

Levelling up London:

Improving London to
meet the aspirations,
needs, and rights of
young people

About this report

Young Londoners have various aspirations, personal and professional, that they want to achieve to have a meaningful and fulfilling life. However, through no fault of their own, they face multiple barriers preventing them from achieving such goals. There is an urgent need to tackle those barriers and make London a better city to live in for young Londoners. Despite this, young Londoners remain absent from the Levelling Up White paper. Their city is presented as a benchmark of prosperity, with their needs and priorities neither acknowledged nor addressed. While the Levelling Up agenda does not appear to be progressing recently, this research shares data on the inequalities and aspirations from across London.

This report looks at the relationship between the levelling up agenda and young Londoners. It does so in four key parts. The first part looks at the levelling up agenda, and what the challenges are for London. The second part looks at the cost of living crisis in London, and the impact that is having on young people and their wellbeing. The third part examines the aspirations that Londoners have, for their city and themselves. Lastly, we look at young people are involved in decision making, with a focus on 2022's Local Elections in London.

Released March 2023

Matthew Walsham

Matthew.Walsham@cityoflondon.gov.uk

Marie Colangelo



Contents

Key findings	03
Methodology	04
The levelling up agenda	05
Cost of living and happiness	11
Aspirations of Londoners	21
Political participation and change	29

Key findings

1. Over half (54.9%) of young Londoners had not heard the term levelling up before. When we asked how well they understood what levelling up actually meant, we found that over a third (35.2%) had either no understanding or a very weak understanding of the term.
2. Housing was ranked as the most important issue for young Londoners, followed by the cost of living, and mental and physical health. Youth service provision was ranked as least important.
3. More than half of young Londoners (58.1%) want to continue to live in London in the future. However, only one in four (26.4%) young Londoners said that they feel like they will be able to because it will be unaffordable.
4. Young people are experiencing a cost of living crisis. The overwhelming majority of young Londoners (95.1%) agree or strongly agree that there is a cost-of-living crisis in London.
5. Young Londoners are very critical of the Levelling Up White Paper's "left behind" areas formula. A formula designed by them includes important data like poverty, and considers the impact of the cost of living.
6. Loneliness, especially post-Covid, is a real challenge for young Londoners. Almost four out of five (78.1%) young Londoners said that they felt lonely at least sometimes, with one in ten (10.5%) feeling lonely all of the time.
7. The improvement young Londoners most wanted to see for their city was more affordable places for food and drinks (51.6%), followed by safe streets (49.8%), an improved environment, pollution and more green spaces (44.7%), and better employment opportunities (42.7%).
8. Young Londoners were most likely to want to work in the arts, entertainment, or recreation sector (54.6%), followed by professional, real estate, scientific and technical activities (39.8%), education (32.4%), information and communication (30.6%), and health (24.6%).
9. A majority (65.4%) of young Londoners do not feel like their voice is listened to, however almost nine out of ten (88.4%) at least agreed or strongly agreed that young Londoners should be more involved in decision making.
10. Local election manifestos from political parties are often the responsibility of a political assistants with little capacity for local engagement outside of party membership. They are reliant on organisations to lobby them, but often this lobbying is aimed at election time and is too late to influence manifestos.

Methodology

1258 young people aged 16 to 25 took part in our survey in August to September 2022.

A survey designed by young people was advertised through social media with over 1000 young people spending an average of 16 minutes each to complete it. We want to thank all young Londoners who took the time to participate in the survey.

- **Age:** Participants were aged between 16 and 25, with the average being older at 21.2.
- **Gender:** We had more young women (61.7%) compared to young men (34.4%) take part in the survey. We also had a minority identifying as third gender/non-binary/other (3.3%), with the rest (0.6%) preferring not to say.
- **Ethnicity:** Over half of respondents were White young people (64.4%), with less than half White British (42.1%), followed by mixed ethnicity (11.5%), Black (10.5%), and Asian young people (9.8%), with the rest preferring not to say (3.9%).
- **Employment and education:** Most commonly respondents were either in full time or part time employment (42.2%), followed by being at university (32.7%). A smaller proportion were doing A-levels or GCSEs (16.2%), doing an apprenticeship or traineeship (3.1%), or Not in Employment, Education, or Training (NEET) (4.2%).
- **Disability:** A minority (16.3%) said that they did consider themselves to have a disability, compared to a majority (78.9%) who did not, with a minority (4.7%) preferring not to say.
- **Care experience:** Less than one in ten (10.8%) of our sample were care experienced, which is far more than the London average of 51 per 10,000 young people (0.51%).
- **Area:** We also looked carefully at the postcode data from respondents and found good representation from across London. However, there was more engagement from inner-London boroughs, and less response from areas of South-West and North-East London.



Focus groups

Additionally as part of this work we conducted two focus groups, with a total of 13 young Londoners. Their quotes can be found throughout this report, often reacting to the data from our survey. We would like to thank London Youth and the Peer Outreach Team at the Greater London Authority for helping to organise the chance for us to speak with the young people they work with.

The levelling up agenda

What is Levelling Up?

The term 'Levelling Up' has a long history but its meaning and purpose have changed over time. One of the earliest references in Hansard dates back to 1869 when the term was used during a debate on religious equality in the House of Lords. More recently, the term 'Levelling Up' re-emerged in relation to educational inequality when Justine Greening, former Secretary of State for Education and Conservative MP, started using it in official documents of the Department for Education¹. However, the expression 'Levelling Up' only truly became widespread in the time after Brexit, as a way of addressing many of the grievances raised in the debate.

*"Boris Johnson has set out an agenda for Levelling Up every part of the UK – not just investing in our great towns and cities, as well as rural and coastal areas, but giving them far more control of how that investment is made. In the 21st century, we need to get away from the idea that 'Whitehall knows best' and that all growth must inevitably start in London. Because we as Conservatives believe you can and must trust people and communities to make the decisions that are right for them."*²

Levelling up the UK was presented as a central promise of the Conservative Party manifesto for the General Election of 2019. In simple terms, the Levelling Up agenda refers to the necessity to tackle geographical inequalities between different regions of the UK. It argues that opportunities are not spread equally across the country, with opportunities, wealth, and outcomes in health and employment varying greatly across regions, with the primary aim of the Levelling Up agenda is to reduce such disparities. At the beginning of the year, on 2 February 2022, the Government published the 'Levelling up' White Paper, setting out the steps they would take to tackle the UK's deep inequalities.

The Levelling Up White Paper

The Levelling Up White Paper provides a diagnosis of geographical inequalities in the UK and identifies which areas are the most "left behind" and in need of Levelling Up based on various economic, financial, and social measures. Left behind areas are defined as 'low-income places where economic growth has remained stagnant'. Using indicators such as pay and educational attainment, the White Paper shows that left behind areas include 'coastal communities previously associated with tourism, parts of the North and Midlands with industrial legacies, and rural parts of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland'³.

In order to level up left-behind regions and reduce geographical inequalities, the White Paper sets twelve specific medium-term missions that need to be achieved by 2030. Those are linked to four core policy objectives:

1. boosting productivity, pay, jobs and living standards by growing the private sector
2. spreading opportunities and improving public services
3. restoring a sense of community, local pride and belonging and
4. empowering local leaders and communities. Moreover, the White Paper identifies six factors that can help drive Levelling Up in the UK: physical capital, human capital, intangible capital, financial capital, social capital, and institutional capital.

¹ Department for Education, '[Unlocking Talent, Fulfilling Potential](#)' (2017)

² Conservative Party, '[Manifesto for 2019 General Election](#)' (2019)

³ Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, '[Levelling Up the United Kingdom](#)' (p.17) (2022)

Reactions to the Levelling Up white paper

The Levelling Up White Paper has received mixed reactions across various sectors of British society. One of the most widely shared criticisms is that the White Paper fails to consider social inequalities within regions and especially across London. Charities such as Equally Ours⁴ and The Equality Trust⁵ have highlighted the importance of focusing on people as well as places in order to achieve a genuine Levelling Up.

Moreover, organisations working with young people have expressed concerns regarding the government's lack of commitment to get all children out of poverty across the UK. For example, London has the highest rate of child poverty of any English region (37% of all children in London)⁶, but the White Paper does not set out a clear path to tackle this. Below, we have included a selection of responses that followed the release of the Levelling Up White Paper:

Child Poverty Action Group

'The paper contains twelve missions yet none of them are about how the govt plans to get children out of poverty. It's a glaring omission. Levelling up is meaningless if children and families are left going hungry' (02/02/2022).

Joseph Rowntree Foundation

'A focus on rising employment, pay and productivity will only succeed if it delivers better jobs and pay for people on the lowest incomes. To make this happen we need to see investment in skills, childcare, local transport and affordable housing' (02/02/2022).

Centre for London: Nick Bowes (Chief Executive)

'We wholeheartedly support the focus on narrowing the nation's geographical inequalities, which have persisted for far too long. And we welcome acknowledgment that London's success matters and that the city has its own extensive Levelling Up challenges. But London's success depends on sustained investment in infrastructure, public services and skills: none of these are possible without a long-term funding deal for Transport for London' (02/02/2022).

Local Government Association

'The Government's framework for devolution is an important step and is something that the LGA has long called for. It is good that the framework will apply to all local areas and will not impose a one-size-fits-all approach to governance. We are keen to go further and faster with other government departments so the whole of government is taking a 'local first' approach' (02/02/2022).

London Councils

'While welcoming the white paper's focus on reducing inequalities and boosting prosperity in all parts of the country, the cross-party group called for London boroughs to have the powers and resources needed to tackle the capital's enormous challenges' (02/02/2022).

The Equality Trust

'While the White Paper is riddled with numerous targets and an eight year completion date, it fails to put people at the center of Levelling Up, emphasising places and productivity rather than people and incomes' (02/02/2022).

4 Equally Ours, ['Levelling up: Firm Foundations'](#) (December 2021)

5 The Equality Trust, ['The Equality Trust responds to the Government's Levelling Up white paper'](#) (2022)

6 Child Poverty Action Group, ['Child Poverty in London Facts'](#)

The six “capitals” of Levelling Up

The White Paper develops a framework to capture the key drivers of geographical disparities. It is defined by six capitals: physical, human, intangible, financial, social, and institutional.

i) Physical capital

Physical capital refers to the physical assets used to produce goods and services. It can take various forms such as digital infrastructure, housing, and transport. While Transport for London is generally admired, London is also known to be one of the most expensive cities in Europe when it comes to public transport and housing. Expensive housing is forcing more young people out of the city, or into low quality housing, and the cost of transport is increasingly a barrier for young people looking to travel around the city to access opportunities or socialise.

ii) Human capital

Human capital refers to all the knowledge, skills, experience, competencies, health, and other attributes that people acquire throughout their life. In the White Paper, London is celebrated for its excellent performance in terms of skills and education. However, for young people, London still struggles with the lowest uptake of Apprenticeships in the country.

iii) Intangible capital

In the Levelling Up White Paper, intangible capital is defined as 'assets without a physical or financial embodiment' such as innovation, ideas, and patents. While young Londoners are a creative force, and an asset to London, the high cost of starting a business and recent post-Brexit barriers to trade have made capitalising on this increasingly difficult.

iv) Financial capital

Financial capital refers to the resources supporting the financing of companies and enabling them to provide good and services. Although London is widely acknowledged as a top global finance centre, young Londoners do not necessarily benefit, with most entrepreneurs and small business owners in their forties, and the level of personal debt rising because of the cost of living.

v) Social capital

Social capital refers to “the extent and nature of peoples’ connections with others and the collective attitudes and behaviours between people that support a well-functioning, close-knit society” . Young Londoners often do not feel a sense of local pride, and are increasingly reporting feeling lonely while living in the city.

vi) Institutional capital

Institutional capital refers to the strength of local institutions and leadership. According to the Levelling Up White Paper, London has one of the greatest levels of autonomy in England. However, often young people do not feel like they can influence the decision-making processes impacting their life, with a lack of representation among elected officials. This is closely related to another issue, the lack of representation of young people in political institutions. For example, since 1979, the average age of MPs at elections has been consistently around 50 years old.

The meaning of 'Levelling Up'

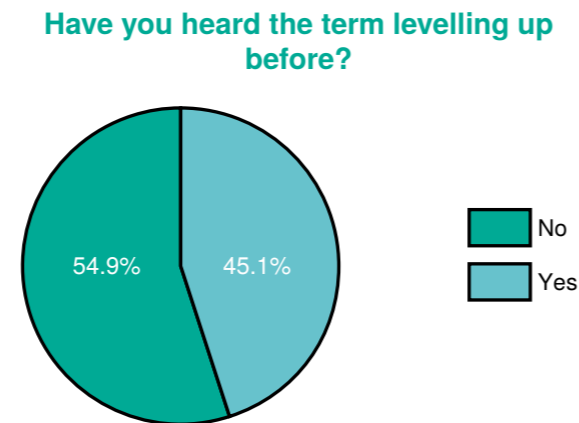
Although the Levelling Up White Paper acknowledges that London faces multiple key challenges such as high housing prices and air pollution, it does not offer concrete solutions to support London's own Levelling Up. In the White Paper, London is presented as one of the 'high-income places where economic growth has remained strong'⁷. It is most frequently referenced as a benchmark of economic prosperity that other parts of the UK need to catch up with or as a region whose funding and employment must be moved from.

This has raised concerns about the implications of the Levelling Up agenda for London and Londoners. Due to the lack of focus on London as a region in need of support and funding, many Londoners fear that the Government's Levelling Up strategy will not help the capital and might even hurt it. Similarly, Mayor of London Sadiq Khan stated that the Government 'must recognise that Levelling Up the UK must not be about levelling down London and withholding the funding and investment our capital city desperately needs'.

There is a lack of clarity about what Levelling Up means to young Londoners

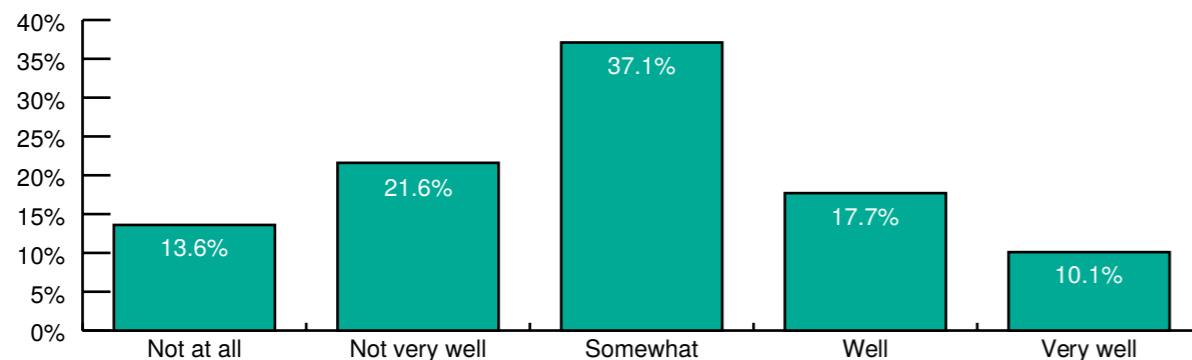
In September 2021, a survey conducted for Centre for London found out that 43% of Londoners knew either a lot or a little about Levelling Up while 20% had never heard the phrase before. Similarly, a survey conducted for the London Communications Agency highlighted that 58% of British people did not understand the government's 'Levelling Up' plan well.

The answers among young people (18-24) in our survey were quite similar, where over half (54.9%) of young Londoners had not heard the term Levelling Up before.



When we asked young people how well they understood what Levelling Up actually meant, we found that over a third (35.2%) had either no understanding or a very weak understanding of the term, while only one in four (27.8%) understood it well or very well.

How well do you understand what levelling up means?



7 Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, 'Levelling Up the United Kingdom' (p.44) (2022)

"When I think of (the term) levelling up, I think of new high rise buildings. And transport like HS2 or the Elizabeth Line."

"My mind (when I think of the phrase levelling up) goes to education, or infrastructure in general."

"(Levelling Up) feels like a media or government buzzword. Something made up to make it sound way more impressive than it is."

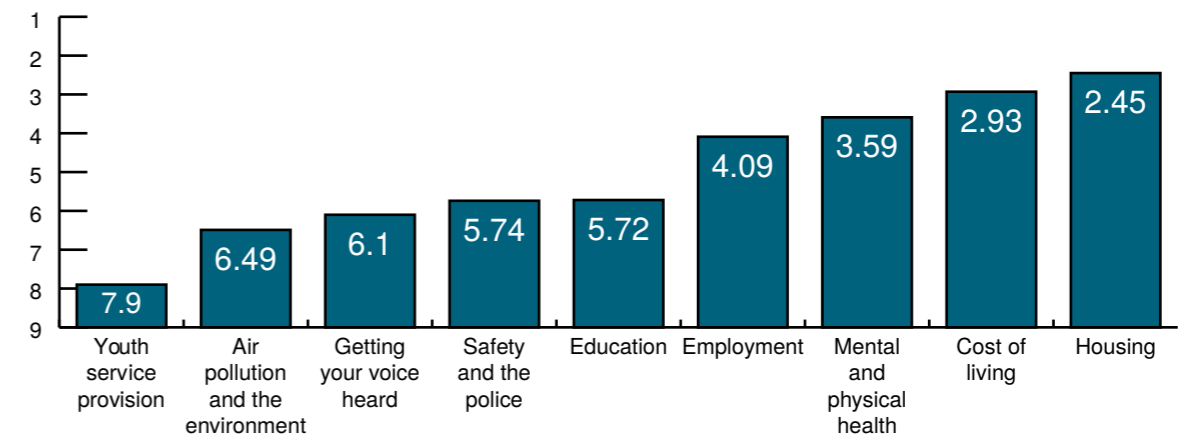
"Maybe levelling up will be better for more financially well off areas, but other areas will be more pushed to the side."

The cost of living and happiness

The top issues for young Londoners

We asked young Londoners to rank nine issues by how important they were to them and young people living in London. Housing was ranked as the most important issue for young Londoners, being most commonly (39%) ranked first and with an average ranking of 2.45 out of 9. This was followed by the cost of living (2.93), mental and physical health (3.59), employment (4.09), education (5.72), safety and the police (5.74), getting your voice heard (6.1), air pollution and the environment (6.49), and youth service provision (7.9).

Rank the following issues by which are the most important to you, with 1 being the most important, and 9 being the least important



We asked this question in a previous survey for Mapping Young Londoners⁸, and found some small differences and similarities. For example, housing was ranked the most important in both surveys, while air pollution and the environment and youth service provision were ranked bottom in both. However, Black young people were half as likely to rank youth service provision as last compared to White young people (31.8% to 66.8%).

"Youth services funding has dropped what, like 400%? I don't think we've really experienced the benefits of youth services to understand them."

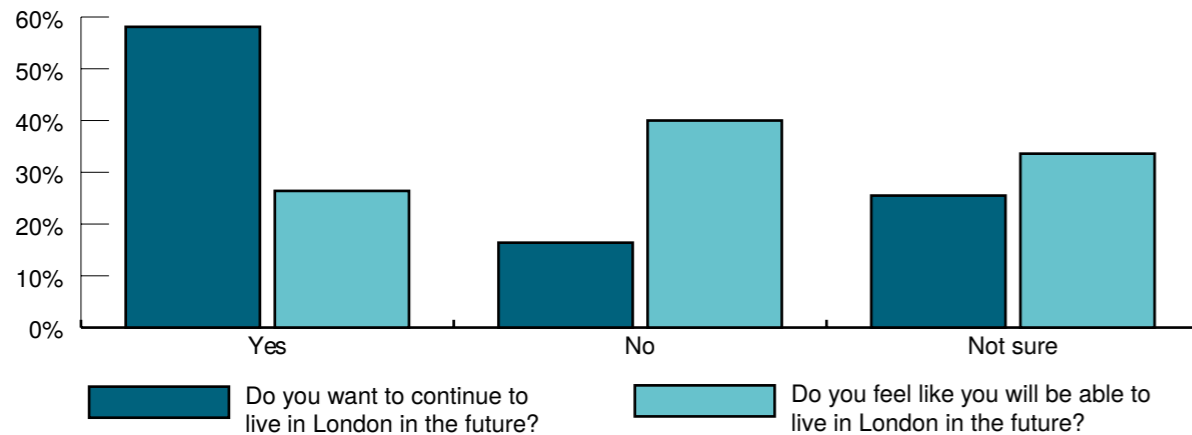
"There are no youth clubs in my area to go to."

⁸ Mapping Young London, Partnership for Young London (2021) (<https://www.partnershipforyounglondon.org.uk/mappingyounglondon>)

Affording a future in London

More than half of young Londoners (58.1%) say that they want to continue to live in London in the future. Less than one in five (16.4%) said that they did not want to continue to live in London, with one in four (25.5%) not sure.

"Do you want to continue to live in London in the future?" compared to "Do you feel like you will be able to live in London in the future?"

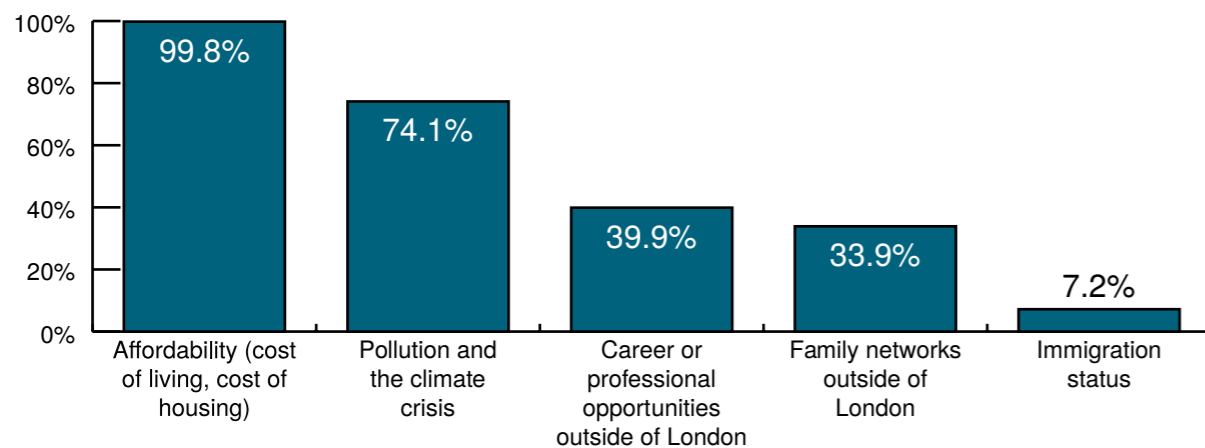


However, only one in four (26.4%) young Londoners said that they feel like they will be able to live in London in the future. Just less than half (40%) said they did not think they will be able to, with one in three (33.6%) unsure.

Affordability is the biggest barrier, alongside air pollution and the environment

For those who said that they did not think they will be able to live in London in the future, we asked them why they did not think they would be able to, providing them a range of options so they could select their top three.

"You said you don't feel like you will be able to live in London in the future. Which of the following reasons apply (select three):"



Apart from one person, every young Londoner (99.8%) chose affordability as the reason they did not think they would be able to live in London in the future. The second most commonly chosen reason was concerns around pollution and the environment (74.1%), followed by specific career or professional opportunities being outside of London (39.9%), and immigration status (7.2%).

"The price of housing is like doubling, and if you will earn the same amount of money well that's basically taking away all your living expenses."

"My flatmates' room has mould which is causing health problems."

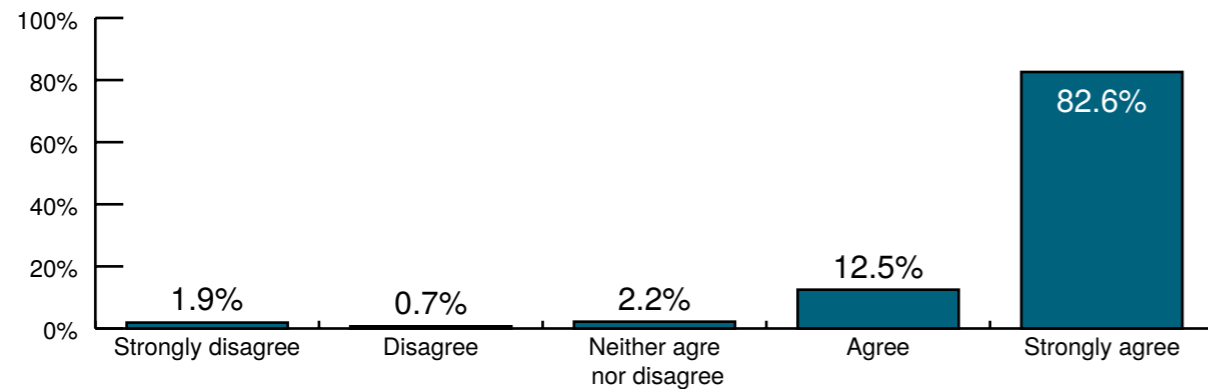
"I think the problem with housing and cost of living is that they are short-term issues."

"If you have a problem with your housing, that affects you right now. Air pollution might impact you, but as a youth, not for awhile."

London's Cost of Living Crisis

While there is a clear emphasis on the advantages that London enjoys in the Levelling Up white paper, it does not reflect the clear cost of living crisis experience by young people across the capital.

Do you agree or disagree with the following statement:
"There is a cost of living crisis in London"

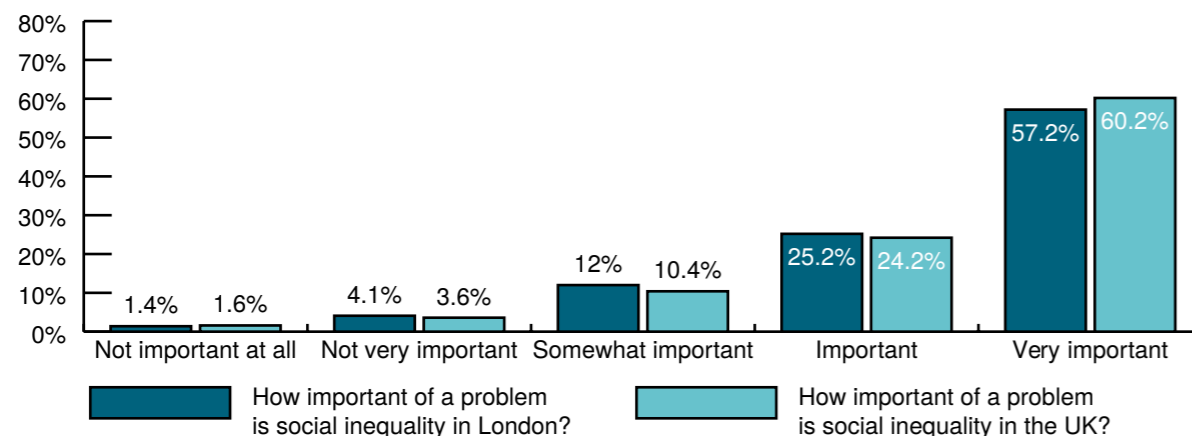


The overwhelming majority of young Londoners (95.1%) agree or strongly agree that there is a cost-of-living crisis in London. Only a tiny majority (2.6%) disagreed or strongly disagreed about there being a cost-of-living crisis, with a similar number also not being sure (2.2%).

Young Londoners see social inequality as a problem everywhere

We wanted to know how important young Londoners felt social inequality was as a problem, both in their own city and across the UK, and how it might compare. Thinking about their own city, the majority of young Londoners (82.4%) said that social inequality is an important or very important problem in London. Only a small minority said that it was not important at all (1.4%) or not very important (3.6%).

"How important of a problem is social inequality in London?" compared to "How important of a problem is social inequality in the UK?"



However, an equal number (84.4%) said that social inequality was an important or very important problem in the UK. Only a small minority said that it was not important at all (1.6%) or not very important (3.6%).

"It's gotten harder to actually survive. You worry about feeding your family and how much you can afford, which could lead to bad mental health."

"Just cutting everything that's not absolutely necessary. Because you just don't have that money to spare anymore."

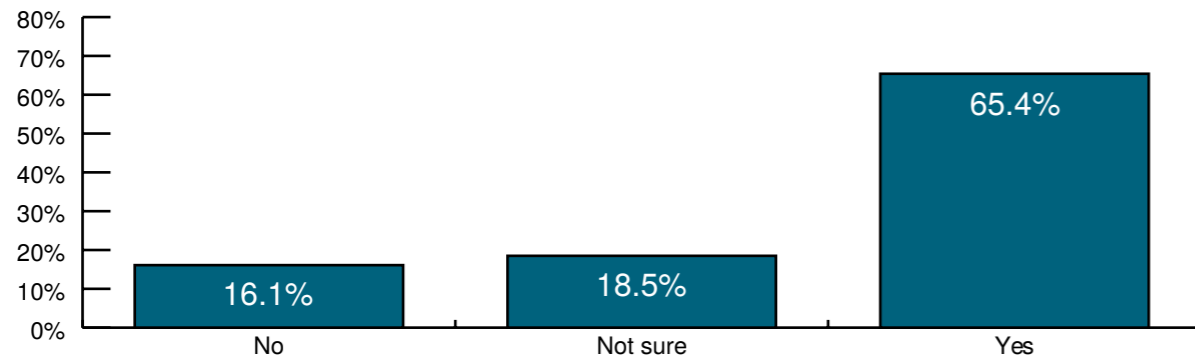
"The one that got me was garlic bread, Tesco brand garlic bread used to be like 45p and it's gone to like 95p which doesn't sound like a lot but in percentage that's so much."

"We are sort of afraid to turn the heater on. £10 a day? No. It is just feeling kind of difficult at times."

Living a happy life in London

More than half of young Londoners (65.4%) think that they can live a happy life in London. Only a minority believe that they cannot live a happy life in the capital (16.1%) or report being unsure about it (18.5%).

Do you think young people can live a happy life in London?

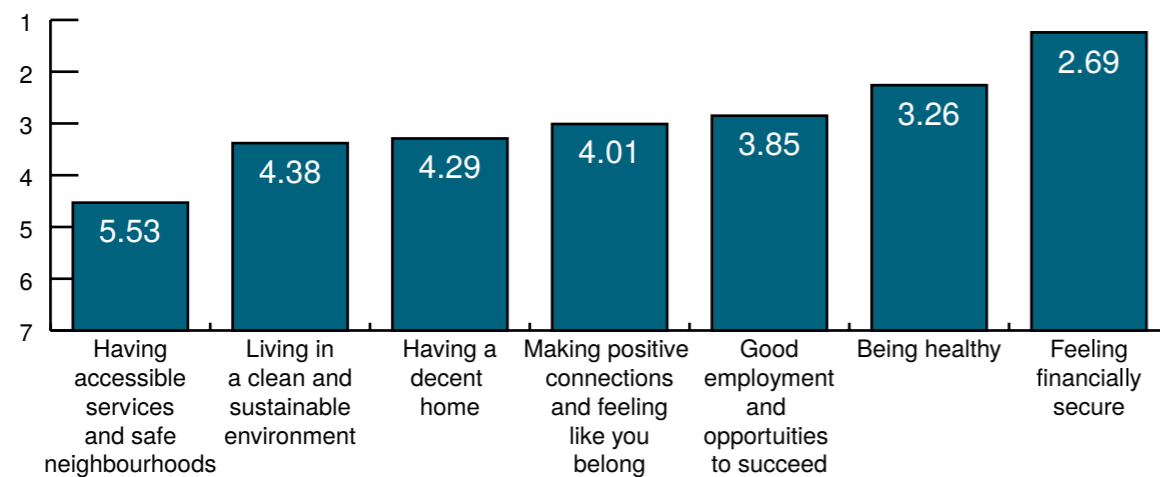


Asian and Black young people are twice as likely as White British young people to think they cannot live a happy life in London (25.8% and 24.2% to 12.3%). Care experienced young people were less likely than those who are not care experienced to think that they can live a happy life in London (52.6% to 68.1%).

Living a happy life in London

We asked young people to rank a range of options by how important they felt they were to live a happy life. Feeling financially secure was the top ranked option (with an average ranking of 2.59 out of 7), with a majority (70%) of young Londoners including it in their top three.

Average ranking of importance to having a happy life (the lower the number, the higher the average ranking out of seven)

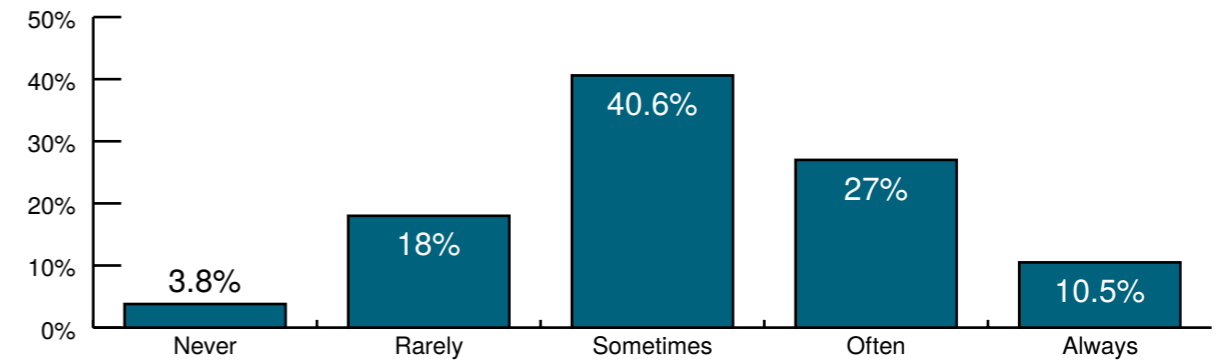


Interestingly having accessible services and a safe neighbourhood was the least important, with a significant proportion (40%) ranking it the least important of the seven options provided.

How often do young people feel lonely?

Almost four out of five (78.1%) young Londoners said that they felt lonely at least sometimes, with one in ten (10.5%) feeling lonely all of the time, and over one in four (27.5%) feeling lonely often. Only one in five (21.8%) said that they felt lonely either rarely (18%) or never (3.8%).

How often do you feel lonely?



Disabled young people were more likely than young people who do not consider that they have a disability to say that they feel lonely often or all the time (47.3% to 34.4%).

"Everybody's got the idea that if you've got enough money, then you can buy all the rest of them (health, safety, housing, opportunities)."

"If you can't afford to go out, there may be an increase in loneliness."

Left behind area formula

The Levelling Up White Paper published by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities included a formula which combined a range of data sets at a borough level to answer the question "Which places are most left behind?":

1. Level 3+ equivalent skills in the adult population
2. Gross Value Added (GVA) per hour worked
3. Median Gross Weekly Pay
4. Healthy life expectancy

We worked with the Peer Outreach Team in City Hall on how they felt about how the left behind area formula in the White Paper, as well as what they would do differently. There were three key themes in the discussions they had:

1. Poverty should be included

Young people felt that it was very odd that a formula for deciding which areas were left behind did not use any data around poverty, or child poverty. They felt that Gross Value Added (GVA) per hours worked and Median Gross Weekly Pay did not accurately capture the real issue facing left behind areas.

2. London is unfairly disadvantaged

Given the cost of living crisis in London, it was discussed how using Median Gross Weekly Pay was a very unfair measure for London where salaries may be higher than the rest of the country, but is often offset by having the highest housing and living costs in the country.

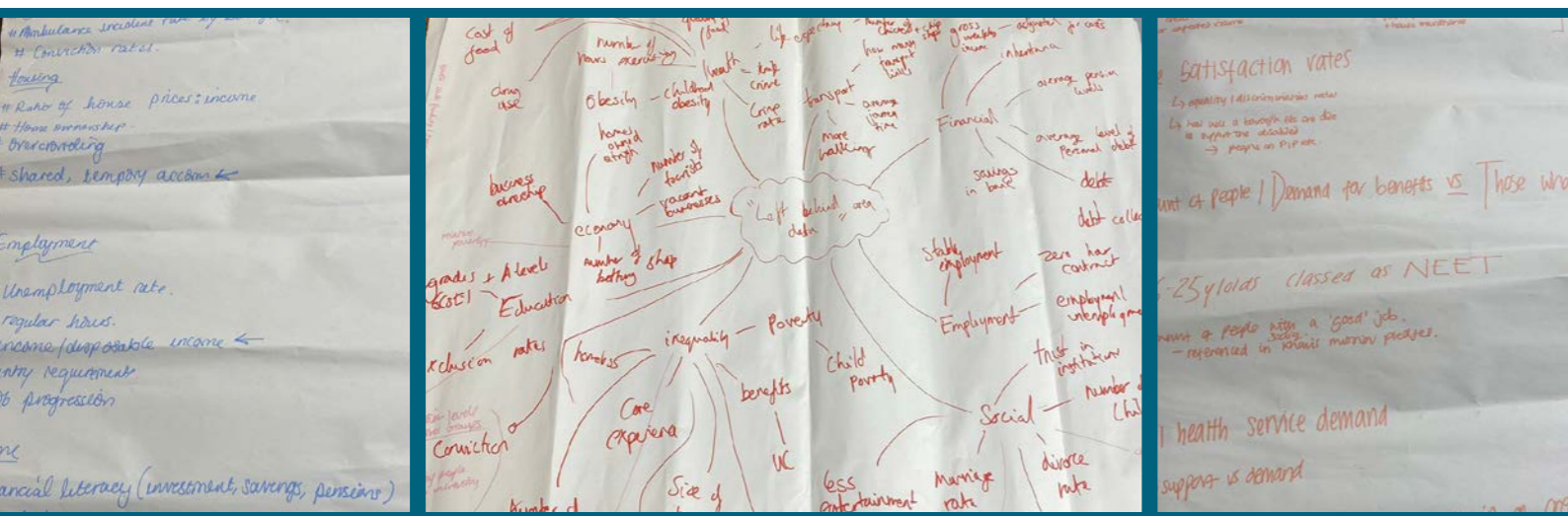
3. Young people are left out of the picture

Young people questioned why Level 3+ equivalent skills in the adult population was chosen over the attainment of all age groups, or by measuring the attainment of those still at school.

A left behind formula by young Londoners

After a discussion about the formula in the white paper, the young people in the Peer Outreach Team split into two groups to design their own. They felt that poverty data was important to include, that average income should account for housing costs, and data around personal well-being scores.

A better left behind formula	A left behind formula for young people
<p>1. Average income after housing costs</p> <p>Monthly income minus cost of living (rent, energy bills, water bills, Wi-Fi/mobile, food/groceries, house maintenance). The expectation is that more "left behind" areas will have lower average monthly income after housing costs.</p>	<p>1. Pupils eligible for free school meals</p> <p>This is the proportion of young people in an area who are eligible for free school meals, i.e., come from families who are on universal credit or earn less than £14,000. This idea from Group 2 was a different way of measuring poverty.</p>
<p>2. Number of children living in poverty</p> <p>This will look at what percentage of children in a borough are in poverty. The expectation is that more "left behind" areas will have a higher rate of child poverty.</p>	<p>2. Level 2 and 3 attainment rate - ages 16 - 19</p> <p>This is the proportion of young people who have attained a level 2 or level 3 in English and Maths by the age of 19. The expectation is that more "left behind" areas will have a lower attainment.</p>
<p>3. Average ratings of personal well-being</p> <p>Both groups felt that the average ratings of personal well-being was a good measure for both the general population and young people. The Government rate personal well-being on four key questions, on how satisfied a person is with their life, how happy they feel, or how anxious they feel. The expectation is that more "left behind" areas will have a lower average rating of personal well-being. We had conversations around happiness, and how happy or anxious people were as a measure of whether an area is left behind.</p>	
<p>4. Claimant unemployment rate</p> <p>This is a very simple measurement of how many people are unemployed in each area. The expectation is that more "left behind" areas will have a higher rate of unemployment.</p> <p>There were multiple conversations around how to measure employment or economic success and failures, like business ownership rates, or NEET figures.</p>	<p>4. Young people not in education, employment, or training (NEET)</p> <p>This is the proportion of young people who are not in education, employment, or training. The expectation is that more "left behind" areas will have a higher rate of NEET young people.</p> <p>Group 2 felt that for young people, unemployment rate was less useful than NEET figures for young people.</p>
<p>5. Life expectancy</p> <p>This a measure of the average number of years a person will live to in an area. The expectation is that more "left behind" areas will have a lower local life expectancy.</p> <p>We spoke about different health measures, such as mental health, but for the general population, life expectancy seems to work best.</p>	<p>5. Children aged 10 to 17 criminal offences</p> <p>This looks at the number of criminal offences committed by 10- to 17-year-olds in each borough of the UK. The expectation is that more "left behind" areas will have a higher rate of offence in the population.</p> <p>Instead of life expectancy, Group 2 instead focused on the prevalence of crime and youth offences by different areas. For example, they cited the link between knife crime and poverty.</p>

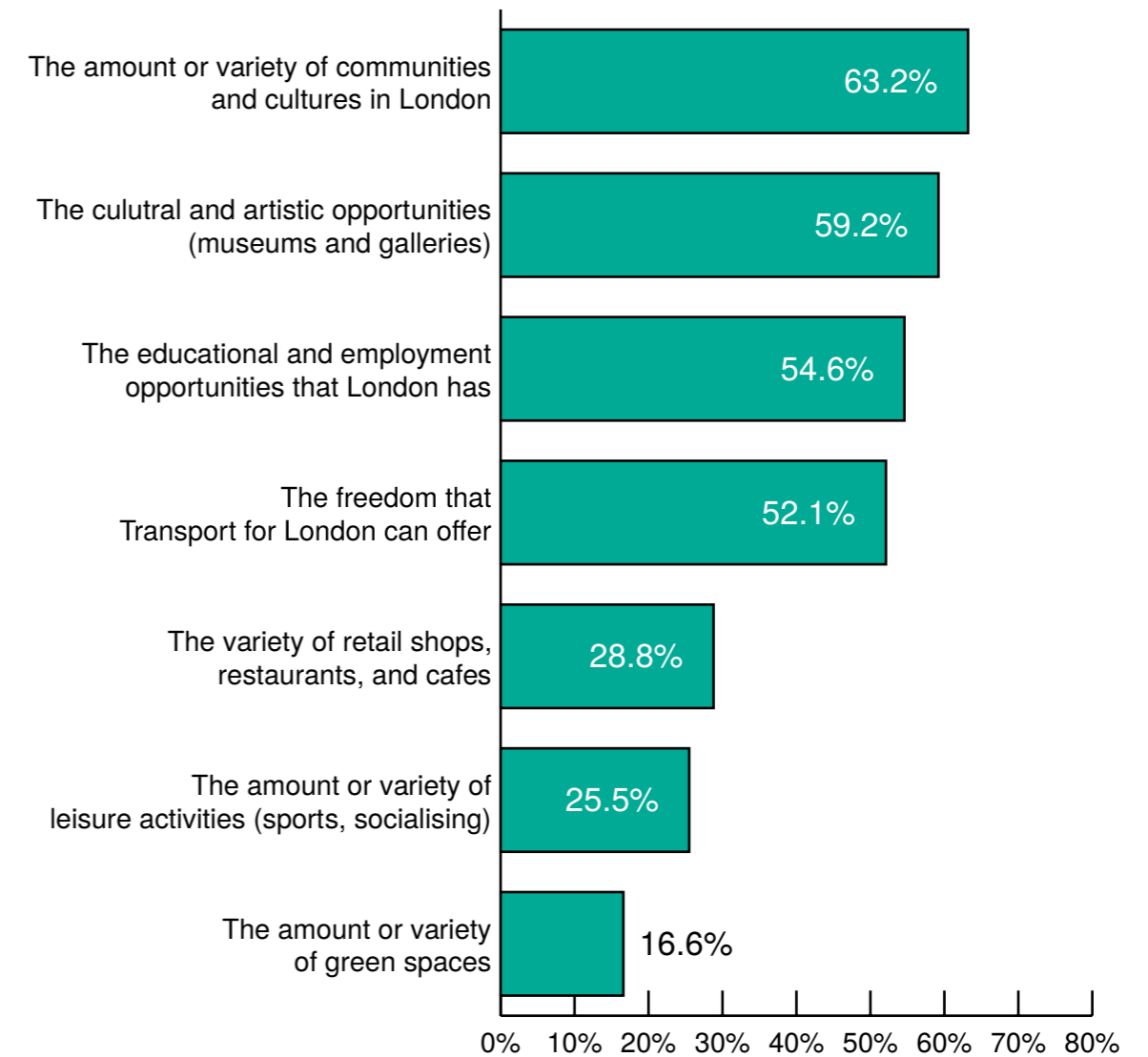


Aspirations of young Londoners

Growing up in London

The three most common choices for the best thing about living in London were the amount or variety of different communities and cultures in London (63.2%), followed by the cultural and artistic opportunities on offer (59.2%), the educational and employment opportunities that London has (54.6%), and the freedom that Transport for London can offer (52.9%).

What do you think is the best thing about growing up in London? (Please select the three most important options)

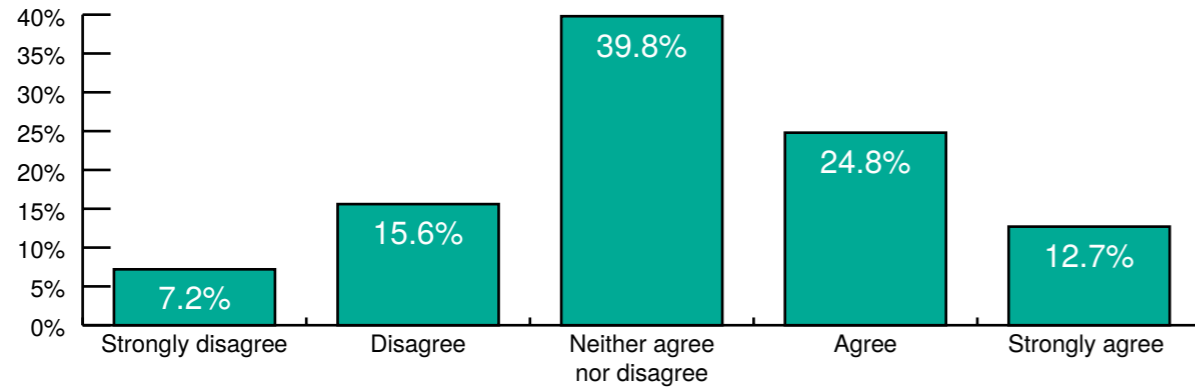


The remaining options were selected in the top three for a minority of young people, such as the variety of retail shops, restaurants, and cafes (28.8%), the amount or variety of leisure activities (25.5%), and the amount of green spaces in London (16.6%).

Local pride varies massively across London

Over a third (37%) of young Londoners agreed or strongly agreed that they were proud of the area that they lived in, with one in five (22.8%) disagreeing or strongly disagreeing. Most commonly (39.8%) neither agreed nor disagree with the statement.

Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: "I am proud of the local area that I live in"

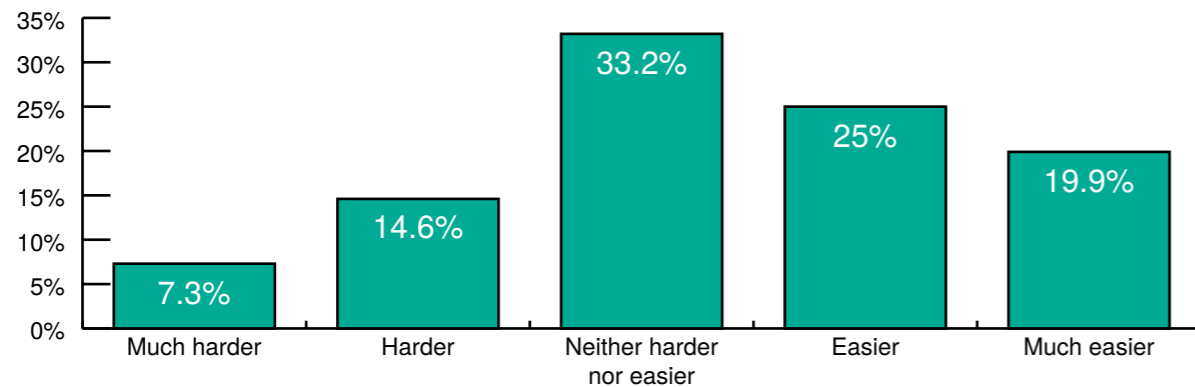


Non-binary/third gender young people are less likely than others to feel proud of the area they live in (38.4% of them report not feeling proud of their local area compared to 19.6% of women and 26% of men)

Not all of London is accessible for opportunity

One in five (21.9%) said that accessing work or studying opportunities was harder or much harder because of where they lived in London. A third (33.2%) were not sure about the impact of where they lived on accessing opportunities, while less than half (44.9%) said that it was easier or much easier.

Is it easier or harder to reach work or studying opportunities because of where you live in London?

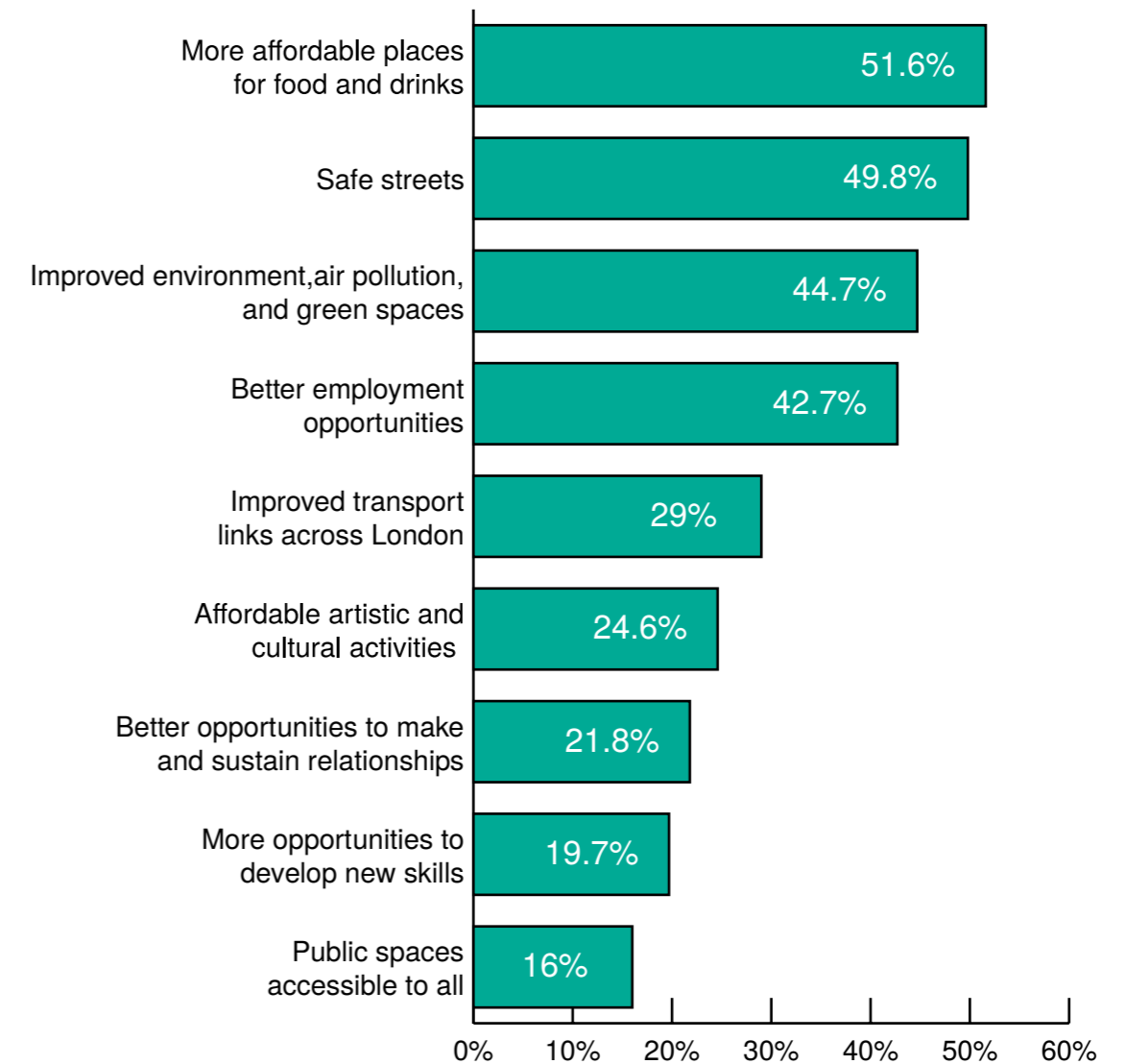


Again, responses changed by the different groups of young people. Young people owning their own place are significantly more likely than young people in council housing or temporary accommodation to say it is much easier to reach work or studying opportunities where they live (58.3% to 0%). While young people who are or went to an Academy School are less likely than those who are or went to Private/Independent School to think that it is much easier to reach work or studying opportunities where they live (12.5% to 32.8%).

Levelling up London

We asked young Londoners to choose the three improvements to London that they wanted to see, with a range of options. The most common things that young Londoners wanted to see in their city was having more affordable places for food and drinks (51.6%), safe streets (49.8%), an improved environment, pollution and more green spaces (44.7%), and better employment opportunities (42.7%).

Which three improvements to London are the most important to you?



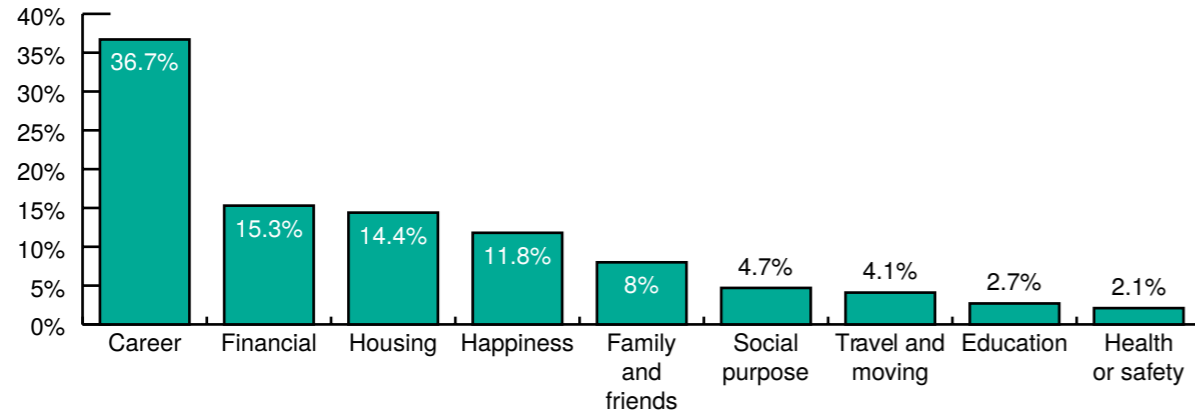
A smaller proportion also selected in their top three priorities: improved transport links (29%), affordable artistic and cultural activities (24.6%), better opportunities to make and sustain relationships (21.8%), more opportunities to develop new skills (19.7%), and making public spaces accessible to all (16%).

Despite youth violence and air pollution being prevalent issues at the moment, many young Londoners just want affordable places where they can meet, socialise, and eat and drink without adding to their cost of living anxiety.

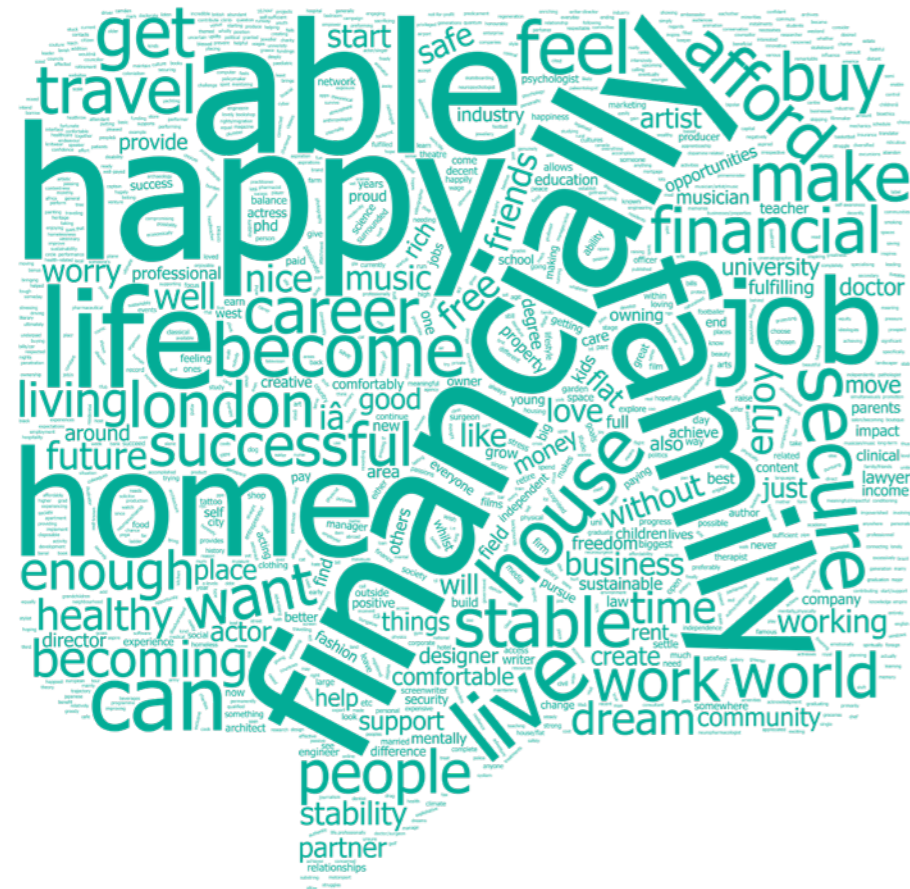
Aspirations and dreams

We asked young people to tell us what their biggest aspiration or dream for the future is, with 981 young people responding. After coding the responses to see what they spoke about, we found that most commonly people spoke about career or employment goals (36.7%), followed by financial goals (15.3%), housing goals like owning their own home (14.4%), and the goal of simply living a happy life (11.8%).

What is your biggest aspiration/dream for yourself in the future?
(981 responses coded by categories)



Wordcloud of answers to the question "What is your biggest aspiration/dream for yourself in the future?"



Three key themes

1. Young people's employment ambitions tend to be specific to a sector

- "Captain a vessel in the yachting industry traveling the world to exotic places."*
- "My biggest aspiration is to become a successful music producer. In addition to this career prospect, I plan to become an actor and screenwriter."*
- "Become a general manager for a hotel."*
- "I want to work at a major law firm."*
- "Becoming a dentist."*

2. Financial dreams were commonly less about the dream of having a lot of money, but about avoiding the anxiety that finances can cause

- "To live life being financially stable and not having to worry about debt"*
- "To be able to afford living in London without any worries"*
- "To have a steady, decently paying job (ridiculous, I know), a place to live that is affordable and nice (in this economy?)"*
- "I want to be able to have a life work balance, where I don't need to work 6 nights a week (like now) just to pay my bills/car insurance. And to have a social life, I have no time for any of that, and I'm just 21..."*
- "Shop at Waitrose and John Lewis and not worry about the bill!"*
- "To be able to not worry about money and enjoy my life"*

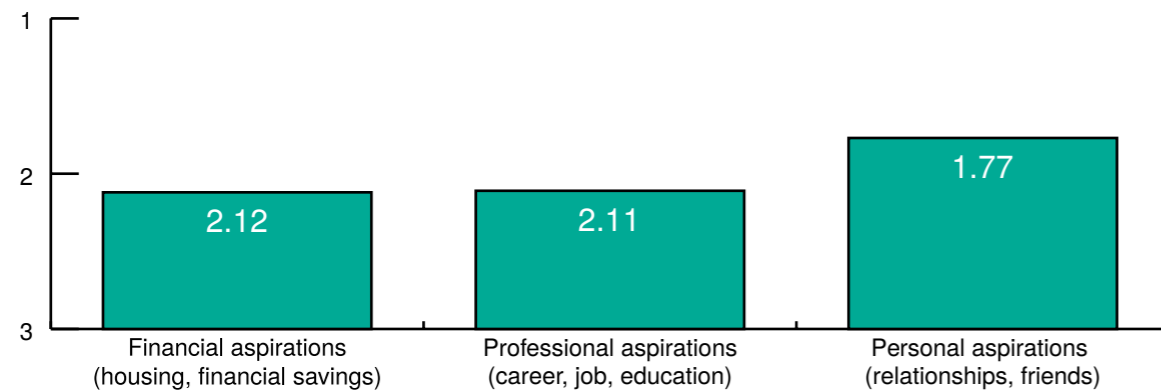
3. Homeownership is still a dream for young Londoners, despite the reality of it being increasingly out of reach

- "To securely own my own property"*
- "I want to own a house where I can host all my friends"*
- "Owning a HOUSE where I can live safely with family"*
- "To be able to live in the house that I love in the place I love."*
- "To be able to buy a house somewhere where I am happy and feel safe so that I can build my career and focus on family/friends"*
- "Being debt free and being a home owner"*

Personal aspirations

We asked young Londoners to rank three types of aspiration by what was more important to them: financial aspirations (housing, savings), professional aspirations (career, job), or personal aspirations (relationships, friends).

Rank the following aspirations in terms of importance to you (the lower the number, the higher the average ranking out of three)



By a large margin, young Londoners were most likely to rank personal aspirations as most important out of the three, which an average ranking of 1.77 out of 3, and almost half (47%) ranking it first. Following that, professional and financial aspirations were evenly tied with a ranking of 2.11 and 2.12 respectively.

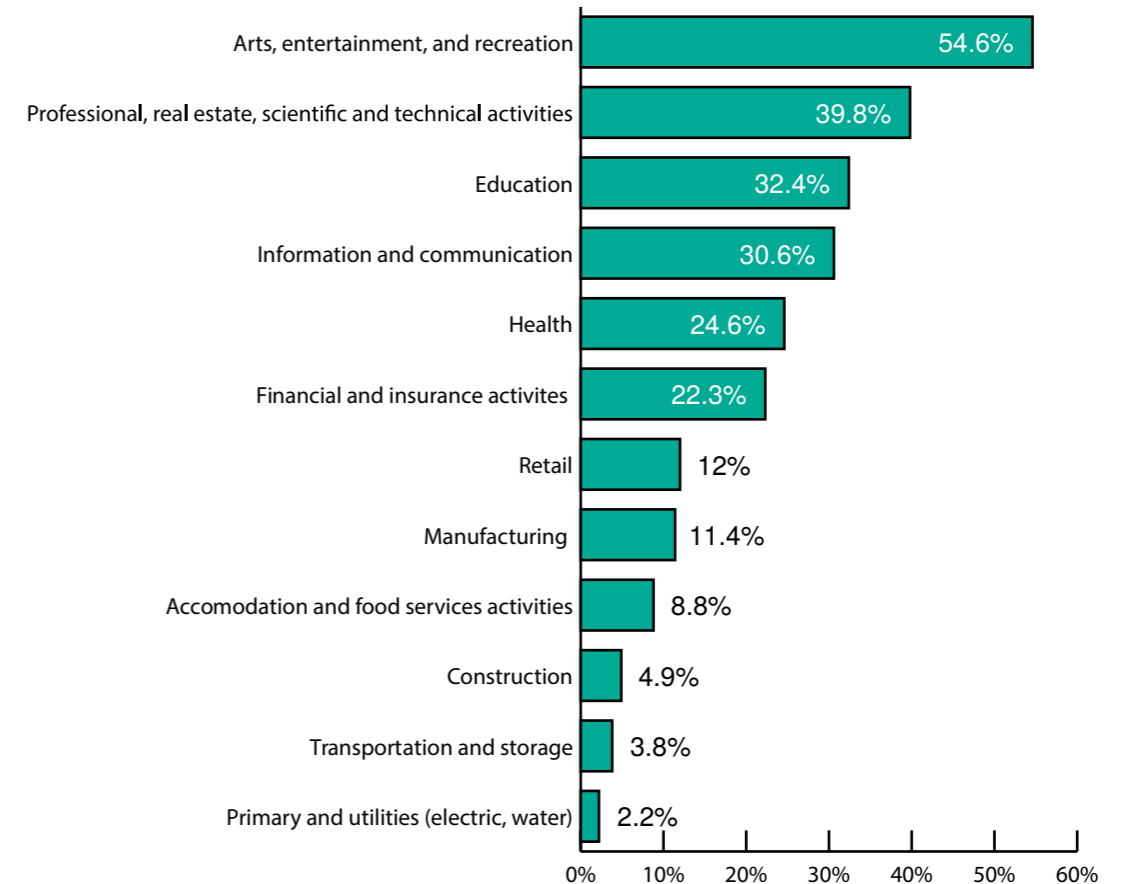
However, while personal aspirations were on average ranked as the most important aspiration, this wasn't the case for everyone. For example, Black young people were significantly less likely to consider personal aspirations as the most important to them (32.6% to 47%), conversely being much more likely to say that financial aspirations were the most important to them (42.4% to 27%).

This was also the case with young people in temporary accommodation, who were far more likely to rank financial aspirations as the most important (61.5%), as opposed to those living in university halls (21.7%), renting a property (20.7%), or owning their own place (16.7%).

Employment aspirations

We then asked young people which sectors they would want to work in, providing a range of options for them to choose three of. We found that young Londoners were most likely to want to work in the arts, entertainment, or recreation sector (54.6%), followed by professional, real estate, scientific and technical activities (39.8%), education (32.4%), information and communication (30.6%), and health (24.6%). The least selected sectors were primary and utilities (2.2%), transportation and storage (3.8%), construction (4.9%), manufacturing (11.4%), and retail (12%).

In the future, which of the following areas do you want to work in (select three):



There is a real challenge as given what we know about estimates of job numbers by sector⁹, there is a real mismatch between the work that is available and the work that young people want to do. For example, over half (54.6%) of young people would ideally want to work in arts, entertainment, and recreation, the sector makes up less than three percent (2.8%) of jobs in London.

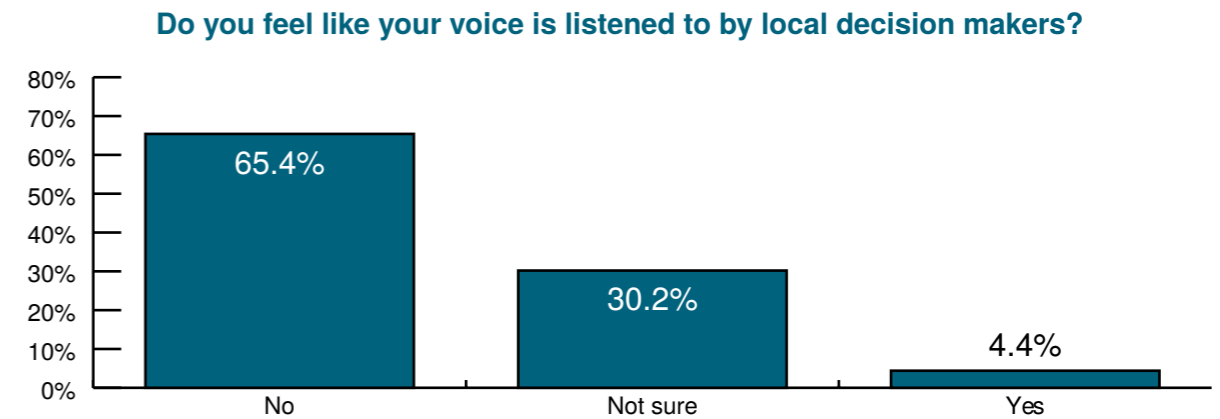
The sectors that young people wanted to work in also changed by age and ethnicity. Younger people aged 16-18 were more than twice as likely as those aged 22-25 to say that they want to work in retail (20.8% to 8.1%). While Asian young people were more likely to choose to work in the professional, real estate, scientific and technical activities (50.8% to 39.8% average).

9 <https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/employee-jobs-by-sectors>

Political participation and change

Involving young people in policy

We first asked young people whether they felt like they were listened to by local decision makers. A majority (65.4%) of young Londoners do not feel like their voice is listened to, while a third (30.2%) said that they were not sure.

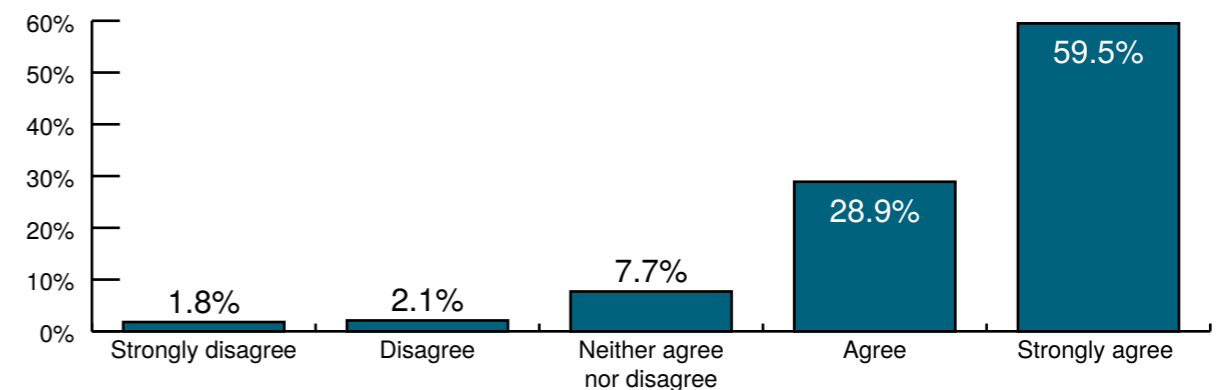


While it is unsurprising that young people do not feel listened to, given the cynicism often found by young people about politics, it is shocking how few felt that they did. Less than 1 in 20 (4.4%) said that they did feel listened to.

Young Londoners should be involved in planning, designing, and decision making

While they do not feel like their voice is listened to, young people resoundingly believe that they should be involved in the planning, designing and decision-making of their city. Almost nine out of ten (88.4%) at least agreed or strongly agreed that young Londoners should be more involved.

Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: "Young Londoners should be more involved in the planning, designing and decision-making of their city"

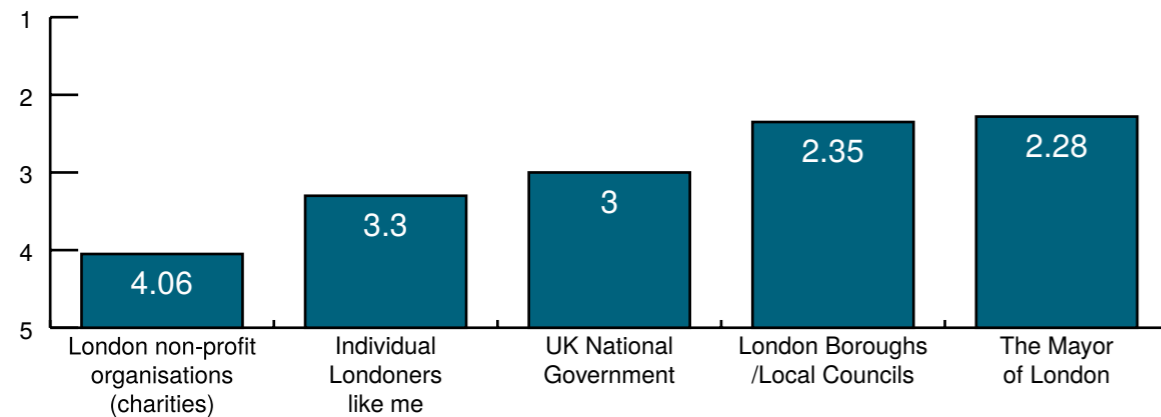


Very few (3.9%) disagreed or strongly disagreed that young Londoners should be more involved, while less than one in ten (7.7%) were not sure.

Responsibility and education

We asked young people to rank a range of options by who they felt is most responsible for creating positive change in London. We found they were most likely to rank the Mayor of London as most politically responsible for creating change, with an average ranking of 2.28 out of 5 options. This was closely followed by London Boroughs/London Councils (2.35), then UK National Government (3.00), individuals Londoners (3.3), and London non-profit organisations (4.06).

Rank the following according to who you think should be the most responsible for making London a better city (the lower the number, the higher the average ranking out of five)

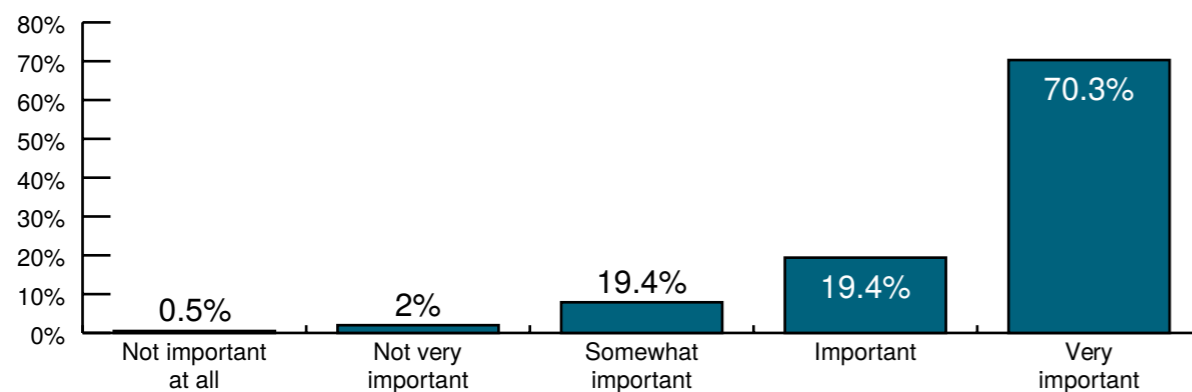


Given the visibility of the Mayor it is not surprising that young people believe them to be the most responsible for creating change, however less often understood is the limitation of the Mayor's powers especially on key issues like housing.

Political education

Young people overwhelmingly (89.7%) believe it is either important or very important for them to learn about UK politics, democracy, and citizenship at school. Only a tiny minority (2.5%) felt that it was not important, while less than one in ten (7.9%) were not sure.

How important do you think it is for young people to learn about UK politics, democracy, and citizenship in school?



As well as the general importance of political education, there is clearly a need to link political education with local and regional political structures and policy making in those local contexts.

"He's the Mayor of London. I think, I mean, I know he's kind of in charge of TfL and stuff."

"(Sadiq Khan) has more responsibility than the actual government. The government control like most of the UK, but then the Mayor has to focus on just London."

"I think a lot of times people don't know what role London Boroughs have to play. How many people even know what borough they're in at any time?"

"I don't know, we don't get taught this unless you take politics. Obviously you don't get taught how budgeting works at local councils."

Young Londoners in London's local election manifestos

We reviewed and analysed the manifestos and 'key pledges' published by four main political parties in each London borough. Those political parties were Labour, the Conservatives, the Liberal Democrats, and the Green Party. We decided to look at both manifestos and key pledges because some local political parties did not publish a full manifesto but only a list of priorities or pledges ahead of the May local elections. In total we analysed:

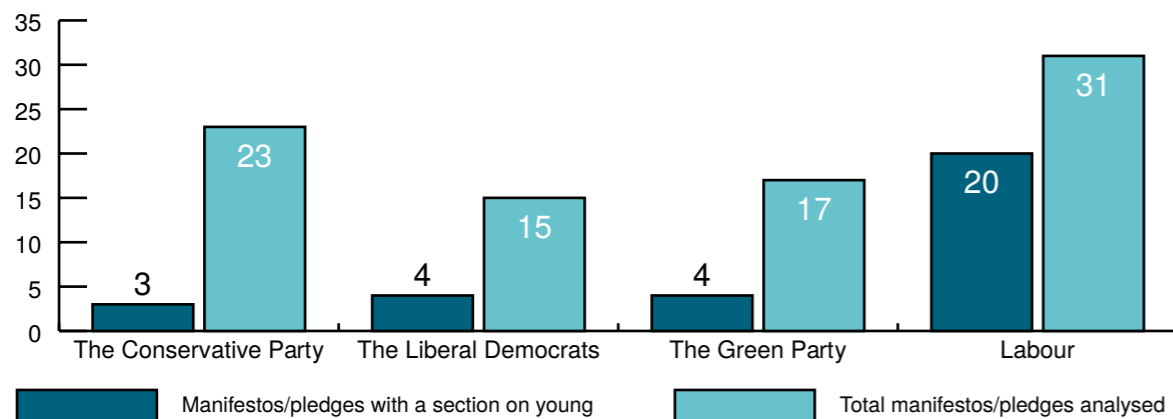
- **The Labour Party:** 31 boroughs, 25 manifestos and 6 lists of pledges/priorities
- **The Conservative Party:** 23 boroughs, 17 manifestos and 6 lists of pledges/priorities
- **The Liberal Democrats:** 15 boroughs, 11 manifestos and 4 lists of pledges/priorities
- **The Green Party:** 17 boroughs, 11 manifestos and 6 lists of pledges/priorities

All the manifestos and key pledges that we have analysed were found online. We located them via online searches. Most of them were published on local political parties' websites.

Young Londoners are mostly absent from local manifestos

In total we looked at over 64 manifestos, and 22 pledges from the four major parties, to see how many had a focus on young people. We defined a focus on young people as where a manifesto had a section or there was a specific pledge about young people. Where young people were referenced as one of a range of groups that would benefit from the promised change, such as on housing, it was not included as we wanted to look at specific policies aimed at young Londoners.

Total number of local manifesto/pledges compared with total number of local manifesto/pledges that have a specific focus on young people in London



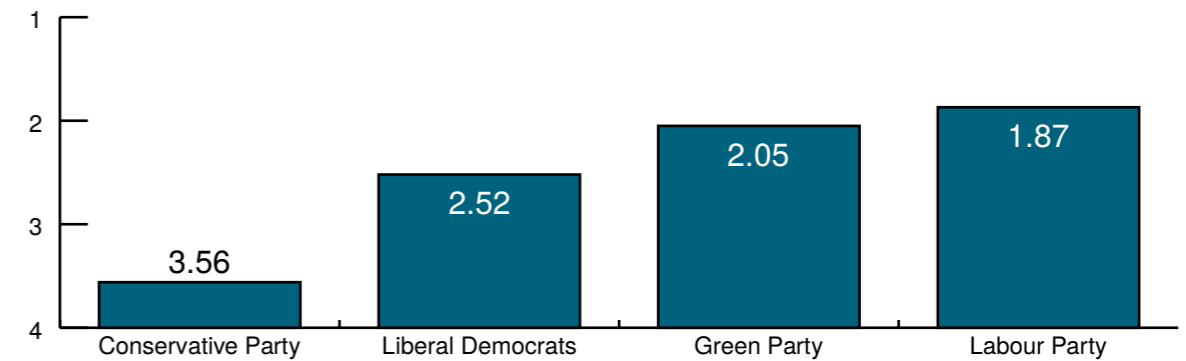
Overall, Labour is the political party that has referenced young people the most in their manifestos and key pledges. Across their manifestos/pledges in 31 boroughs over half of them (65%), 20 boroughs, had a specific focus on young people, with 688 references to young people.

This was followed by The Liberal Democrats and The Green Party where around one in four (27% and 24% respectively) had a focus on young people. The Conservative Party were by far the least likely to specifically focus on young people, with only three boroughs out of the 23 (13%) analysed with specific focuses on young people. Across 23 London boroughs' Conservative manifestos/pledges, there were only 66 references to young people.

Young Londoners see who focuses in on them

We asked young Londoners to rank the four main political parties by who they felt listens to young people's views and opinions. We found that the Labour Party were most likely to be ranked first, with an average ranking of 1.87 out of 4.

Rank the following political parties based on how much you think they listen to young people's views and opinions (the lower the number, the higher the average ranking out of four)



This was followed by the Green Party, with an average ranking of 2.05 out of 4. It was suggested that, separate to local Green Parties, the visibility of the London Assembly's Sian Berry and her work on youth services might have contributed to their higher ranking.

"I have a strong belief that all political parties just view people as vote banks."

"I think we always just get the picture painted that conservatives don't as much care about young people as they do older voters."

Participation in local election manifestos

Different political parties will have different priorities in terms of the different groups that they engage with during elections. However, there is a clear lack of consistency and transparency in the process of producing local manifestos and key pledges around an election. We spoke anonymously to two Political Officers based in two different boroughs, from two different political parties, who were responsible for writing their political party's local manifesto, and found:

1. Manifestos written locally typically engage local party members, which regardless of party, tend to skew older as a demographic. Engagement outside of local party members is heavily dependent on the capacity of external organisations to lobby.

Local party manifestos are primarily drafted with local party stakeholders, regional party groups, and the direction from national politics.

"Manifestos are drafted for party memberships, not for the electorate, right? How do you get them to reach closer to what the electorate want than what a party membership does? The party membership is the most influential stakeholder in the process unfortunately."

However, the local party membership of all major parties tends to skew older as a demographic and have less representation from under-25s.

"Party memberships are a very specific kind of demographic. So, you may only have a very limited amount of young people involved in the process of drawing one up."

Engagement with groups or communities outside of local party structures can be challenging due to a lack of capacity and resources. Often it is largely dependent on organisations reaching out, sending materials, organising hustings. However, in the two boroughs we spoke to, many local youth organisations do not have lobbying capacity or a focus on lobbying, and as a result are often left out of the conversation compared to other more organised interest groups.

"I think if you were developing a manifesto from scratch, and you had a blank piece of paper and a nice budget, you would go after very different groups of people that might be underserved or hard to reach. But primarily, we rely on existing voluntary groups that are already organised to influence the manifesto developments."

2. Being in control of the council can widen access into council staff as a sounding board, but support from the council is limited because of political neutrality.

The manifesto writing process can hugely vary depending on the political assistant writing them, and whether the party they are part of is in control of the council. Having greater elected representation can provide a party with more political support, and more hours for political assistants.

"As soon as you have a third of the chamber, you are entitled as a political group to ask for political support from your local authority...Because (my party) is so dominant here, my post is full time, while for (the opposition party) is part time on a pro-rata contract."

Additionally, the party with control of the council can potentially find it easier to have conversations with officers in the council as a sounding board for policy.

"It probably means that you have a pre-existing idea of what youth services are locally, you have a realistic idea, you know what is attainable. I know my officers, I could talk to them about ideas that were that were being brought to me, I can test them for realism."

However, local political parties are often at capacity, and are unable to tap into the council's support because it would breach political neutrality. For example, not being able to fully engage with the local youth parliament, or get support from engagement officers.

"There isn't like a specific under-25 forum. The most ideal existing structure is our youth parliament, but because that's neutral, run by the council, I can't go in there and say, 'Hey, what do you think should be in our manifesto?'"

"In an ideal world, I'd have a stakeholder engagement officer sat next to me that would be able to do some of the work. But that's the problem with the manifestos. I've got over the other side, where I'm sat, probably 20 engagement officers, which we cannot use for any of this kind of stuff, because it's inherently political."

3. Lobbying activities, such as hustings, are usually timed around the election and miss the opportunity to influence manifesto writing much earlier. However, there is a key opportunity to local youth organisations to influence political manifestos, as often the voices of young people are not communicated.

There is a real opportunity for local groups of young people to influence policy and the manifesto writing process. Providing a clear set of asks, that are practical and local, is incredibly useful for political assistants who struggle for capacity to do that engagement work themselves.

"They turned up with six things that they thought should be in the manifesto. To be honest, it was incredibly helpful for us because it was simply we can say yes or no. Like it outsources the thinking and the provenance of the ideas to somewhere else."

In particular, organised events like hustings are a good opportunity to get locally elected politicians on board with an ask.

"They will organise hustings, basically a glorified way to hold politicians' hands the fire and say, 'Will you agree?', and 9 times out of a 10, most politicians are gonna go: 'Yes, I'm in a public meeting, I'm obviously going to take the path of least resistance.'"

However, organisations who want to influence the manifestos often leave lobbying too late, focused on delivering engagement opportunities for young people near elections.

"So if you've got your May local elections, most of the hustings don't happen until April, by which point I've gone to print. I've already printed out like 10,000 manifestos, and like we're running our roadshows in October, November. Most of the groups don't wake up until the idea of an election until just too late."



**Partnership
for Young
London**



Trust for London
Tackling poverty and inequality