Table: Future voting intentions

	Likely (2002)	Unlikely (2002)
Vote in the next UK general election	64 (67)	16 (16)
Vote in the next local council election	53 (46)	21 (32)
Vote in the next election for the European Parliament	42 (35)	28 (37)

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8 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>

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

Today's young people are just as interested in politics and as keen to be involved as previous generations, yet – much like the general population – they have considerably less confidence in the political system as currently constituted. Yet this is not a reason to be apathetic. 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.”¹⁰

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.

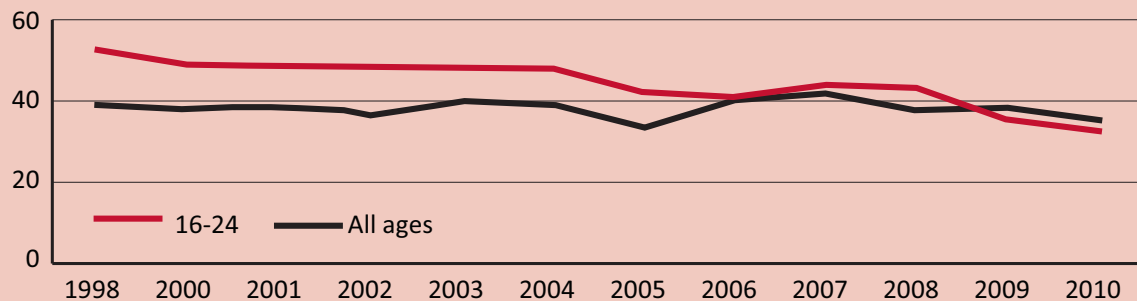
New puritans?

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

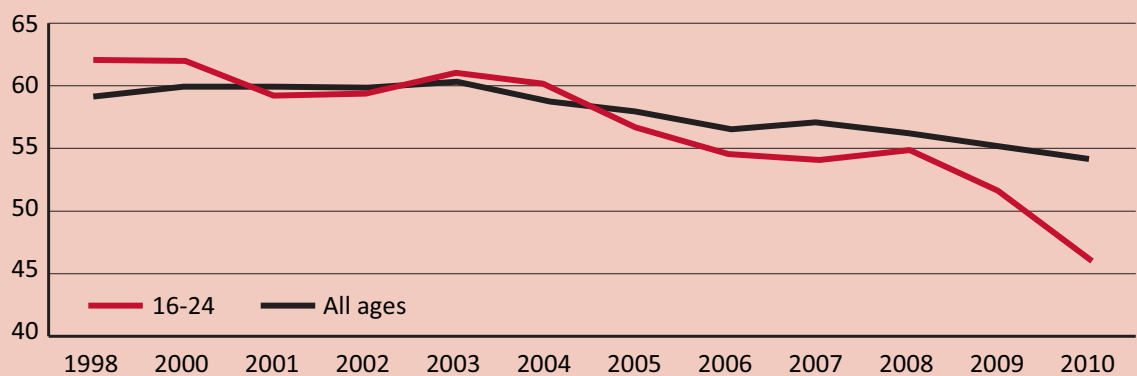
For example, young people have reduced their alcohol intake both on a regular basis and have reduced the occurrence of binge drinking, and this has been observable for both young men and women. The trends are similar for 11 -15 year olds: the proportion of school pupils who had never drunk alcohol rose 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.¹¹

¹⁰ Sutton focus group

¹¹ 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

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

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Figure 5 Woman that drank last week

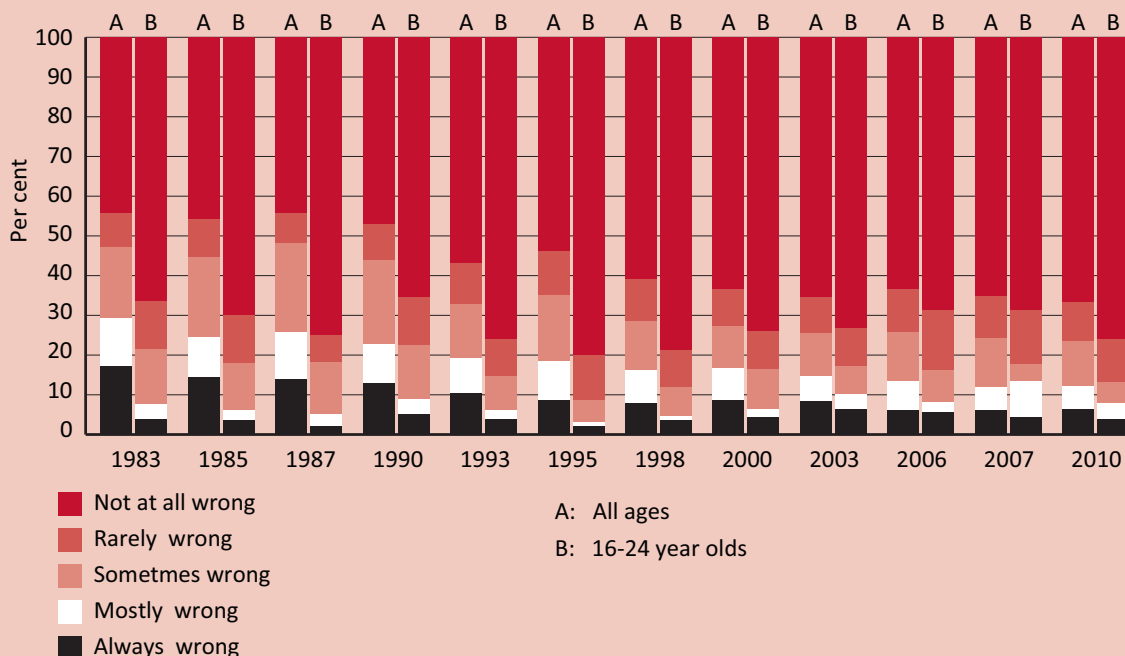
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Similarly, while the attitudes of the UK population as a whole have become more liberal towards premarital sex, young people have remained just as conservative as they were in the 1980s, regardless of faith: "I'm not religious, and think that morals come from inside. Some things are just wrong, like adultery."¹⁴

¹² 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])

¹³ 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])

¹⁴ Sunderland focus group

Figure 6 Attitudes towards premarital sex

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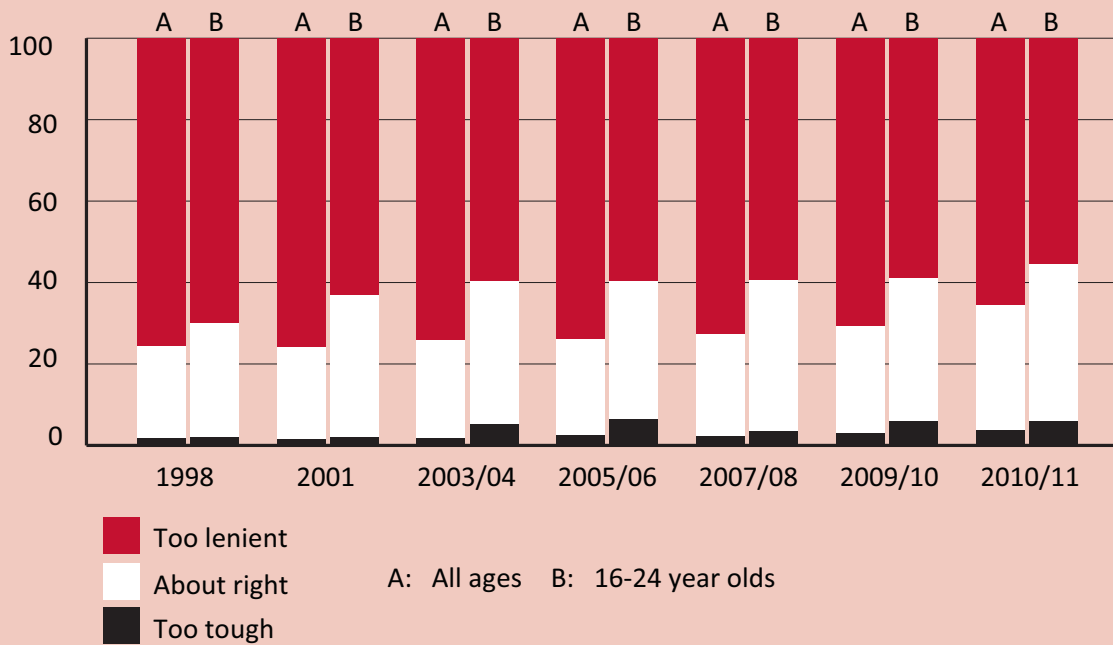
The trends in sexual behaviour among young people are slightly more mixed. Teenage pregnancies are the lowest they have been since 1969 with reductions in conception rates for those under 16 and under 18.¹⁶ There has been a similar decline in abortions. However, as the reduction in teen pregnancies has been coupled with an increase in sexually transmitted diseases, it may in large part be due to the availability of new methods of contraception.

Attitudes towards crime have not seen significant changes since 1998, although there has been a convergence and hardening of attitudes towards the punishment of young offenders between young people and all adults.

¹⁵ British Social Attitudes Survey 1986-2010

¹⁶ Conception Statistics, England and Wales (2010). <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/vsob1/conception-statistics--england-and-wales/2010/index.html>

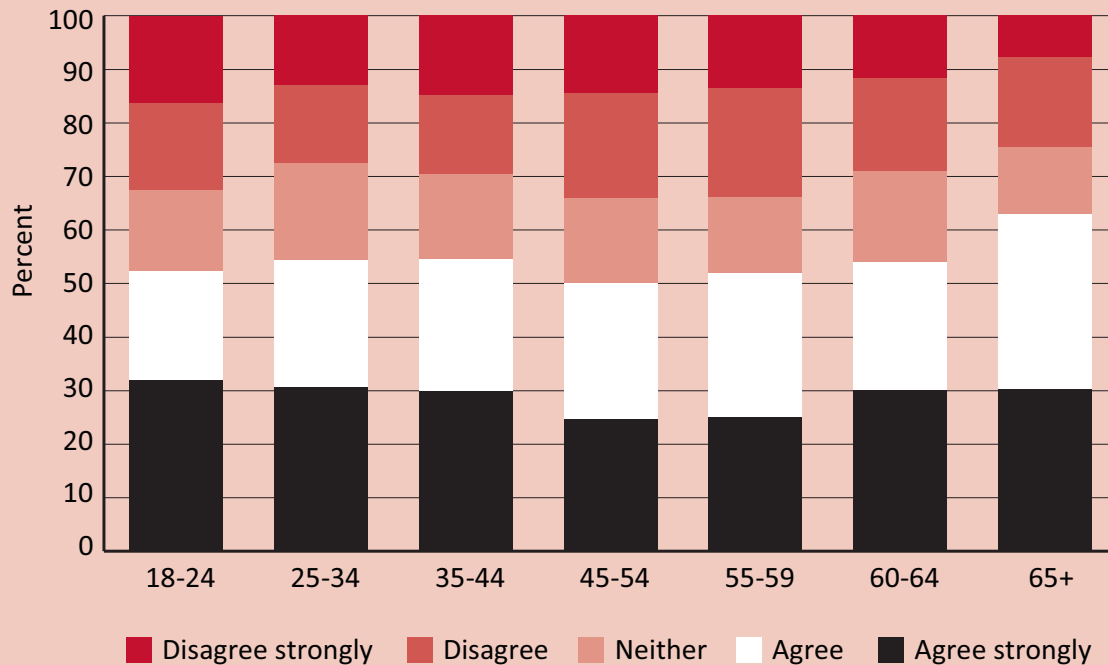
Figure 7 Are young offenders dealt with too leniently or too harshly?



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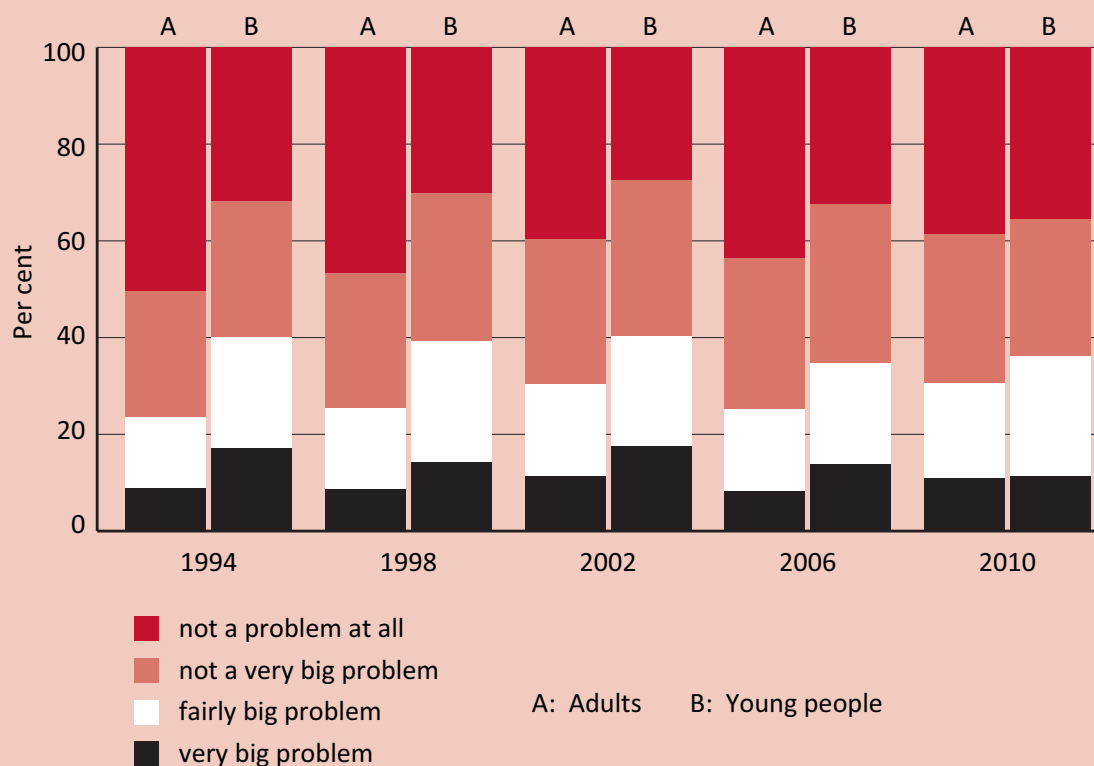
Such increasing disciplinarianism is apparent generally: support for capital punishment is similar amongst young people and adults of all ages. Indeed, while the over 65s are the most likely to agree with the death penalty, 16-24 year olds are the most likely to agree strongly.

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

Figure 8 Sometimes the death penalty is the most appropriate sentence

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It is often assumed that young people will be much more liberal about drug use than other older groups, yet the data shows that they are more concerned about drugs than the population at large. 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 9 Attitudes towards drug use

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This may, of course, be a consequence of greater proximity: young people are more likely to know of drug users, and any problems that surround drug use, than older generations. However, 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 1996.²⁰ 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 2001.²¹

This appears to be a generation of 'upright citizens' in both their attitudes and behaviours in terms of sex and drugs, crime and punishment: certainly there is no evidence of moral decline. This may, of course, lead them towards greater intolerance of the transgressions of others.

¹⁹ Home Office British Crime Survey. <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/publications/science-research-statistics/research-statistics/crime-research/hosb1011/hosb1011?view=Binary>

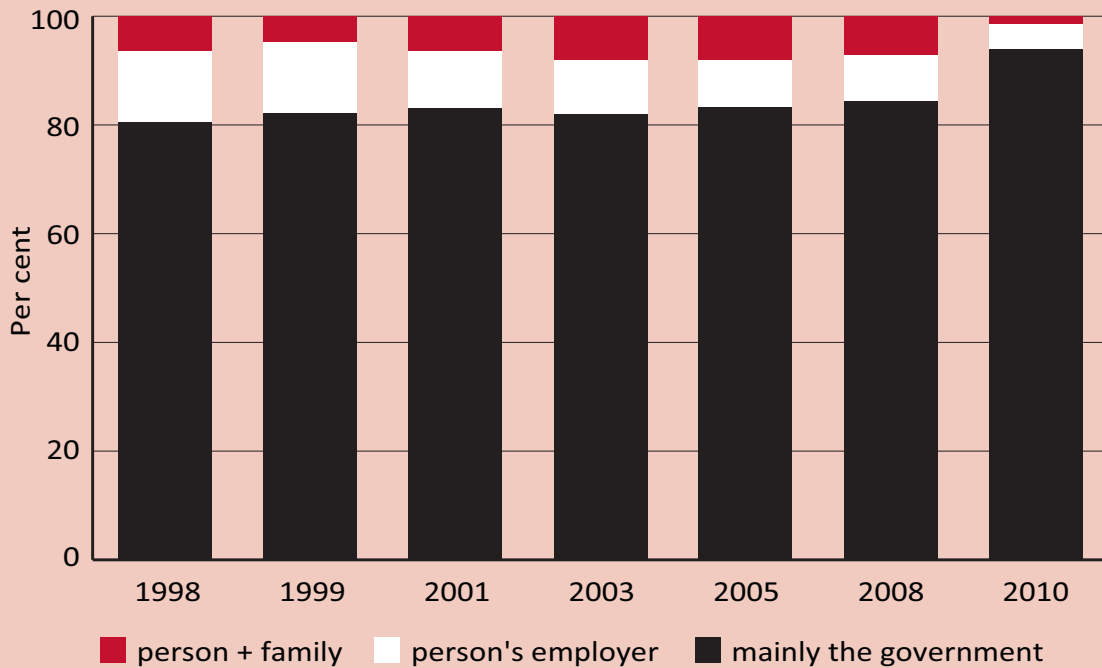
²⁰ Eastwood, P (2011). NHS The Information Centre. Statistics on Drug Misuse: England. http://www.ic.nhs.uk/webfiles/publications/003_Health_Lifestyles/Statistics%20on%20Drug%20Misuse%20England%202011/Statistics_on_Drug_Misuse_England_2011v3.pdf

²¹ 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>

Standing on your own two feet?

Young people's attitudes towards government and public services 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.

Figure 10 Who should pay for healthcare?

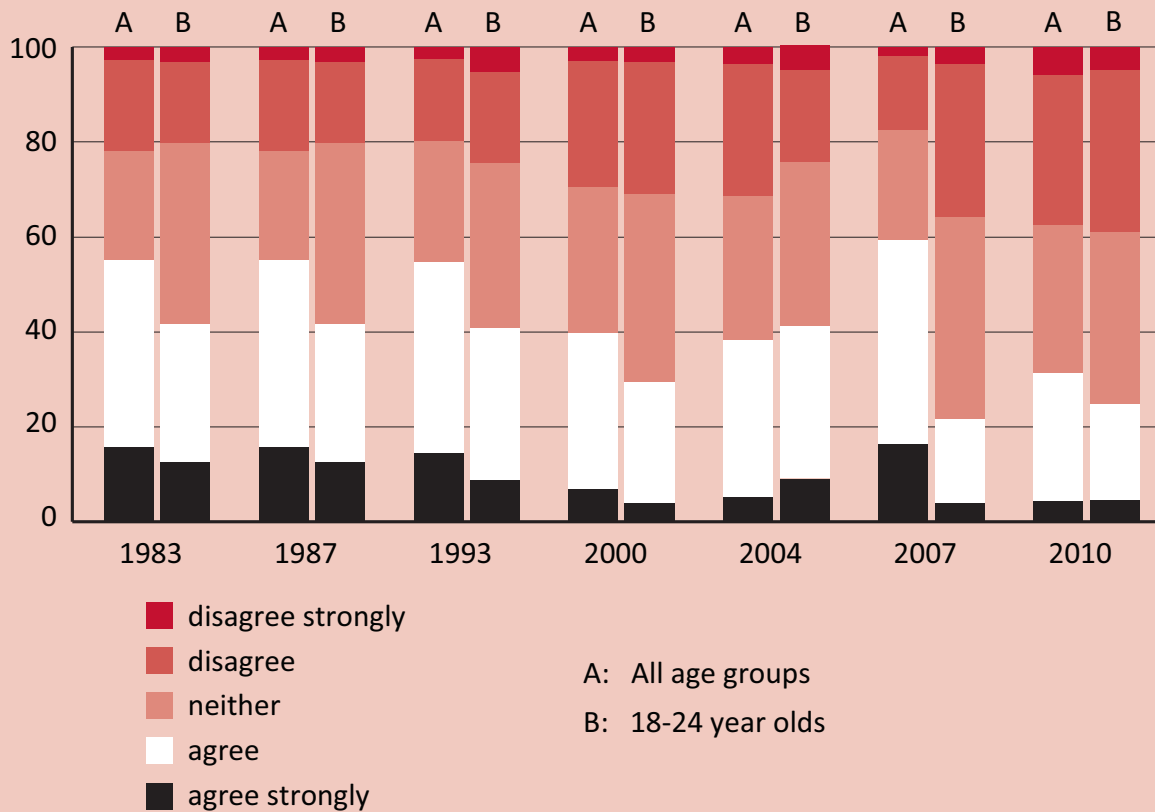


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However in relation to welfare spending, we have seen reductions in the level of support for unemployment benefits and pensions. This reflects a wider societal shift: support for welfare benefits has declined among young people and all adults alike, but young people have historically been less generous on welfare. 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.”²³

Figure 11 Government should spend more money on welfare benefits for the poor



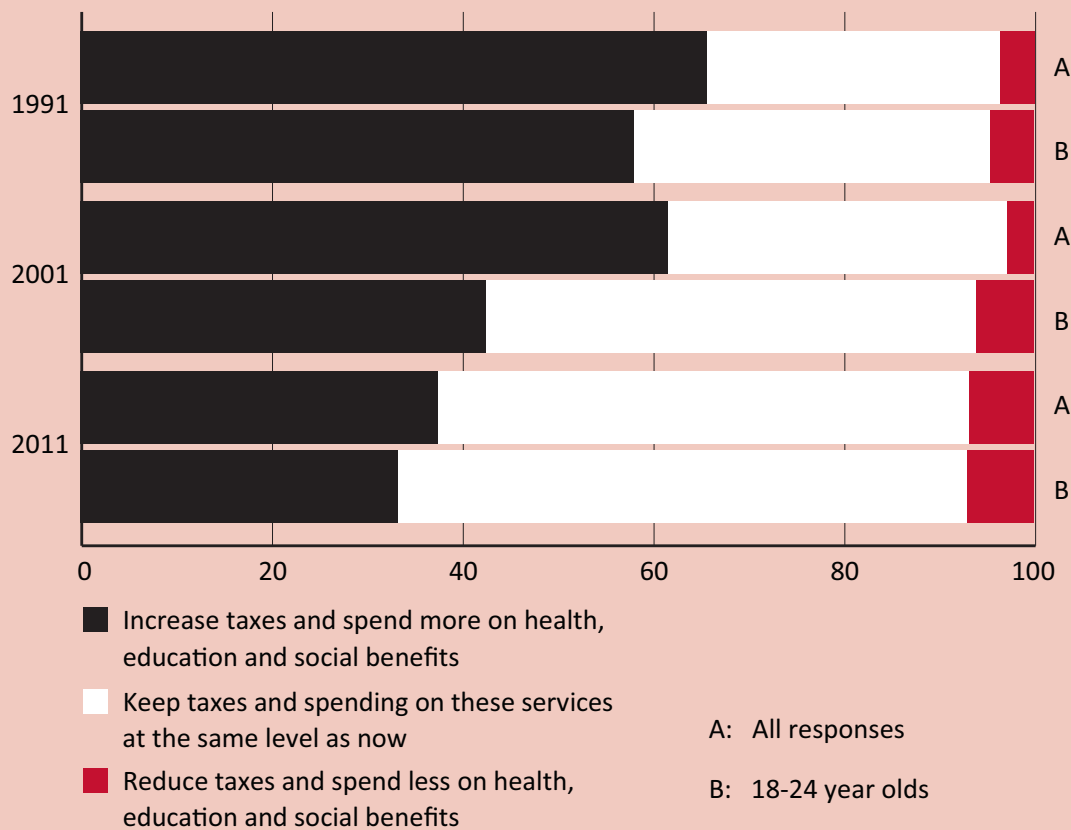
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When asked about whether the government should increase taxes and spend more on benefits, young people expressed more conservative views than all adults. Only 33 per cent of 18-24 year olds believed in higher spending and higher taxes compared to 37.4 per cent of all adults.²⁵

²³ Sunderland focus group

²⁴ British Social Attitudes Survey 1986-2010

²⁵ British Social Attitudes Survey 1986-2010

Figure 12 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.”²⁷ This suggests a hardening of attitudes towards claimants and while support for welfare has decreased most rapidly amongst those better off,²⁸ 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 the relative stability of the priorities of the population as a whole. However,

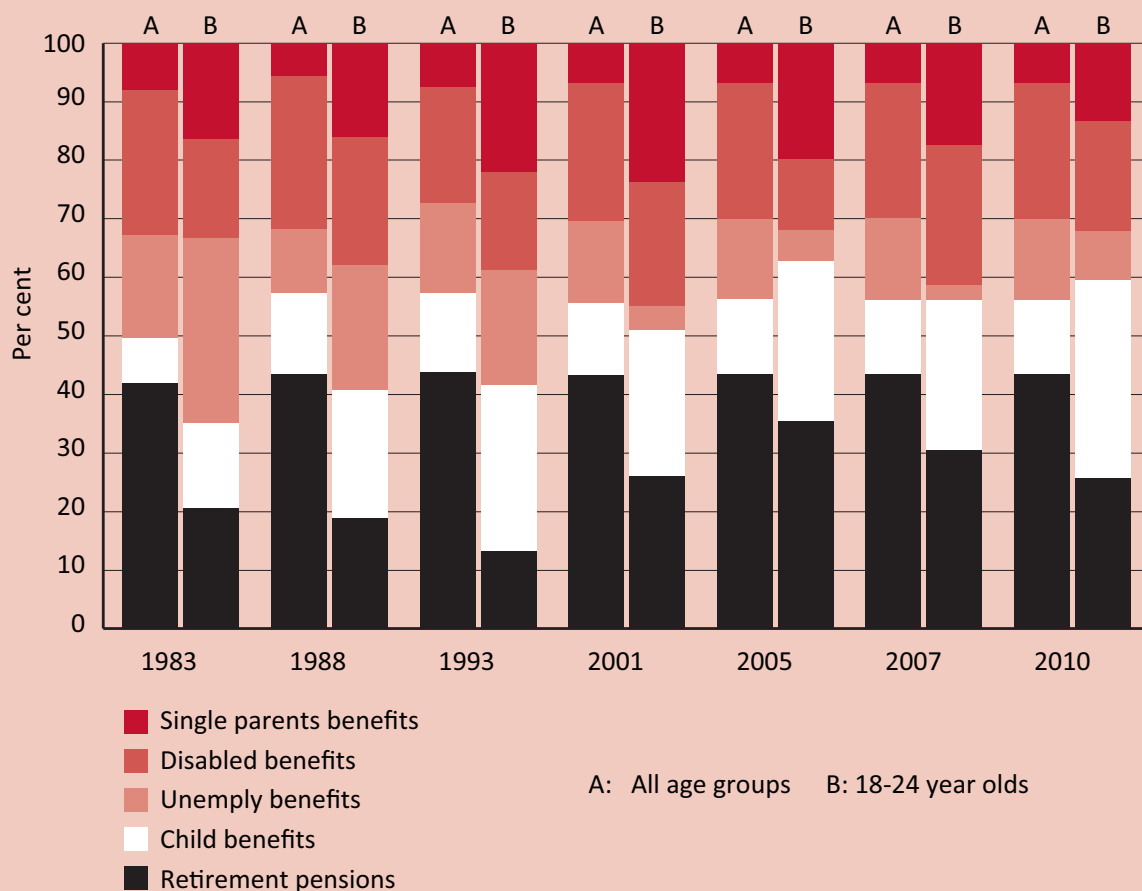
²⁶ British Social Attitudes Survey 1986-2010

²⁷ Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2009). Understanding Attitudes to Tackling Economic Inequality. <http://www.jrf.org.uk/publications/attitudes-economic-inequality>

²⁸ 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 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 13 Priorities for social security spending



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Alongside an apparent intolerance of dependency, 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.”³⁰

29 British Social Attitudes Survey 1986-2010

30 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 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’.³¹ This shows that contrary to the media stereotypes of young people, 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;³² 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.³³

While young people’s commitment to communities of place appears to be solid, they tend to be less likely than their predecessors to define themselves as religious and to identify with communities of faith. 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 continue to fall over time.³⁴ 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.³⁵

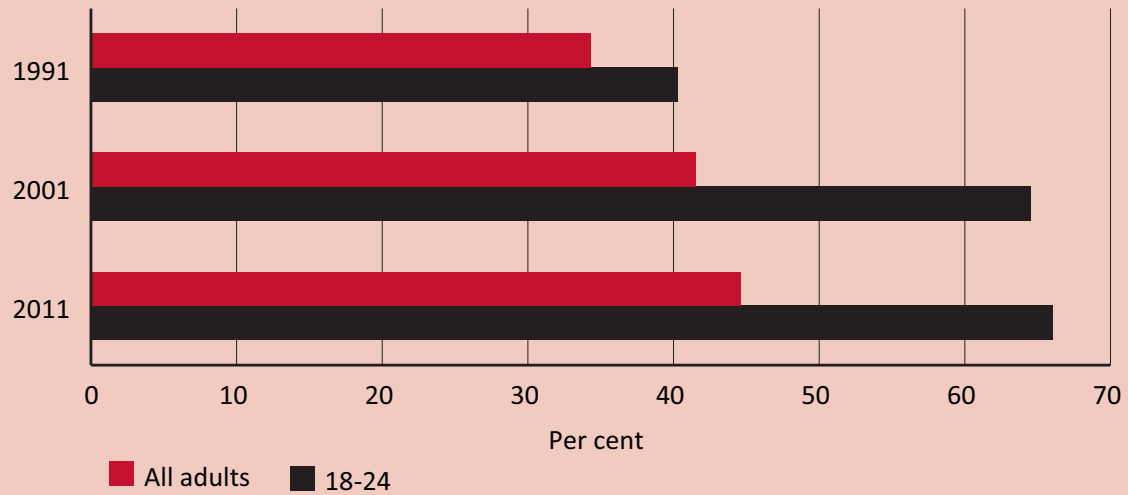
³¹ Voicebox, <http://voicebox.vinspired.com/>

³² Department of Communities and Local Government Citizenship Survey (2010) <http://www.communities.gov.uk/communities/research/citizenshipsurvey/>

³³ Voicebox, <http://voicebox.vinspired.com/>

³⁴ 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.

³⁵ 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>

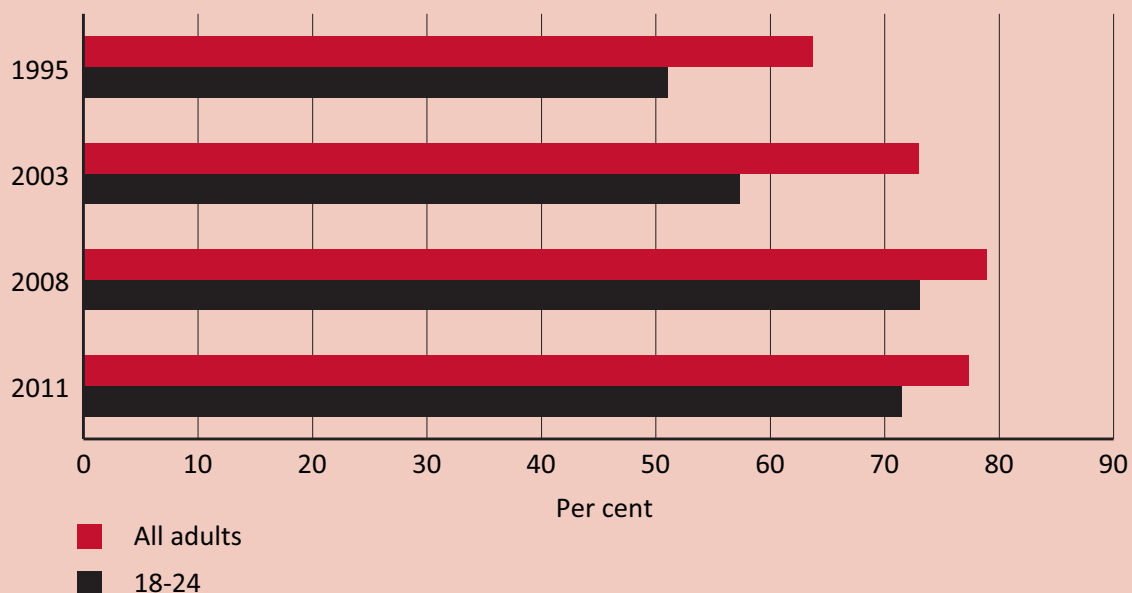
Figure 14 Proportion of respondents with no religion

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Finally it is worth noting that, alongside a general hardening of attitudes over the past two decades, even young people have become less tolerant of immigrants. 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.

36 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>

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



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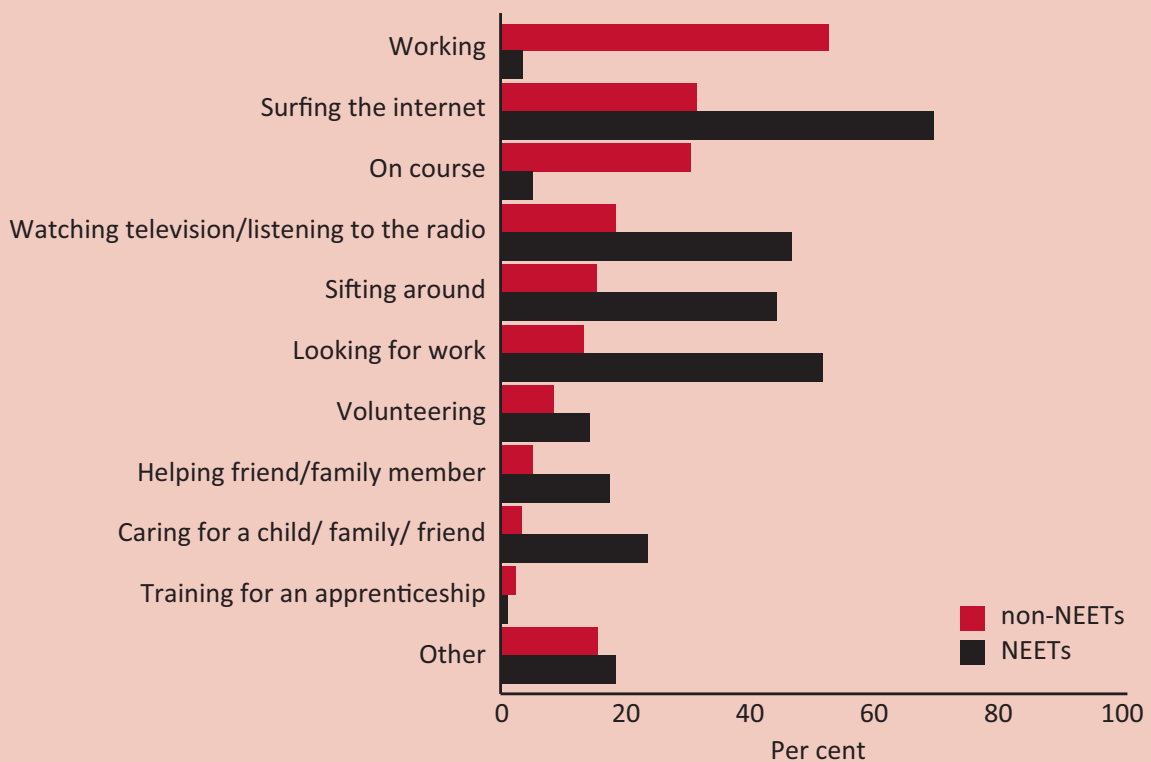
Life online?

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. 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 young people not in education, employment or training (NEETs) spend most of their day online is a cause for concern or for hope.

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



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2 *An expectations gap?*

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.

We were struck by how far 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 Young people are optimistic about the prospect of sustainable home ownership early in life, and about the rewards 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

This optimism is borne out in the figures: a lower proportion of young people than all adults said they will have a harder life than their parents' generation (42 per cent compared to 56 per cent).⁴² This is not to say that those expectations will necessarily be unmet; simply that some exceed what is currently available to the preceding generation.

Housing

The crisis of housing affordability of the past decade continues, despite the on-going recession. While previous recessions were accompanied by large scale boosts in house building,⁴³ this has not been the case during the

³⁹ Sutton focus group

⁴⁰ Sutton focus group

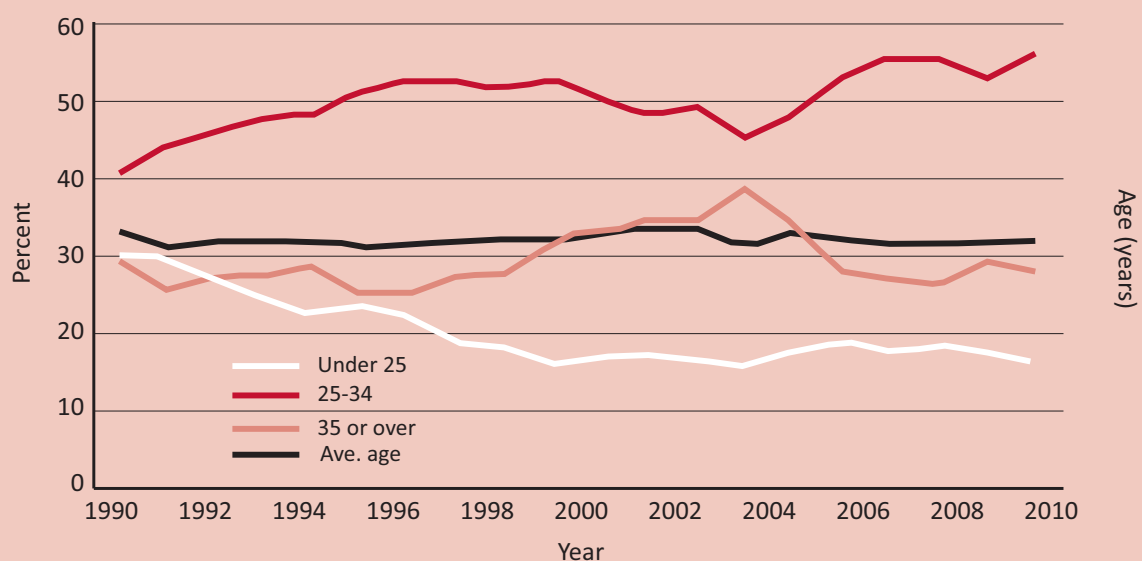
⁴¹ Sunderland focus group

⁴² Yougov (2012). British Future Survey Results. http://cdn.yougov.com/cumulus_uploads/document/5nfv7cj25l/YG-Archives-BritishFuture-YoungPeople-270712.pdf

⁴³ Centre Forum (2011), Delivering growth while reducing deficits: lessons from the 1930s. <http://www.centreforum.org/assets/pubs/delivering-growth-while-reducing-deficits.pdf>

current economic downturn. The supply of new housing is still at 60 per cent of pre downturn levels,⁴⁴ 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 recession and the likelihood of successfully being offered a loan is likely to decrease in the coming years. Certainly, the proportion of first time buyers under 25 has been decreasing since 2007 and we have seen a much lower incidence of home-ownership amongst younger adults over the past 20 or so years. Today, barely a fifth of 18-24 year olds are home-owners (17 per cent according to the latest YouGov survey).

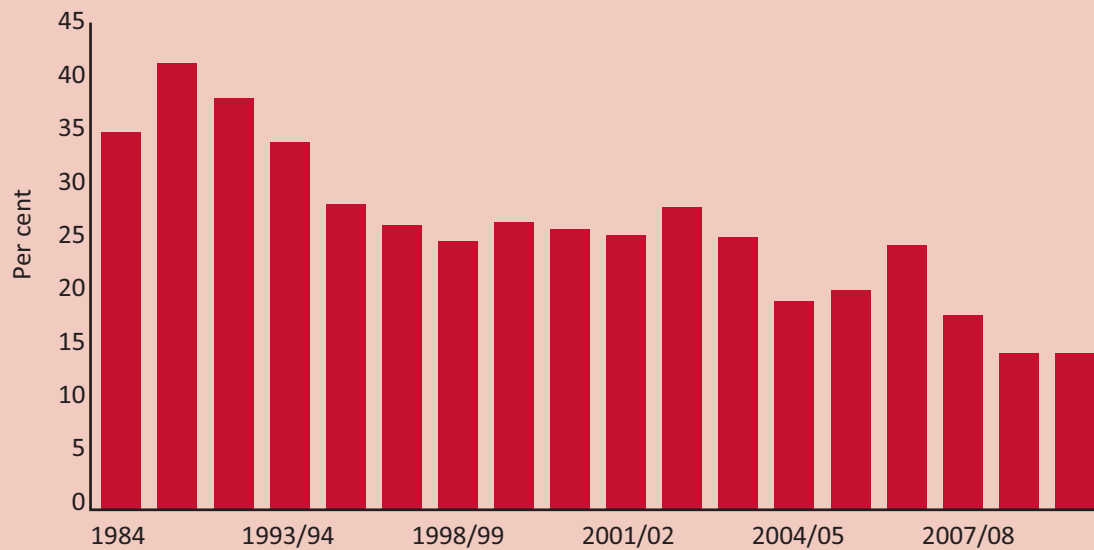
Figure 17 Percentage of all mortgages to first time buyers in the UK by age group and average age of first-time buyers (1990-2009)



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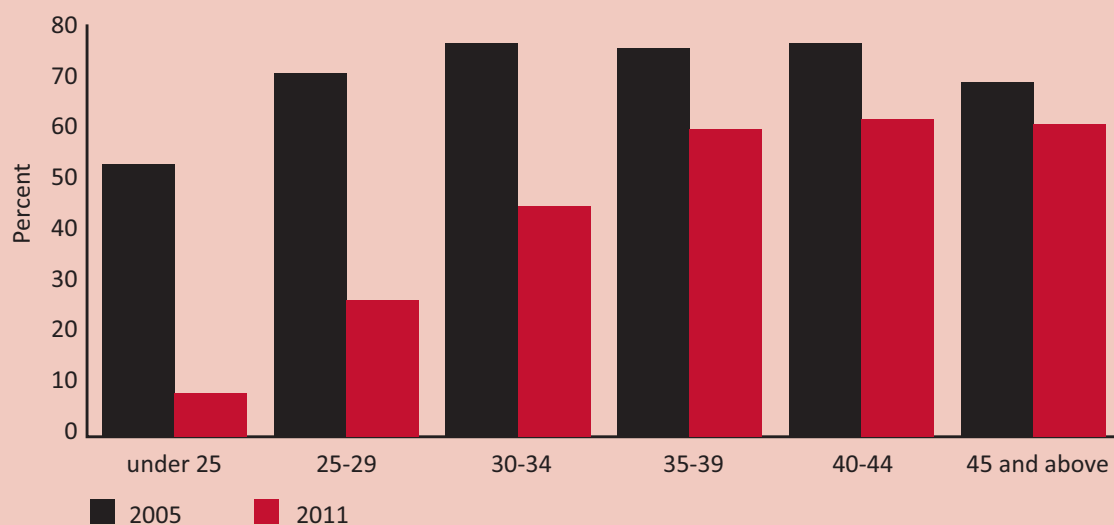
⁴⁴ Department of Communities and Local Government (2011) House Building: June Quarter 2011, England. <http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/statistics/pdf/1967957.pdf>

⁴⁵ Joseph Rowntree Founstation, (2010), <http://www.jrf.org.uk/publications/young-people-housing-key-drivers-for-change>

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

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In particular, unassisted first time buys are now a small proportion of house purchases for those under 25 years of age. 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 19 Unassisted first-time buyers by age, 2005-2011

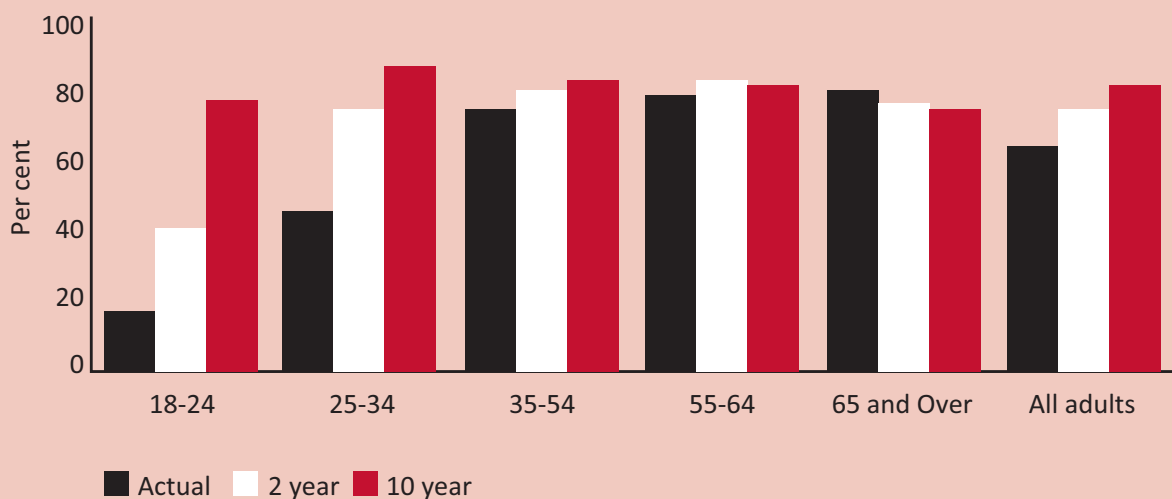
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46 Council of English Mortgage Lenders, <http://www.cml.org.uk>

47 Council of English Mortgage Lenders, <http://www.cml.org.uk>

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. For those currently aged 18-24 to fulfil their 10-year home-ownership aspirations would mean them achieving a much greater rate of home-ownership than their current 25-34 year old counterparts have.

Figure 20 Preference for home-ownership in two and ten years time, by age group, percentage of respondents



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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.⁴⁹ 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.⁵⁰

Education and employment

A similar *expectations gap* is evident in education, where young people clearly place ever greater value on education, both at school level and at university level. More 16/17 year olds disagree with the statement that

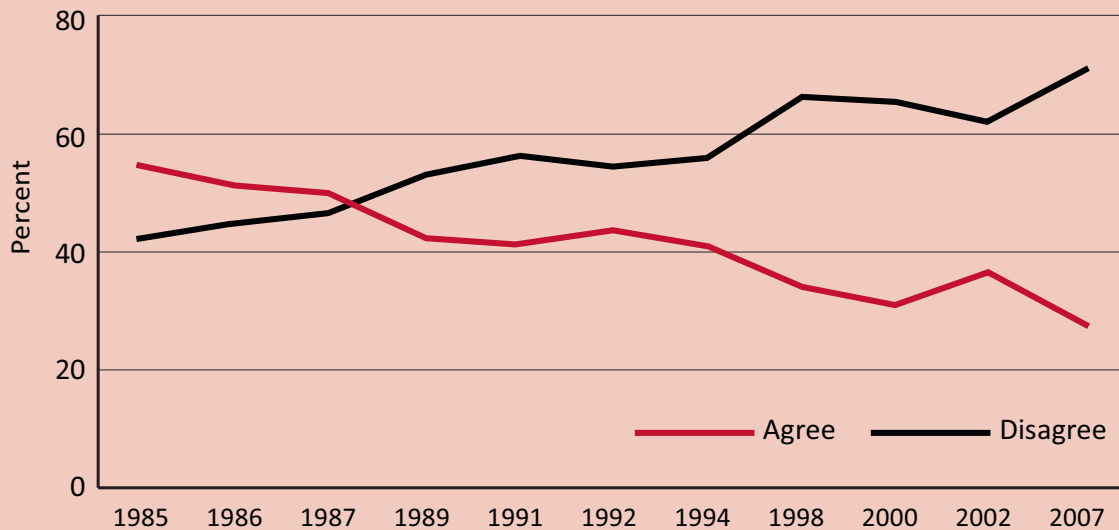
⁴⁸ Yougov (2012). British Future Survey Results. http://cdn.yougov.com/cumulus_uploads/document/5nfv7cj25l/YG-Archives-BritishFuture-YoungPeople-270712.pdf

⁴⁹ Yougov (2012). British Future Survey Results. http://cdn.yougov.com/cumulus_uploads/document/5nfv7cj25l/YG-Archives-BritishFuture-YoungPeople-270712.pdf

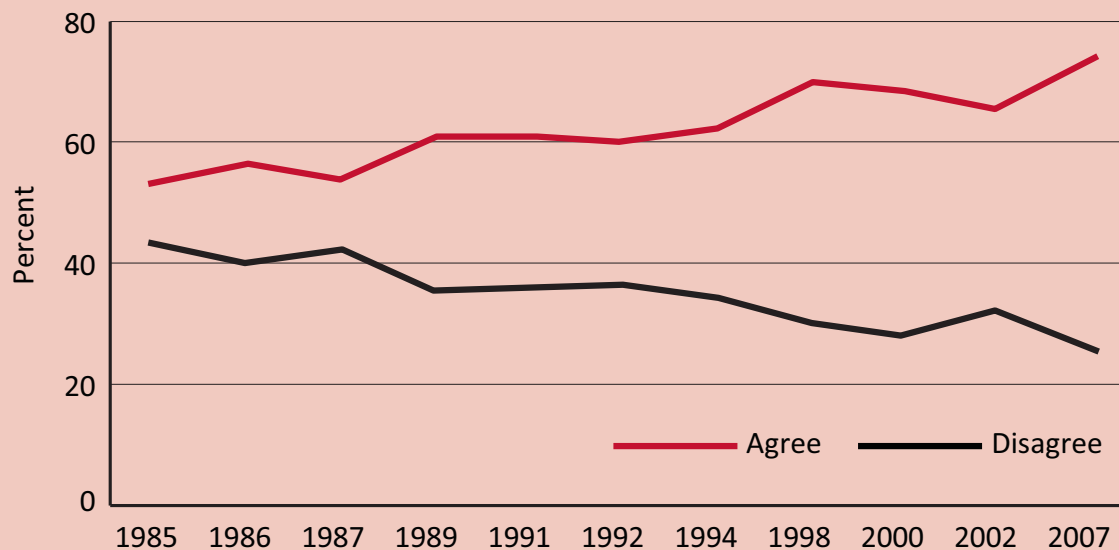
⁵⁰ BBC News (2012) Cameron suggests cutting housing benefit for under-25s. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-18567855>

“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.

Figure 21 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



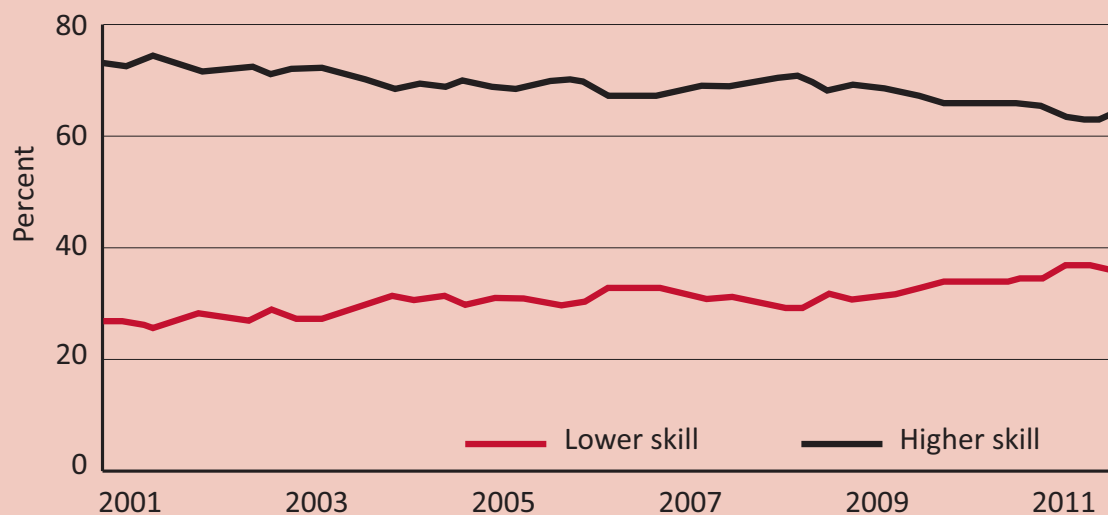
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University is still seen as a guaranteed way to get a good job in adult life. When we asked focus group participants whether they were put off going to university by the rise in fees, the common view was “No because a degree leads to higher wages, making it less difficult to pay off debts”; another was

more blunt: “You can’t afford not to go to University”.⁵²

Similarly, national surveys show that students increasingly believe that university instils confidence for later in life.⁵³ 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 22 Recent graduate by skill level of occupation (per cent)



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Today’s 18-25 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 16.⁵⁵ As long as the recession continues there are few reasons to believe that this situation will improve in the short run.

⁵² Soton and Sunderland Focus Groups

⁵³ National Student Survey

⁵⁴ Labour Force Survey - Office for National Statistics

⁵⁵ Youth Cohort Study 1986-2010

3 *Interim conclusions*

Our analysis 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".⁵⁶

They are still suspicious of formal politics, and are not fastidious in voting at elections. They believe in community and many of them contribute to making 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 to of the population as a whole. Neither in the data nor in our focus groups have we found any evidence of the media stereotypes. For the vast majority, this is not a something for nothing, libertine, selfish generation.

Where our analysis does suggest a marked difference is in the emergence of a potential expectations 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.

There are a number of risks and opportunities associated with the trends identified in the earlier sections. By understanding and examining these risks in greater details there is an opportunity for local government to prepare for them sooner rather than later. Precisely how these risks can be mitigated and the opportunities seized will be the focus of the second phase of this research project.

⁵⁶ Sunderland focus group

But some issues are already apparent. The expectations gap may lead to withdrawal, disengagement or resistance (both passive and active). The possibility of social isolation and disengagement was considered to be the most likely and have the highest impact by attendees of risk register workshops conducted by NLGN. 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)⁵⁷ and the psychological impact of failure, when success was felt to be dependent primarily on one's own efforts, could be significant. After all, psychologists have described depression as a "response to the discovery that there is a serious discrepancy between what we thought our life was and what it actually is."⁵⁸ ***A major challenge will be to find ways to manage expectations without destroying aspiration, to create new pathways for success that can provide an outlet for the undoubted optimism and industriousness of this generation.***

Alternatively, there could be resistance (passive or active) to the institutions perceived to be blamed for the unmet ambitions. Some have pointed to the 2011 riots as the opening salvo of such resistance, but a far more relevant and compelling augury is the reaction already apparent among unemployed graduates in Spain.⁵⁹ Of course, this kind of phenomenon might not materialise in the UK. But active resistance, such as antisocial behaviour or even through technological activism, could be damaging and costly. One of the potential challenges identified at a research seminar conducted as part of this project was the increasing vulnerability of institutions to 'cyber-attack'. Such 'hacktivism' has increased over recent years as the internet began to form a dominant channel for political protest: 'hacktivists' stole more data from large corporations than cybercriminals in 2011, according to a study of significant security incidents⁶⁰. ***How can councils and others prepare for some of these possibilities without relying on 'target hardening', at the expense of positive engagement?***

⁵⁷ Mental Health Statistics: UK and Worldwide. Mental Health Foundation. <http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/help-information/mental-health-statistics/UK-worldwide>

⁵⁸ Rowe, Dorothy (2003). *Depression: The Way Out of Your Prison*. <http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=tPP0u8FBvBEC&printsec=frontcover#v=onepage&q&f=false>

⁵⁹ Europe's Most Earnest Protestors (2011). *The Economist*. <http://www.economist.com/node/18959259>

⁶⁰ Data theft: Hacktivists 'steal more than criminals' (2012). <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-17428618>

But passive resistance, in the form of non-co-operation or the development of a ‘nothing to lose’ attitude, could also create wider problems, including an increased propensity for risk taking in relation to drug abuse and sexual health. In addition, unmet expectations of future earnings could result in an increase in property crime and the informal economy. And of course, the “nothing to lose” attitude has been cited as one of the causes for last year’s riots.⁶¹ ***What opportunities exist for creating a positive stake in society, to make sure that the next generation feel that there is ‘something to lose’?***

Disengagement from formal politics could lead to a vicious circle of political engagement, where local politicians do not engage with young people because of low turnout and young people do not vote because politicians have not engaged them. This in turn could lead to central government choosing to bypass local government because of a lack of democratic mandate. But there is also an opportunity here for a new, local political revival: councils and politicians are already experimenting with new channels to gauge young people’s views about their policy such as social media, but these efforts could be scaled up. ***Are councils able to lead on the development of new mechanisms of meaningful political engagement that go beyond Twitter campaigns, and can cope with disagreement and challenge?***

Technology will of course play a part here, but its impact will not be restricted to political participation. The first generation of ‘digital natives’ will have grown up with the expectation of being able to access information and services on demand, at any time, through their online experience. This will plainly have implications for the way that local authorities structure their services too, if they are not to become irrelevant. ***How do service providers in all sectors create a platform that meets the expectations of the ‘digital natives’ but does not exclude other generations or those who remain ‘offline’?***

The impact of youth unemployment will also create specific issues for those directly affected by it. Prolonged periods of joblessness when young are linked to an increased likelihood of unemployment at a later stage in life and to a lower earning potential. Individuals unemployed at a young age will spend on average an additional two months per year (8.41 weeks for men,

⁶¹ Reading the Riots. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-17428618>

10.7 weeks for women) out of work between the ages of 26 to 29 than they would have had they benefited from work experience.⁶²

The evidence on the future costs of youth unemployment comes from two UK birth cohorts, which track all babies born in a particular period for the rest of their lives. By chance, the participants in the first cohort were aged 21 when the 1980s recession hit and in the second cohort the participants were aged 20 when the 1990s recession hit. About one in five young people in the first cohort spent more than six months out of work before age 23, and it was similar in the second. Furthermore, these people spent about 20 per cent of their time unemployed five years later and 15 per cent 12 years later. The impact on wages is similar, with an extra month unemployed when young associated with 1 per cent lower wages in their early 30s. And of course youth unemployment will adversely impact upon young people's health: there are well established links between work satisfaction/availability of employment and physical as well as mental health being. ***What measures can be taken now to ensure that this cohort of unemployed youth is not 'scarred' in the same way?***

The depth of an individual's asset base is often considered to be a key factor in their economic resilience. The current generation of young people will possess few property assets, low level of savings and an increasing propensity to get into debt. As economic resilience is defined as the creation of reserves to protect against shocks, the current generation might struggle to get through external shocks leading to increases in homelessness and bankruptcy. ***Young people have not historically set out on adult life with significant savings, but the level of indebtedness, and acceptance of debt, that we are likely to see is new: how do we build up resilience and increase the attractiveness of saving over borrowing?***

Finally, 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 them important years without dependents. What is more, this trend has the potential to lead to

⁶² ACEVO (2012). Youth unemployment: the crisis 'we cannot afford' The ACEVO Commission on Youth Unemployment. <http://www.bristol.ac.uk/cmipo/publications/other/youthunemployment.pdf>

a delay in family formation and possible difficulties in running a household independently. ***A future delay in family starts will mean local government will need to shift its public service provision to meet the needs of a population with a different age distribution.***

Some of the issues presented here may seem fanciful; others obvious. Indeed, there may be some glaring omissions. In the next phase of this project, we will interrogate further these risks and opportunities. We hope that in doing so, local councils and their partners in the private and voluntary sectors, will be better prepared to mitigate the downside risks and to make the most of the undoubted optimism and aspirations of the next generation.

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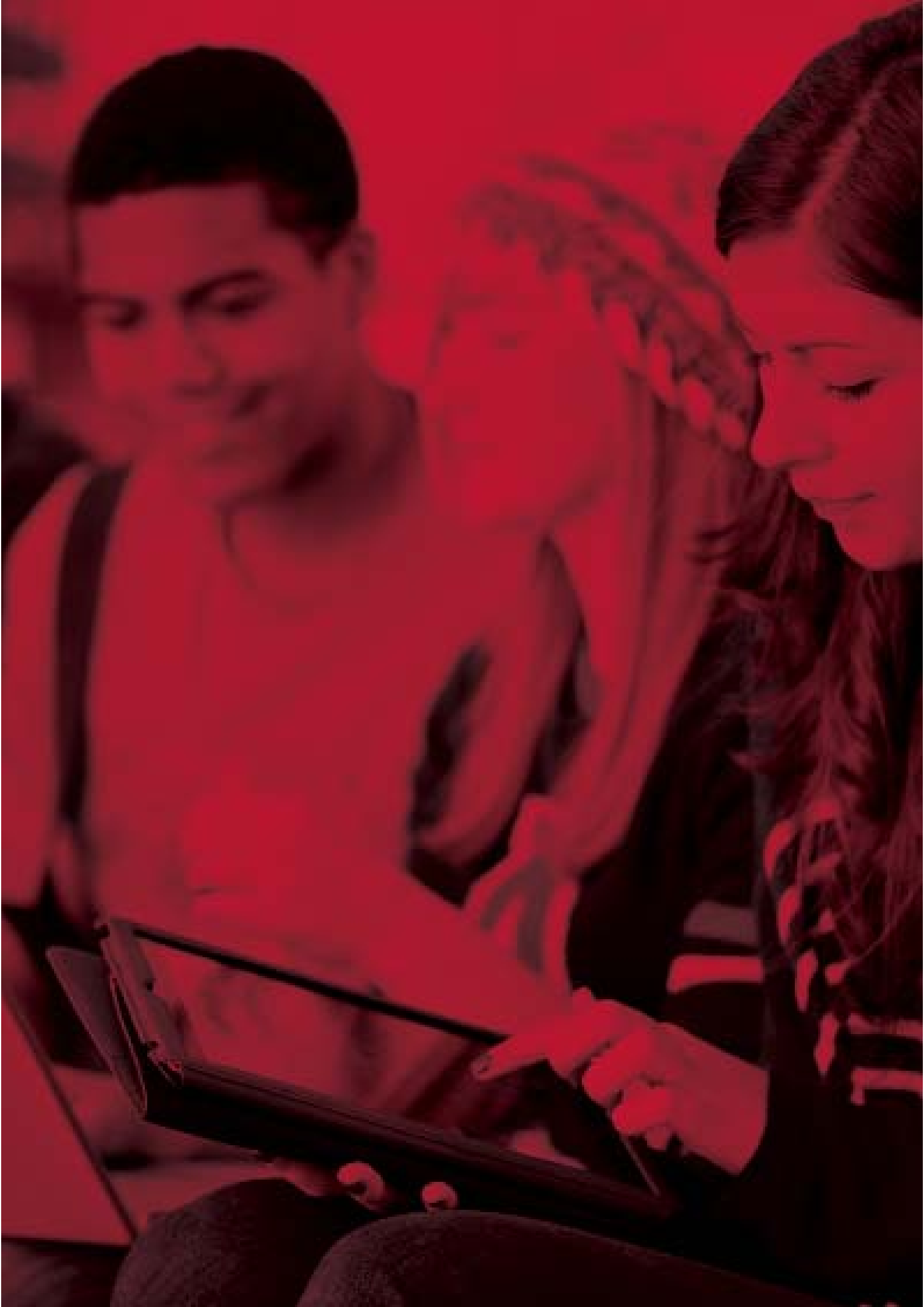
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Local government is, once again, facing an uncertain future. Austerity, certainly, is the key backdrop for local government for the foreseeable future and 'doing more with less' is a familiar refrain.

Many authorities are already rising to the immediate challenge, finding new models of delivery and embarking on new forms of collaboration. But in the medium term, councils will have to go much further if they are to meet the changing demands from local residents and services users, remaining relevant as well as viable. Some of these trends are already well understood; others are less clear. Nowhere is this more the case than in the changing attitudes, preferences and behaviours of the next generation.

Our aim 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 the next generation presents to society.