

# TALKING 'BOUT MY GENERATION

REGIONAL REBALANCING:  
A VIEW FROM THE NEXT GENERATION



# ABOUT THIS REPORT

This independent research report explores the views of some of those who will be living in the hopefully 'levelled up' world of the future, specifically, a representative sample of 16-21 year olds across the North of England. The research focused on three issues:

1. **Place:** young people's views on the infrastructure and amenities where they live
2. **Prospects:** young people's feelings and expectations about their future education, skills, employment and opportunities
3. **Perceptions:** what young people know and how they feel about political and social issues such as devolution, levelling up, climate change and mental health

The two report sponsors - the infrastructure company, AtkinsRéalis and the Northern Powerhouse Partnership (NPP) - provide their individual comments on the research findings.

This report is a sequel to 2022's Regional Rebalancing research report by AtkinsRéalis, NPP and Durham University which explored the issues and challenges facing decisionmakers across the North as they seek to rebalance or 'level up' their communities.

This second report provides the views of an often overlooked group when it comes to levelling up and is intended to be a valuable addition to the overall debate.

Both research reports covered the same four regions: Liverpool City Region, the M6 Corridor (Carlisle to Crewe), Teesside and West Yorkshire.

The research for both reports was conducted by Trajectory, a strategic insight consultancy.



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# FOREWORD

BY RICHARD ROBINSON

This Spring 2023 Next Generation research is a companion piece to our Regional Rebalancing research report from Summer 2022. That primary research explored the views of decision makers across four regions in the North about levelling up, the challenges, issues and priorities for those charged with delivering substantial and long overdue change to the regional imbalances across our country.

## 16-21 YEAR OLDS

This new primary research focuses on the same four regions but this time explores the views of the next generation, specifically 16-21 year olds. It is a logical extension to the earlier research. What do those who will be living in a hopefully levelled up future want it to be like? What do they want from the future, do they think they will find it where they currently live and what fresh insights and perspectives might they have? What issues matter most to them and their daily lives?

The research provides a view of the future from the perspective of those who will live it, not those who professionally plan and deliver it.

As a company whose core work around infrastructure and transport has a direct impact on place and connectivity, it made absolute sense to seek out the answers to those questions. In so doing it took us outside our comfort zone: we and our peers do not often research the views of 16-21 year olds.

In particular, we explored their views on place, their prospects for the future and their perceptions about political and social issues such as devolution, levelling up, climate change and mental health.

## FRESH AND IMPORTANT

We believe the findings are fresh and important and should be shared with everyone involved and interested in delivering levelling up. Business has a crucial role to play and I hope this research can energise and inspire all of us in business to play the full part that is needed, in partnership with others, to meet the challenge. I say more on this in my commentary at the end of this report.

It should be stated up front that despite the major issues and challenges that emerge in the findings, what is clear is that the young people we researched really care about the place where they, their families, friends, and neighbours live. It would be inaccurate to cast all the findings under a pall of gloom, there are positives as well as negatives. Perhaps most importantly, though, there are strong learnings in the research which we think give pause for much thought.

These include views on what made a place 'good', prospects for future jobs and the skills needed for them, the availability of opportunities in their area and their willingness to move away if necessary. In particular, there were major themes around transport and leisure, concern about crime and even their views on the older generation, which were not all bad, I hasten to add!

## NORTHERN POWERHOUSE PARTNERSHIP

We partnered again with the Northern Powerhouse Partnership (NPP) to produce this report and I want to thank them for their help and support. NPP's Chief Executive, Henri Murison, provides his commentary on the findings later in this report. We, like the NPP, have been in listening mode and I want to share the results of this with anyone who is committed to delivering a levelled-up future.

## NEXT STEPS

Taken together, the Regional Rebalancing and this Next Generation report provide contrasting, valuable and rich insights into the challenges we face. They undoubtedly point the way towards further listening both by the private and public sector to what the next generation need and want.

**RICHARD ROBINSON**

MAY 2023



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The issues and challenges across the four quite distinct regions we researched were broadly the same in each. Overall, the quantitative research backed up the focus group findings in most cases.

In some instances the survey findings were more positive and optimistic than expected, due perhaps to respondents wanting to support their areas while focus group participants may have felt more comfortable sharing negative feelings. It was also clear from the focus groups that most young people really care about the place where they live. They want it to do well.

## DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE TWO AGE GROUPS

The two age groups face distinctive challenges: the younger group, 16-18, was most concerned about accessing a high-quality education and finding interesting things to do in their leisure time whereas the 19-21-year-olds were confronting a job market that typically offers low rates of pay, which in turn presents them with challenges in terms of housing and living independently.

The younger age group wanted more leisure opportunities, especially indoors, and the older group was more focused on better pay, job prospects and affordable housing. Both age groups wanted better, more frequent and more reliable transport links and easy access to better shops.

## GEOGRAPHY

Geography was very important. Generally, those living in cities felt that they benefit from more investment and have better leisure facilities, more job opportunities and the best future prospects, but there is more crime and violence, and housing is expensive.

Those in towns felt that they had the worst of both worlds – not much to do or many opportunities and there is still violence and crime.

Those in more rural locations bemoaned the lack of leisure facilities and job opportunities, poor transport links that left them isolated and expensive housing. However, they did benefit from a calmer and more relaxing environment with less crime and violence.

## LEVELLING UP

Around two thirds (**68%**) had heard the phrase 'levelling up' and 40% claimed to have a clear understanding of what it means. Despite most thinking it is a good idea (**80%**), more than half thought it has not worked in practice (**54%**) and only **31%** thought that their area has benefited. There were some very strong negative views from those who were already aware of it.

## MAJOR THEMES

### Transport

Transport was one of the major issues, being seen by young people as fundamental to their life prospects and quality of life – where you can go to school or college, job opportunities and leisure options.

### Leisure

This was a major issue for 16- to 18-year-olds, who wanted indoor options. The older group, which can legally use pubs and clubs also felt that this was a limiting option (especially for a generation that we know drinks less alcohol than previous cohorts).

### Education

Provision is patchy and depends on location. Those living in small towns and rural areas often felt they had little choice and many felt that the education system is not fair. While nearly three quarters (**72%**) agreed that they were getting a good education this also means that over a quarter are unhappy. When patchy education provision and patch transport links intersect, it has real impact on young people's lives.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Prospects: jobs of the future, opportunities, skills and what they want from an employer

They were not overly positive about their prospects. Just over half (**55%**) thought they will get the right skills and less than half (**45%**) thought there will be job opportunities and somewhere affordable to live locally.

### The jobs of the future

They had strong opinions and were well informed about the jobs of the future. They felt that tech, online, digital, science and life sciences jobs will be prominent along with healthcare, finance and engineering. Some opportunities were locationspecific such as the nuclear industry in Cumbria. They also cited likely considerable demand in the care sector.

Compared with the older generation, they felt that today's jobs were more varied and possibly more interesting. There are also more opportunities to study but getting the job they want is a lot more difficult than before.

### Opportunities

They had a strong sense that opportunities will not be evenly distributed – the bigger cities in each region and London are expected to offer the best employment options and many felt they would have to leave the area to pursue their career of choice.

## Skills

Only just over half (54%) said they have been well prepared for the job market of the future. Interestingly, they felt that soft skills such as communication, time management, collaboration and team working were far more important than practical and knowledge-based skills. Many had been, were at, or planning to go to university. Some saw it as almost essential and others thought the cost made it a less attractive.

### What they want from an employer

They felt strongly about how employers should treat and relate to them as people and valued respect and consideration above high wages. They also expected an awareness of mental health issues and felt they are more likely to find this in entrepreneurial rather than large companies. They felt that a diverse and inclusive working environment should be the norm and not something that employers should get credit for doing.

Many said they wanted to ultimately start their own companies and to be their own boss.

## Place: mental health, crime, housing, the High St, the countryside

### Mental health

There was a clear belief in a link between place and mental health with only **30%** saying their local environment does not affect their mental health.

### Crime, drugs and homelessness

Issues that were brought up spontaneously were crime – a very real concern - drugs and homelessness, the latter in towns not just the big cities. These issues have a very real impact on how they feel about their area, particularly crime (gun, not just knife).

### Housing

In all areas young people felt that housing is increasingly expensive and, for many of them, unaffordable. Perhaps surprisingly they have mixed feelings about new housing developments – they are not universally welcome, especially in rural areas.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## The High Street and shops

'The shops' are often a key criterion for judging a place and the quality and variety of the shops are often important factors for where young people want to live.

## Countryside and natural environment

Where beautiful countryside does exist, young people appreciate it and want to see it preserved. However, some saw rural environments as places for people who are settled, not for those looking to progress.

Despite the perceived faults that were discussed, most could find something positive to say about where they live.

## Moving away

Where they will be able to live in the future is driven not just by the cost of housing but also by their beliefs about their job prospects and earning potential.

Around half expect to stay near to where they currently live, including those who expect to go away to study. Just under half expect to move away permanently.

Of those who plan to move away, only **15%** plan to move to a town or city in their region and of these, just under half (44%) are seeking better employment prospects and two fifths (40%) hope for a better living environment.

There is a significant difference between the age groups – younger people say they are more likely to move away. Young people from Teesside were more upbeat about what was available than those from the other regions. Despite this, many still felt they would need to move.

## Net Zero

Less than half (47%) have heard the expression 'net zero' but over four fifths (83%) thought that climate change, is one of the most important issues, or the most important issue. Nearly three quarters felt that the older generation should have done more to tackle climate change (**73%**) and protect the local environment (**71%**).

## The older generation

There was a certain amount of intergenerational sympathy and solidarity, rather than conflict. Many respected their parents' efforts and felt that they had worked hard and/ or not been dealt a great hand. Even where their local area had declined, they did not necessarily blame their parents' generation.



# RESEARCH FINDINGS

METHODOLOGY

UNDERSTANDING THE FINDINGS



# RESEARCH FINDINGS

What is it like for young people living in the North of England? How do they feel about the place where they live and the resources and opportunities that are available to them? And how does the place where they live influence their prospects? This report sets out to answer these questions and to find out how young people engage with the political and social issues that also affect their lives.

## METHODOLOGY

The report is based on findings from two phases of research conducted in February and March of 2023 with young people aged between 16 and 21 living in four Northern regions: Liverpool City Region, M6 Development Corridor, Teesside and West Yorkshire. The research was conducted by Trajectory, a strategic insight consultancy.

The qualitative phase comprised eight focus groups, one in each region with 16- to 18-year-olds and one with 19-to 21-year-olds. Throughout the sample there was a wide mix of demographics including gender, ethnicity, educational attainment level, work status and population density.

The quantitative phase comprised an online survey of 227 young people across the four regions, made up of 103 aged 16 to 18 and 124 aged 19 to 21.

This report focuses on the three key issues that were discussed in the focus groups and measured via the survey:

1. **Place:** young people's views on the infrastructure and amenities where they live
2. **Prospects:** young people's feelings and expectations about their future education, skills, employment and opportunities
3. **Perceptions:** what young people know and how they feel about political and social issues such as devolution, levelling up, climate change and mental health



## UNDERSTANDING THE FINDINGS

To understand the findings, it is helpful to consider how the challenges faced by different groups of young people can vary. The focusgroup respondents included some young people with high hopes for the future, such as expectations of attending Oxbridge, and confidence in their future job prospects, as well as others for whom life was more of a struggle and who were less optimistic about their life chances and the prospects for their area.

We found that the two age groups faced distinctive challenges: the younger group were most concerned about accessing a high-quality education and finding interesting things to do in their leisure time whereas the 19-21-year-olds were confronting a job market that typically offered low rates of pay, which in turn presented them with challenges in terms of housing and living independently.

We asked the groups what they wanted most from their area: the younger age group wanted more leisure opportunities, especially indoors, for under 18s and the older group was more focused on better pay, job prospects and affordable housing. Both age groups wanted better, more frequent and more reliable transport links and easy access to better shops.

Geography was another big differentiator with widely different experiences for those living in cities, towns and rural areas. Broadly speaking, those living in cities felt that they benefit from more investment in the area and have better leisure facilities, more job opportunities and the best future prospects, but there is more crime and violence, and housing is expensive.

Those in towns felt that they had the worst of both worlds in that there isn't much to do or many opportunities and there is still violence and crime. Those in more rural locations said that there was nothing to do for leisure and no job opportunities, that transport links were poor, leaving them isolated and that housing was expensive but that they did benefit from a calmer and more relaxing environment with less crime and violence than in towns and cities.

Although the four regions represented in this research are quite distinct, the issues and challenges we uncovered were broadly the same in each, with the quantitative research specifically not revealing statistically significant differences in views.

The quantitative research also shows some differences between age groups, those living in cities, towns or rural environments and the four regions although due to the sample size most of these differences are indicative rather than statistically significant. The report includes some charts with significant differences by age and cities vs. towns and rural locations.

Overall, the quantitative research backed up the focus group findings in most cases. However, some of the survey findings were more positive and optimistic than we might have expected given the conversations in the focus groups. We suspect that respondents to the quantitative research may want to be positive about their area and stick up for it – we did hear about this in the groups, but the moderators built rapport and trust so that young people felt comfortable to share some more negative feelings.

The focus groups also revealed that most young people really care about the place where they, their families, friends, and neighbours live. They want their places to succeed and improve. Many said that they were personally prepared to work to help bring about improvements.



# PLACE

## INFRASTRUCTURE AND AMENITIES

TRANSPORT  
EDUCATION  
HOUSING  
LEISURE

HEALTH  
HIGH STREET AND SHOPS  
COUNTRYSIDE AND  
NATURAL ENVIRONMENT



# PLACE

## INFRASTRUCTURE AND AMENITIES

Overall, the findings reveal a mixed picture. Young people are relatively happy with some elements of the infrastructure and amenities available where they live.

Figure 1 shows that nearly three quarters (**72%**) agree that they are getting a good education and around two thirds (**68%**) say that the public transport network is good. However, digging deeper into attitudes towards transport reveals a more complex picture, as the next section shows. Transport is particularly important as without good transport links, young people are less able to access the other amenities such as schools and colleges, leisure facilities and shops.

Around two thirds of young people (**64%**) say that the digital infrastructure is good, but when it comes to leisure and shopping facilities, they are less positive. Only **53%** feel there is good leisure provision and less than half (**45%**) say their local high street is well looked after and pleasant.

What does this mean? We don't know how these figures compare to young people in other areas. But we can ask, "is this good enough?" Although **72%** being happy with their education sounds high, it still leaves more than a quarter who aren't happy. As the sections below on education and future prospects show, provision is patchy and where you live can have what is sometimes perceived as an unfair influence on your day-to-day experiences and life chances.

HOW MUCH DO YOU AGREE OR DISAGREE WITH THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS?

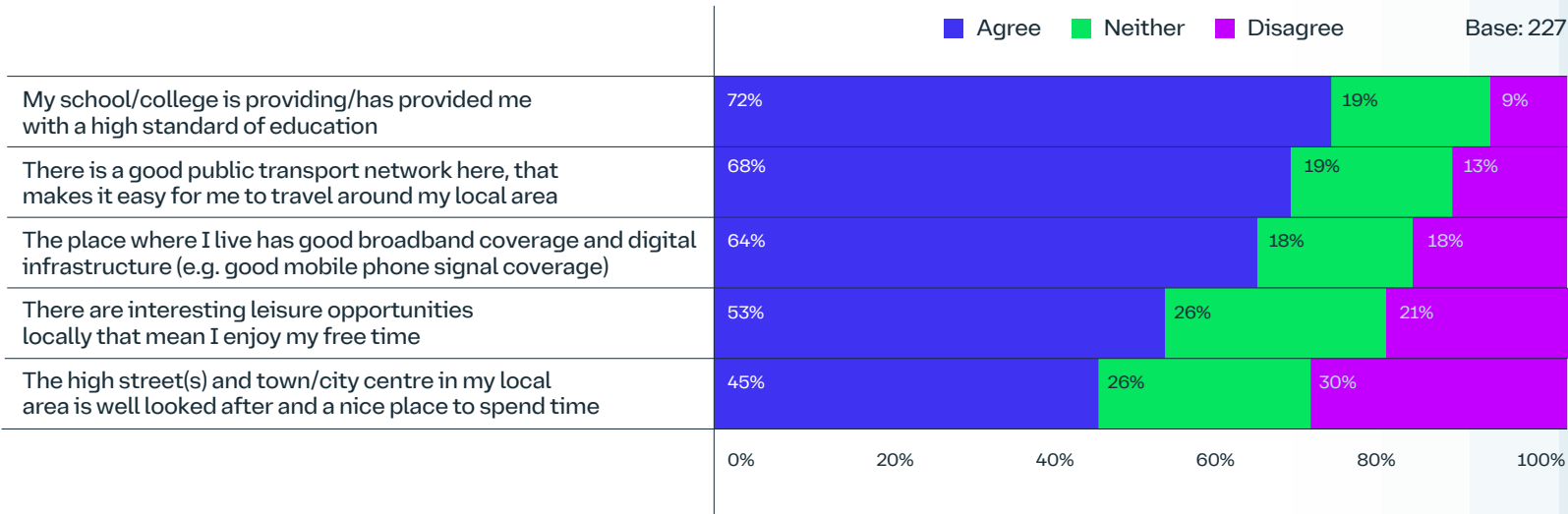


FIGURE 1. HOW DO YOUNG PEOPLE FEEL ABOUT INFRASTRUCTURE AND AMENITIES?





TRANSPORT

In the focus groups, transport was often young people's top priority for improving their area. This was especially true for those living outside city centres. We heard complaints that public transport is too infrequent, unreliable and expensive or simply not available. There was also a perception that services are being cut and becoming even more expensive.

Young people saw good transport as fundamental to their life prospects and quality of life. It affects all other choices such as where you can go to school or college, which job opportunities are open to you and which leisure options you can enjoy.

**"I can either arrive at work an hour early or 10 minutes late." (16-18, West Yorkshire)**

**"Public Transport is the biggest issue around here and I think everyone would agree with that." (16-18, West Yorkshire)**

Where good transport links do exist, young people value them.

**"Middlesbrough connects really well to other places like Darlington and Stockton." (19-21 Teesside)**

TO WHAT EXTENT DO YOU AGREE OR DISAGREE WITH THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS ABOUT TRANSPORT LINKS IN YOUR LOCAL AREA?

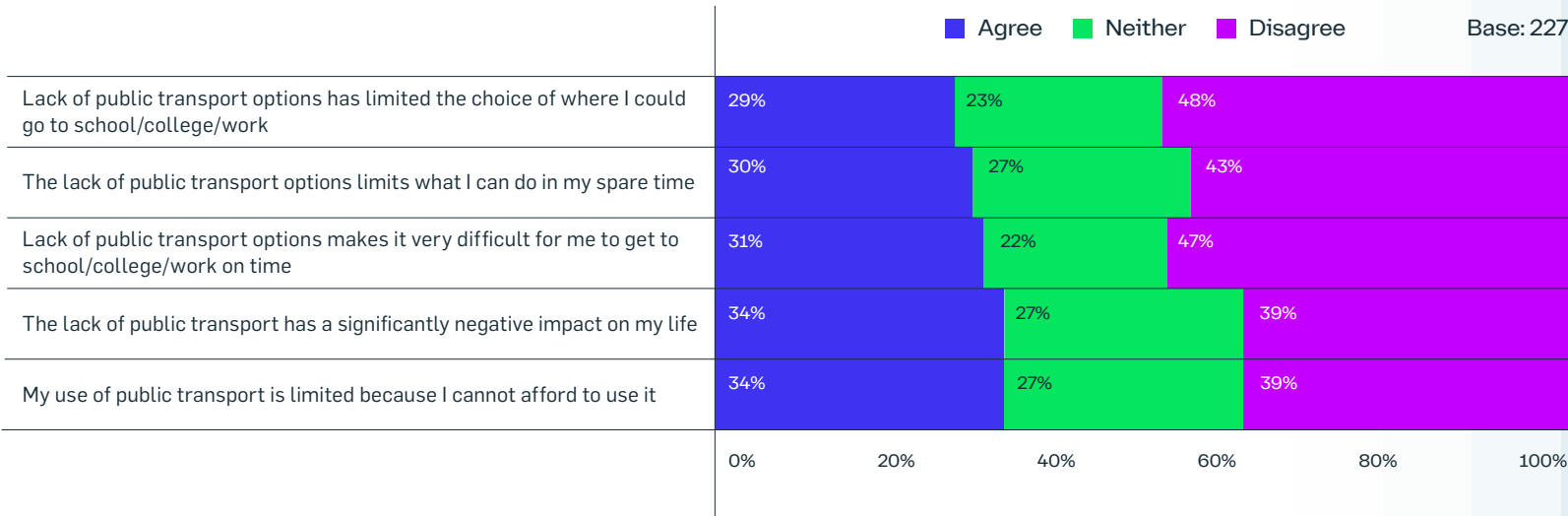


FIGURE 2. HOW DO YOUNG PEOPLE FEEL ABOUT PUBLIC TRANSPORT IN THEIR AREA?



The quantitative research shows some more detail. Figure 1 shows that around two thirds of people say that transport is good in their area. When asked specifically about how lack of public transport has affected them, as shown in Figure 2, around a third report that they have been limited – **34%** in where they work or study down to 30% saying it has a significant negative impact on their quality of life. Three in ten (29%) say they can't afford to use public transport.

Figure 3 shows that young people living in cities (city centres or outskirts) are significantly more likely than those living outside cities (towns or rural environments) to think that public transport is good in their area, whereas those living outside cities are significantly more likely to think that public transport is unreliable.

TO WHAT EXTENT DO YOU AGREE OR DISAGREE WITH THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS ABOUT TRANSPORT LINKS IN YOUR LOCAL AREA?

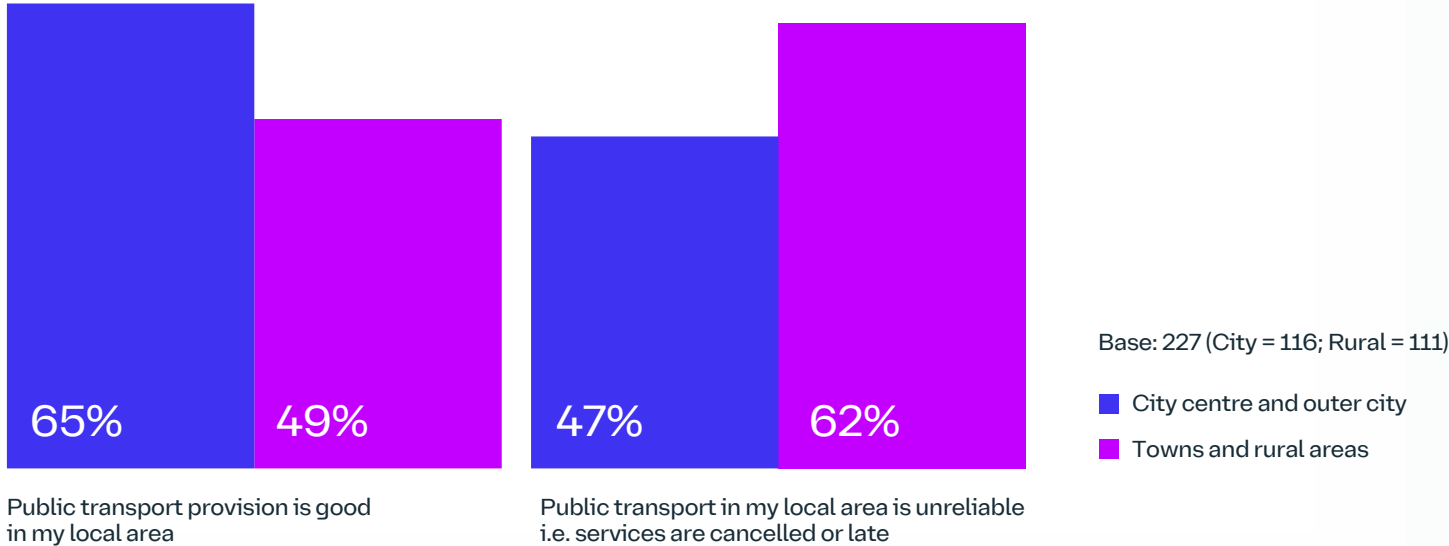


FIGURE 3. TRANSPORT IN CITIES VS TOWNS AND RURAL AREAS

## EDUCATION

It is perhaps not surprising that, like public transport, education provision is patchy and depends on your location. Young people living in small towns and rural areas often felt they had little choice and many of our focus group participants felt that the education system is not fair.

**"You have to overperform if you are where I am from. You can't just do as well as those from better areas or with higher incomes. They have all this cultural capital which we haven't got, but the one thing we do have is a work ethic which is drilled into us." (19-21, West Yorkshire)**

Some also felt that school is not preparing them for the jobs of the future.

**"I would be hesitant to say school taught me for the online jobs of the future. I gave myself the basic computer skills. But in terms of coding or programming, there's no vocational skills being taught. At least not on my courses." (16-18, West Yorkshire)**

## INTERSECTION OF TRANSPORT AND EDUCATION

When patchy education provision and patchy transport links intersect, it has real impact on young people's lives. Those who chose to travel further to a better performing sixth form often regretted it or found it difficult.

**"I got a place at a college with a really good pass rate, 98% grade B or above at A Level... but I had to get up at 5am every morning to get the bus to be there for 9am. Otherwise I would be late. There were no other colleges or sixth forms nearby that were any good." (19-21, West Yorkshire)**

**"Take today for instance. The school bus did not show up. I had to take two trains and a bus to get to college. It cost me £6.40 rather than being free and I was late... Perhaps it's my fault. I chose to go to a college that wasn't close to home. But I thought this one was my best bet." (16-18, Liverpool)**

The Liverpool respondent quoted above also told us that his school bus did not show up on a regular basis (around twice a week) and could appear at any time in a 90-minute window from 7am; he had to be at the stop at the start of that window for fear of missing it.

## HOUSING

In all areas, young people felt that housing was increasingly expensive and, for many of them, unaffordable.

**"I would definitely have to move away (to live independently). I could never afford to live round here." (16-18, Liverpool)**

Perhaps surprisingly, our focus group participants had mixed feelings about new housing developments – they were not universally welcome, especially in rural areas.

**"The area is getting worse. More houses. More traffic. More houses built on the green belt." (19-21, M6 Corridor)**

Young people's beliefs about where they will be able to live in the future are driven not just by the cost of housing but also by their beliefs about their job prospects and earning potential.

Another issue that arose around housing was an increasing awareness of homelessness in their areas. Not only is homelessness devastating for the people experiencing it, but it also has a wider impact on perceptions of an area, as this report shows in the section on young people's perceptions on page 35.

## LEISURE

The young people in the focus groups, and especially the 16- to 18-year-olds felt that there wasn't enough to do in their spare time. When we asked about what they would like to improve in their areas, they said transport first and leisure options second. In particular, they wanted indoor options – it's fine to go to the park in good weather but it is no use in the rain and the cold, and it's potentially dangerous at night.

**"We need more places to go with our friends. There's nowhere to go if it rains. Investing in somewhere communal would be good." (16-18, West Yorkshire)**

Again, what is available depends on where you live.

**"From Huddersfield most people go out in Leeds or Manchester because there's more going on." (16-18, West Yorkshire)**

**"I would rather go out to other places than in my town (Batley)" (16-18, West Yorkshire)**

Those aged 19 to 21 can (legally) use pubs and clubs, but they felt that this was a limiting option (especially for a generation that we know drinks less alcohol than previous cohorts.)

**"There's a lot of pubs and clubs, and a lot of people get peer pressured to go. There's no access to alternatives. If there were other places to go it would change the place." (19-21, Teesside)**

There was a sense (and reality) that even the leisure options they did have are disappearing.

**"We used to have a leisure centre in Halifax, but even that has shut down."**

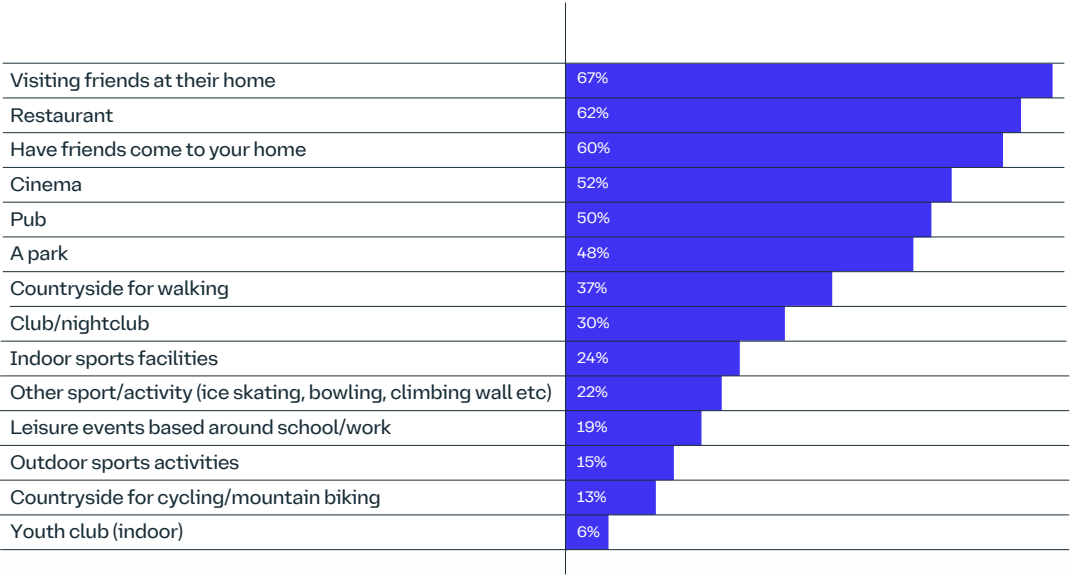
**"There used to be youth clubs and things, but they've all been cut." (19-21 West Yorkshire)**



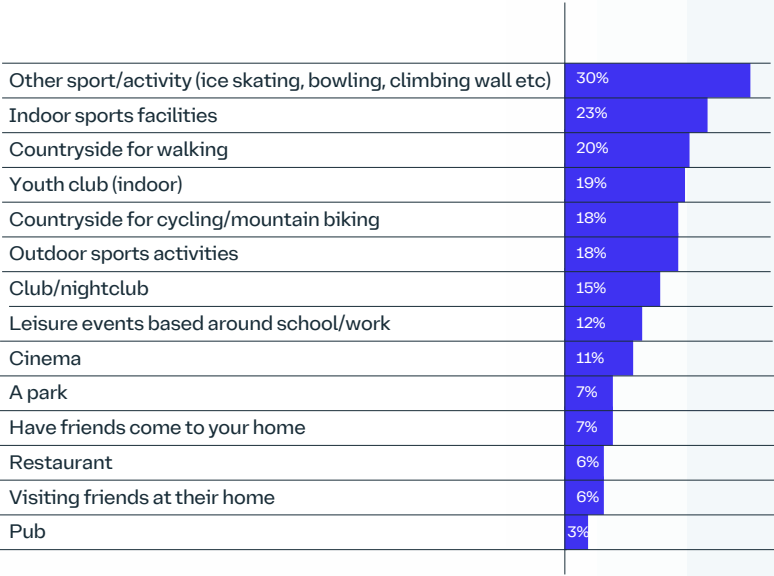


The quantitative research (Figure 4) supports these findings. Young people are most likely to visit friends at home (free) as well as going to restaurants, cinemas and pubs (incurring expenses). What they want most are sports facilities – including indoors facilities – countryside for walking and an indoor youth club.

WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING LEISURE OPTIONS DO YOU USE LOCALLY?



WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING LEISURE OPTIONS DO YOU NOT HAVE ACCESS TO LOCALLY, BUT WOULD LIKE TO HAVE?



Base: 227

FIGURE 4. LEISURE OPTIONS YOUNG PEOPLE USE AND OPTIONS THEY WOULD LIKE



It is not surprising to see that young people in cities feel they have better access to leisure facilities. In particular, people in towns and rural areas were significantly more likely to want access to indoor and other sports facilities, nightclubs, cinemas and restaurants. City dwellers were significantly more likely to lack only countryside for walking.

THERE ARE INTERESTING LEISURE OPPORTUNITIES LOCALLY THAT MEAN I ENJOY MY FREE TIME - HOW MUCH DO YOU AGREE OR DISAGREE WITH THAT STATEMENT?

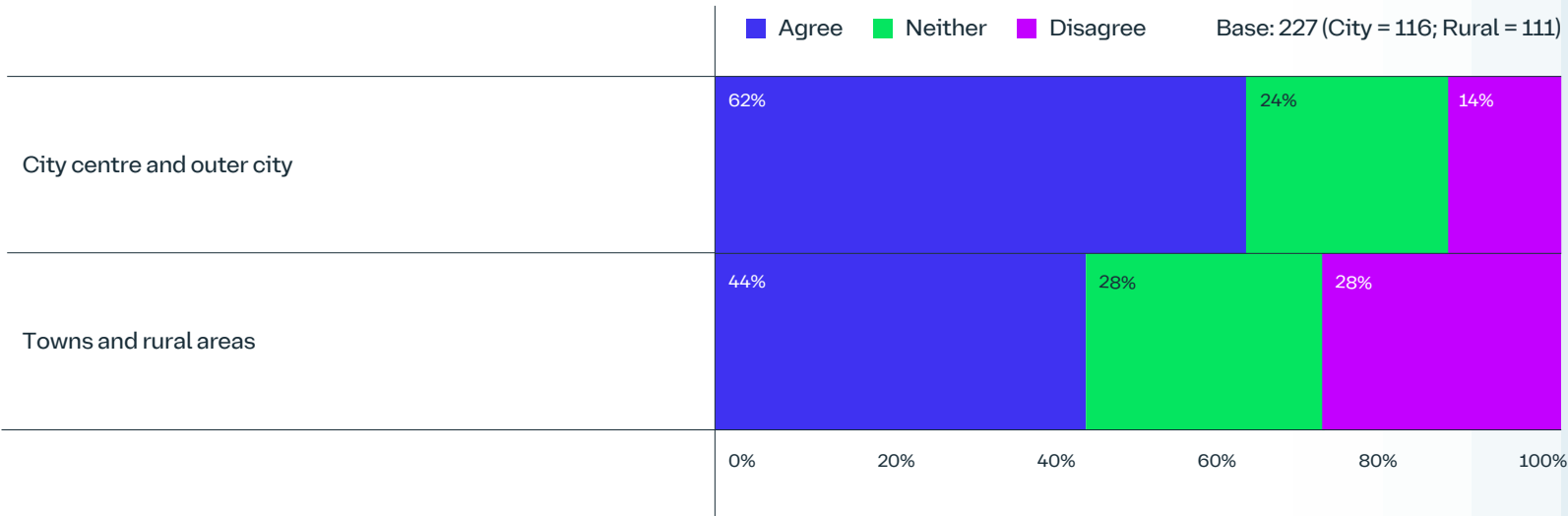


FIGURE 5. LEISURE FACILITIES IN CITIES VS TOWNS AND RURAL AREAS



## HEALTH

We didn't ask directly about the provision of health services, but we did ask about the impact of place on health and mental health. Young people in the focus groups felt that local health services are under resourced and struggling to serve the local population.

**"We need improved health care. There's a shortage of GPs." (19-21, Teesside)**

**"I don't have an NHS dentist. No one around here has an NHS dentist." (19-21, West Yorkshire)**

## HIGH STREET AND SHOPS

'The shops' are often a key criterion for judging a place; when we asked where in their local area people would like to live, it was often because of the quality and variety of the shops.

**"If I could choose around here, I'd live in Warrington... because of the shops." (16-18, M6 Corridor)**

However, in most areas, the young people had a sense that their high streets are under pressure as they see shops closing down and retail spaces being left empty. This has a knock-on effect on perceptions of the area more widely; the loss of retail jobs is also having an impact. Young people do notice cleanliness and upkeep of places (especially town centres) and it makes a difference to how they feel about the place where they live.

**"It is not just that the shops are closing, there is nothing that is opening. We are starting to see levels of poverty you used to only see on the telly." (19-21 West Yorkshire)**

Some town centres do not feel safe, especially at night and especially for women.

**"Some of the places near the centre are a bit rough. It needs to be a bit safer. It could really be improved." (19-21, West Yorkshire)**

## COUNTRYSIDE AND NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

Again, whether you have access to countryside depends on a combination of where you live and the transport links available. Figure 4 shows that 20% of young people don't feel they have access to countryside for walks but would like to. Where beautiful countryside does exist, young people appreciate it and want to see it preserved. However, this often comes with mixed feelings – some see rural environments as places for people who are settled, not for those who are looking to progress.

**"I really like it. It's good for walks. It's nice and quiet. It is good to be back...for a bit. But it is lacking opportunities." (19-21, Teesside)**



# PROSPECTS

SKILLS, EMPLOYMENT  
AND WHERE TO LIVE

FURTHER EDUCATION

THE JOBS OF THE FUTURE

JOB OPPORTUNITIES IN THE LOCAL AREA

WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE WANT FROM EMPLOYMENT

DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION IN THE WORKPLACE

WORK EXPERIENCE

MOVING AWAY





# PROSPECTS

## SKILLS, EMPLOYMENT AND WHERE TO LIVE

Young people were not overly positive about their prospects. Just over half (**55%**) think they will get the right skills and less than half (**45%**) think there will be job opportunities and somewhere affordable to live locally (Figure 6).

As we can see in Figure 7, when it comes to perceptions of future prospects, living in a city versus a town or rural area can be influential (though not in every way). City dwellers are much more optimistic about their opportunities to gain the right skills for the future compared to those living in towns or rural areas. However, there was much greater consensus on housing affordability. Findings from the qualitative research suggest that this is because housing in both cities and rural areas (less so in towns) is seen as expensive.

This section looks at young peoples plans for further education, their beliefs about the skills they can get and those they will need, as well as what they want out of employment, and whether they plan to stay in the local area.

HOW MUCH DO YOU AGREE OR DISAGREE WITH THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS?

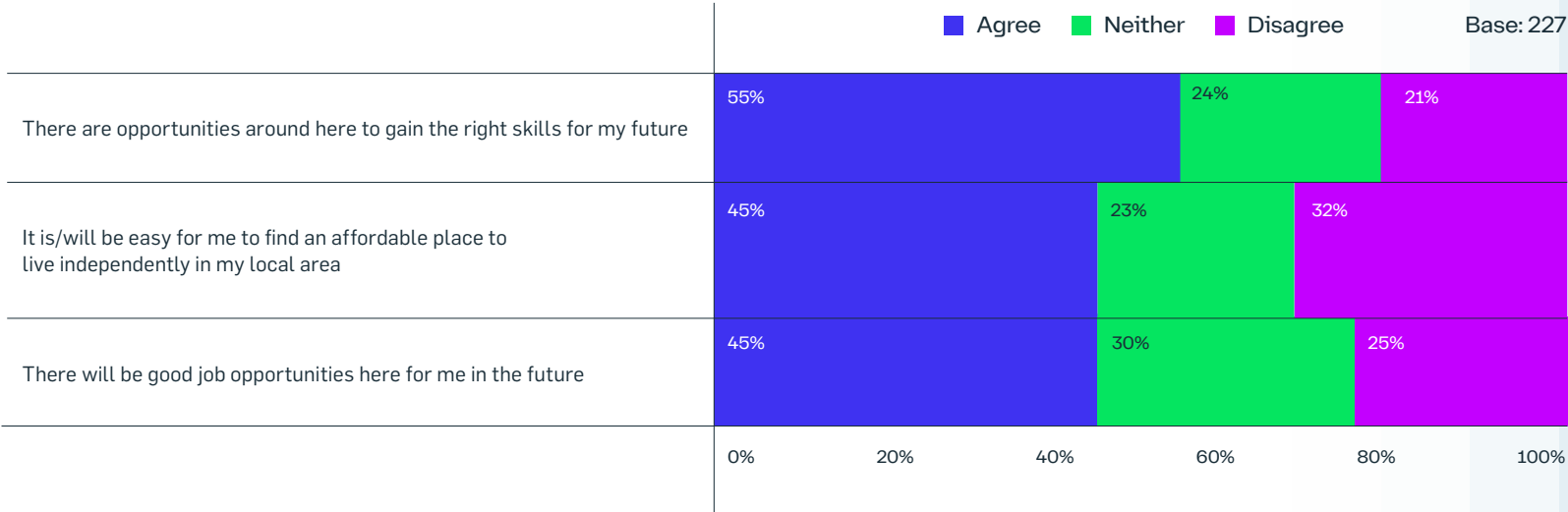


FIGURE 6. YOUNG PEOPLE'S PROSPECTS



FURTHER EDUCATION

Many of the focus group participants had either had been, were currently at, or were planning to go to university. They were also aware of other options such as apprenticeships. Some saw university as almost essential these days, but others thought the cost and student debt made it a less attractive proposition than in the past or saw the appeal as being vocational or course specific.

- “University is obligatory. It is not a step up anymore.” (19-21, M6 Corridor)
- “I’m not from a well-off family. That level of debt would put me and my parents off.” (16-18, Liverpool)
- “If you want to be a doctor or a lawyer or an engineer, then you have to go (to university). For other things, I’m not so sure it is worth it these days.” (16-18, M6 Corridor)

TO WHAT EXTENT DO YOU AGREE OR DISAGREE WITH THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS? (% TOTAL AGREEMENT)

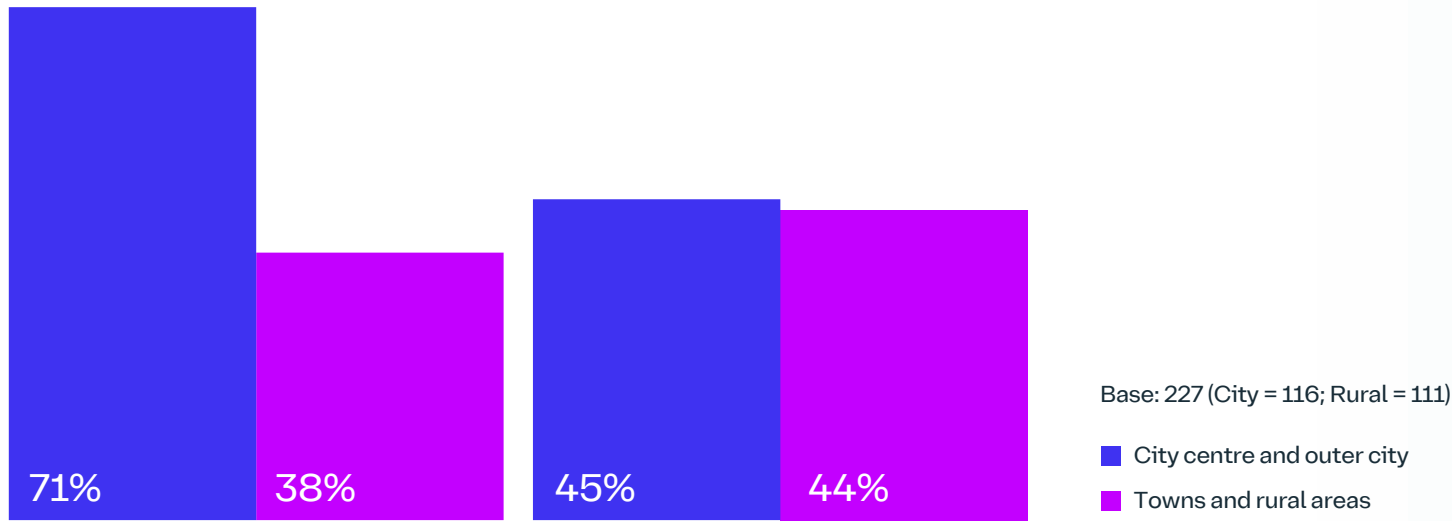


FIGURE 7. FUTURE PROSPECTS IN CITIES VS TOWNS AND RURAL AREAS



THE JOBS OF THE FUTURE

The young people we spoke to had strong opinions and were well informed about the jobs of the future. Unsurprisingly, they felt that tech, online and digital jobs will be prominent, as well as science and life sciences. There was also a lot of interest in AI and other up to date developments such as 3D printing/additive manufacturing. Some opportunities were specific to locations, such as in the nuclear industry in Cumbria. There was also an awareness, especially amongst those living in areas with large older populations, that there would be demand for a wide range of roles in the care sector.

The quantitative survey backed up these findings (Figure 8): two fifths (**42%**) said they expect the IT sector to provide greater numbers of highquality jobs in the future, followed by healthcare (**40%**), finance (**36%**) and engineering (**36%**).

WHICH, IF ANY, OF THE FOLLOWING DO YOU THINK WILL PROVIDE GREATER NUMBERS OF HIGHQUALITY JOBS (WELL-PAID, NEEDING GOOD QUALIFICATIONS) IN FUTURE THAN THEY DO NOW?

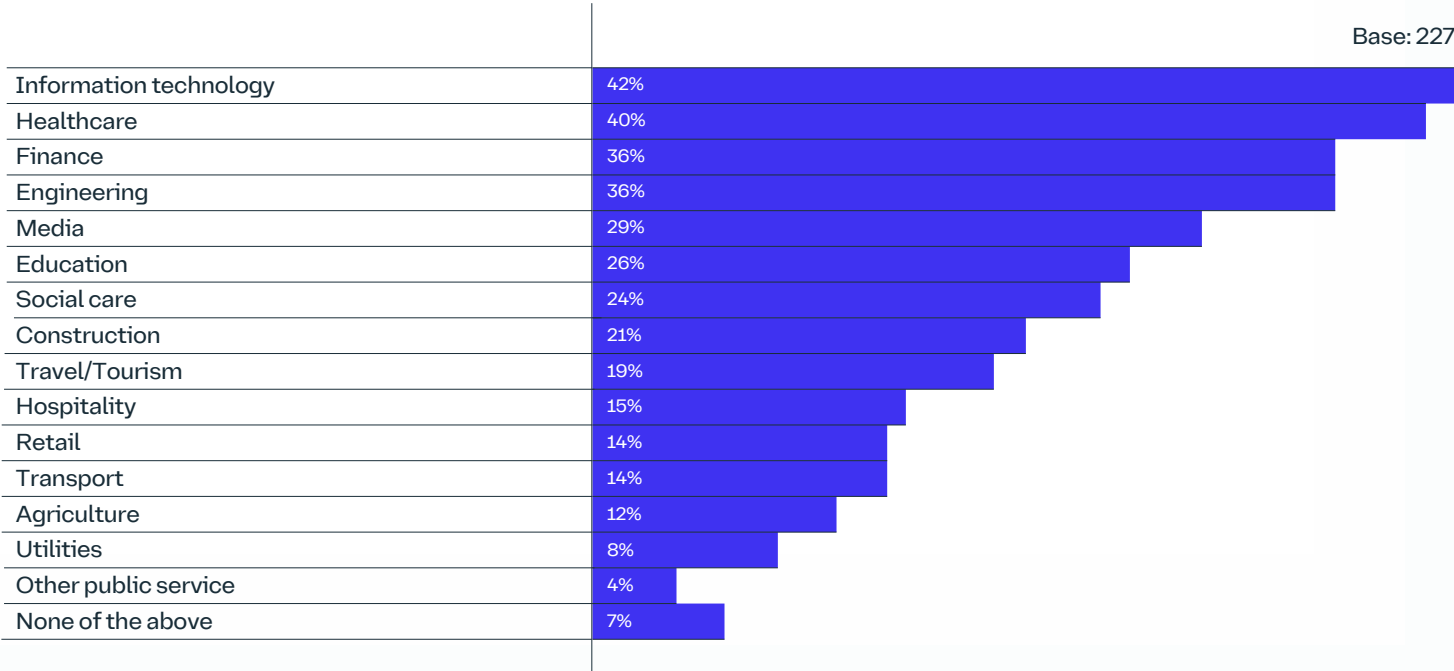


FIGURE 8. THE HIGH-QUALITY JOBS OF THE FUTURE



What is perhaps more interesting is the skills that young people feel they will need to be successful in the jobs of the future (Figure 9). The need for soft skills such as communications **(56%)** and time management (56%), followed by collaboration and team working **(42%)** far outweighed practical and knowledge-based skills such as data analytics **(34%)** or AI **(28%)**. One interpretation of this data is that soft skills are needed in all jobs, whereas technical skills (like AI) are only needed in relevant jobs so not important for everybody.

WHICH, IF ANY, OF THE FOLLOWING DO YOU THINK WILL BE IMPORTANT SKILLS TO HAVE IN FUTURE?

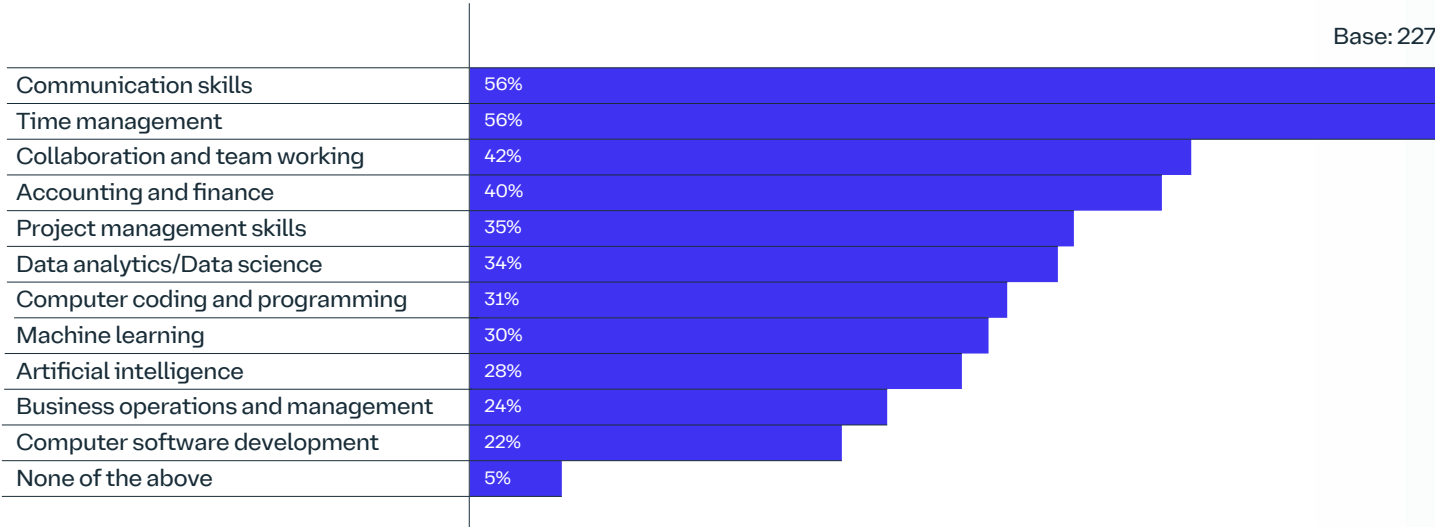


FIGURE 9. IMPORTANT SKILLS FOR THE FUTURE





Only just over half (**54%**) of the young people we surveyed say they have been well prepared for the job market of the future (Figure 10). This may mean that they didn't learn the soft skills identified above, or it may relate to practical skills and knowledge, or it may simply reflect the rapidly changing nature of the job market, driven by technological developments.

HOW WELL OR BADLY DO YOU THINK YOUR EDUCATION AND TRAINING HAS PREPARED YOU FOR THE JOB MARKET OF THE FUTURE (THE JOBS THAT WILL BE AVAILABLE IN THE NEXT 10 TO 20 YEARS)?

Base: 227

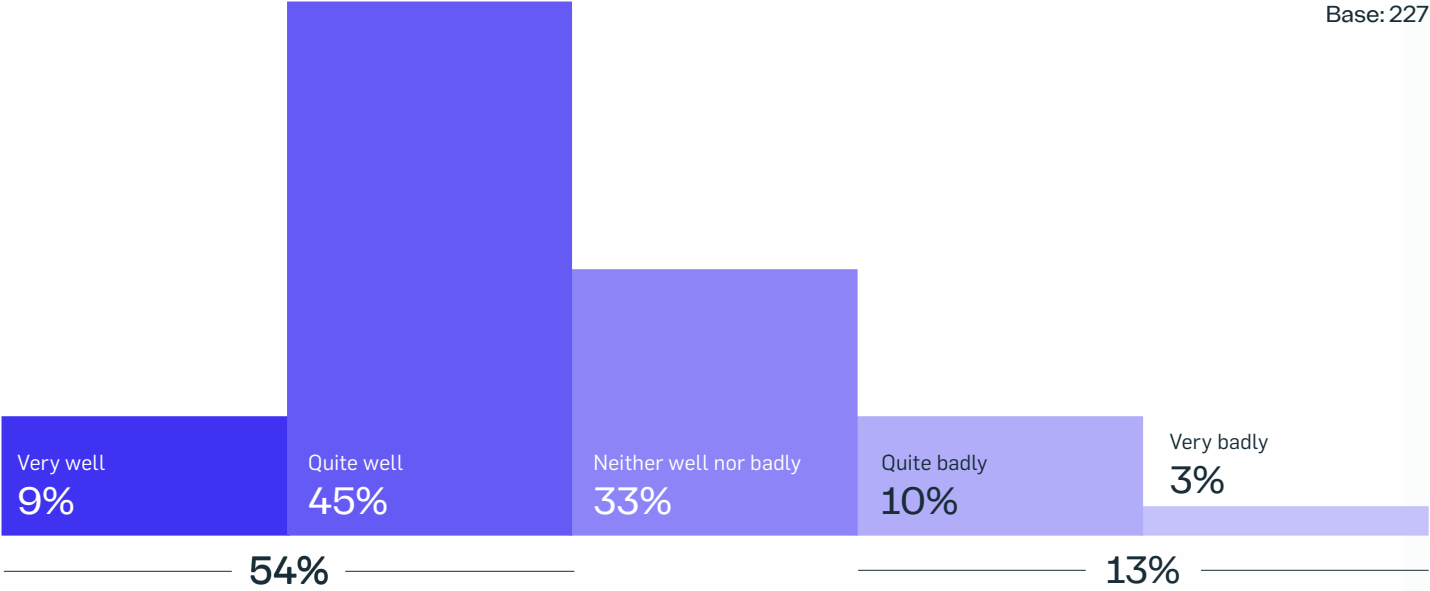


FIGURE 10. HOW WELL HAS EDUCATION PREPARED YOUNG PEOPLE FOR JOBS?



## JOB OPPORTUNITIES IN THE LOCAL AREA

Our focus group participants had a strong sense that these opportunities will not be evenly distributed – the bigger cities in each region and London are expected to offer the best employment options and many felt they would have to leave the area to pursue their career of choice.

**“I will go anywhere (else) as soon as I can.” (19-21, West Yorkshire)**

This is true even on Teesside where there are perceived to be opportunities; in our focus groups, young people from Teesside were more upbeat about what was available than those from the other regions. Despite this, many still felt they would need to move.

**“There’s a lot of job opportunities, even in this small town, including companies that do medical instruments as well as cameras.**

**There’s lots of opportunities for scientists and pharmacists. In Middlesbrough there’s a growing number of offices if you want to go into business and a lot of jobs in fitness. Same in Stockton.” (19-21, Teesside)**

**“The jobs I want to do don’t exist around here.” (19-21, Teesside)**

**“Eventually, I’ll either move to Bristol or to London. There’s a lot more links to my industry (photography). The BBC have studios in Bristol. And London generally appeals because of accessibility to different companies. You can become better known in your industry.” (19-21, Teesside)**



The survey data revealed a slightly more optimistic perspective (Figure 11). Although a majority thought that high-quality jobs will be mostly found in cities (**56%**), less than a third (**29%**) felt that high-quality jobs would not be available at all in the North of England, and the same proportion thought they couldn't get a high-quality job if it was available.

THINKING ABOUT WHERE HIGH QUALITY JOBS OF THE FUTURE WILL BE LOCATED, PLEASE SAY HOW MUCH YOU AGREE WITH THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS

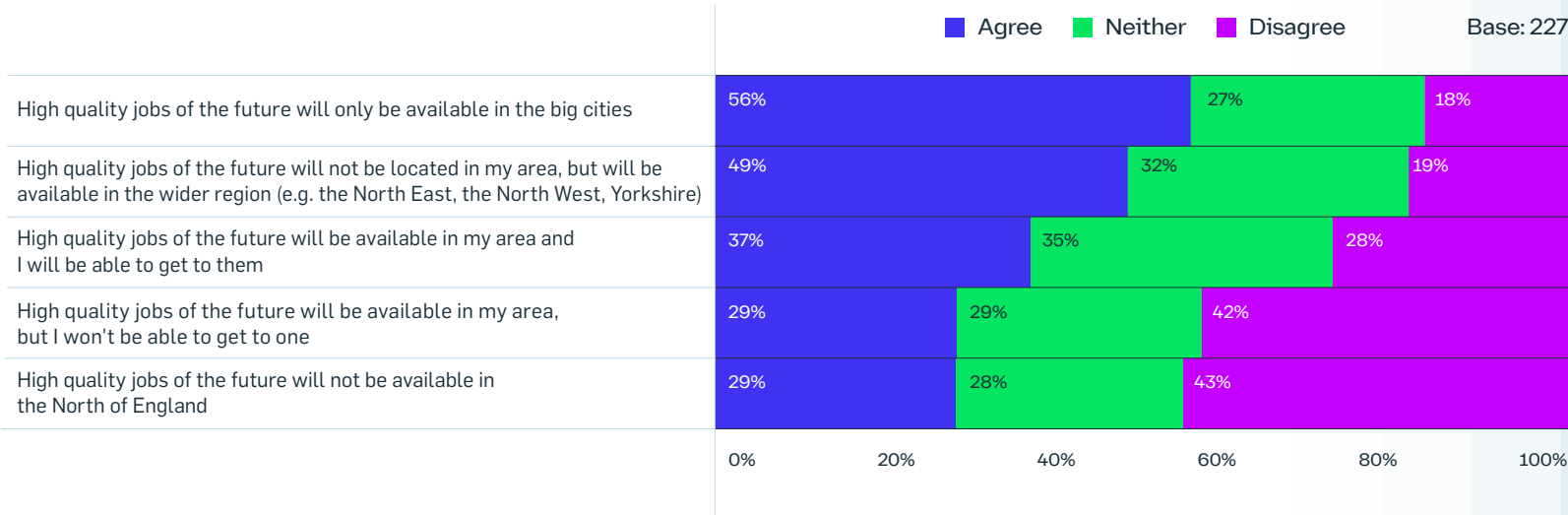


FIGURE 11. ACCESSIBILITY OF HIGH-QUALITY JOBS IN THE FUTURE



Young people living in towns and rural areas were significantly less likely to think that there will be local jobs available for them in the future. They are also more likely to agree with the statement 'High quality jobs of the future will not be available in the North of England'.

THERE WILL BE GOOD JOB OPPORTUNITIES FOR ME HERE IN THE FUTURE - HOW MUCH DO YOU AGREE OR DISAGREE WITH THAT STATEMENT?

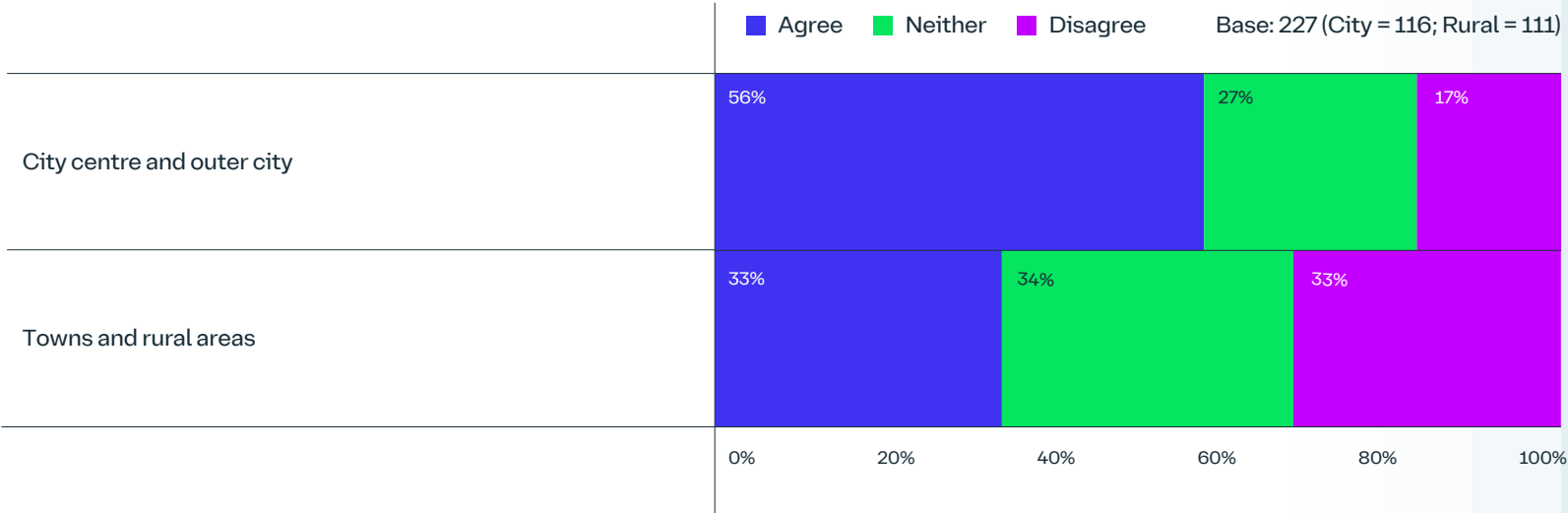


FIGURE 12. WILL THERE BE LOCAL JOBS? CITIES VS TOWNS AND RURAL AREAS





WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE WANT FROM EMPLOYMENT

The young people that we spoke to felt strongly about how employers should treat them and relate to them as people; they are looking for understanding and respect. There was a perception that it will be easier to find this kind of working relationship in smaller, more entrepreneurial companies than in larger companies. The survey showed that young people value respect and consideration above high wages (Figure 13).

**“I want respect and humanity, being a human being... having a human-to-human relationship.” (19-21, West Yorkshire)**

**“Being considerate is important. A lot of employees treat people like a number and a money generator. I like the idea of a smaller company where you have a relationship with people higher up, no matter where you are on the pay scale.” (16-18, West Yorkshire)**

They also want and expect employers to be aware of mental health issues and how to take care of their staff.

**“Colleges are good at mental health. They are switched on. Companies should be the same.” (16-18, West Yorkshire)**

Many also said they wanted to (ultimately) start their own companies and to be their own boss.

PLEASE SAY TO WHAT EXTENT IT WOULD BE IMPORTANT FOR YOU TO WORK WITH AN EMPLOYER THAT DOES THE FOLLOWING (% EXTREMELY/VERY IMPORTANT)

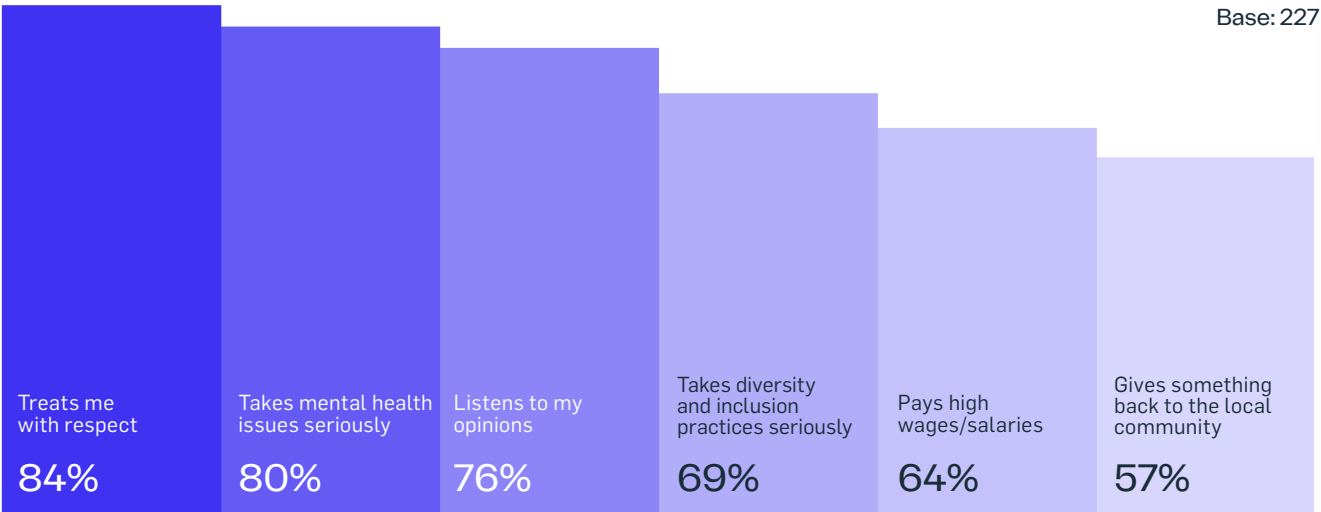


FIGURE 13. WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE WANT FROM EMPLOYERS



## DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION IN THE WORKPLACE

A few of the young people we spoke to in the focus groups were not aware of issues around diversity and inclusion at work. However, the majority were aware and felt that providing a diverse and inclusive working environment should be the norm, and not something that employers should get credit for doing. Several of the young people who were from minority ethnic backgrounds felt that they had suffered or were at risk of suffering discrimination – particularly in relation to accessing jobs.

**“When it comes to job opportunities for black people, I feel it is very limited. We’re not getting access to jobs.”** (19-21, Teesside)

**“When I apply for things, and I apply for a lot of things, they don’t get back to me.”** (Female, Asian and Muslim, 19-21, West Yorkshire)

**“I would lie about my gender and sexuality when applying for jobs. I’d just be playing it safe.”** (Nonbinary, 19-21 West Yorkshire)

## WORK EXPERIENCE

Most of the focus group participants – even those in full time education – had some experience of work because they did parttime jobs around their studies, but the experience often left them feeling exploited – this may go some way to explaining the desire for respect seen in Figure 13.

**“The (U21 rate) minimum wage is a kick in the teeth. You shouldn’t be paid less for doing the same job as someone older than you. I’ve worked in salons since I was 14. You would think after 6 years you would be paid more than £6.53 per hour, as a qualified hairdresser.”** (19-21, West Yorkshire)

**“I work at Tesco, one day a week from 1pm to 10pm. I get no paid breaks, so I get paid for 7.5 hours of work even though my attendance is 9 hours... Been there since I was 16... difference in pay is about 70p an hour.”** (19-21, West Yorkshire)



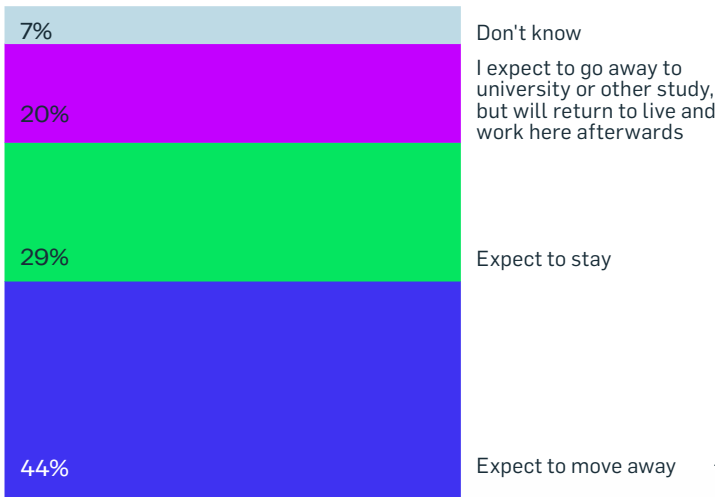


MOVING AWAY

Given some of the concerns that young people have about their prospects, are they planning to stay in the area? Around half of the survey respondents expect to stay near to where they currently live, including those who expect to go away to study. Just under half expect to move away.

Figure 14 shows that of the **44%** who expect to move, just under half (**44%**) are seeking better employment prospects and two fifths (**40%**) hope for a nicer living environment.

IN THE FUTURE, DO YOU EXPECT TO STAY LIVING IN THE AREA WHERE YOU LIVE NOW, OR DO YOU THINK YOU WILL MOVE AWAY?



Base: 227

WHAT IS THE MAIN REASON YOU EXPECT TO MOVE AWAY FROM THE AREA WHERE YOU LIVE NOW?



Base: 98

FIGURE 14. YOUNG PEOPLE'S PLANS TO MOVE OR STAY AND REASONS FOR MOVING



Figure 15 shows a significant difference between the age groups – younger people say they are more likely to move away. This may be down to an element of youthful daydreaming - **21%** of those who expect to move want to go to another country (Figure 15) - or it may indicate that the older age group have found good reasons to stay, such as a good job or affordable housing – or reflect that those in the slightly older group have already moved away.

The qualitative research sheds an additional worrying light on the quantitative findings, as in the focus groups it was those with the highest academic aspirations who were most certain that they would move away from their local area, and move further away.

IN THE FUTURE, DO YOU EXPECT TO STAY LIVING IN THE AREA WHERE YOU LIVE NOW, OR DO YOU THINK YOU WILL MOVE AWAY?

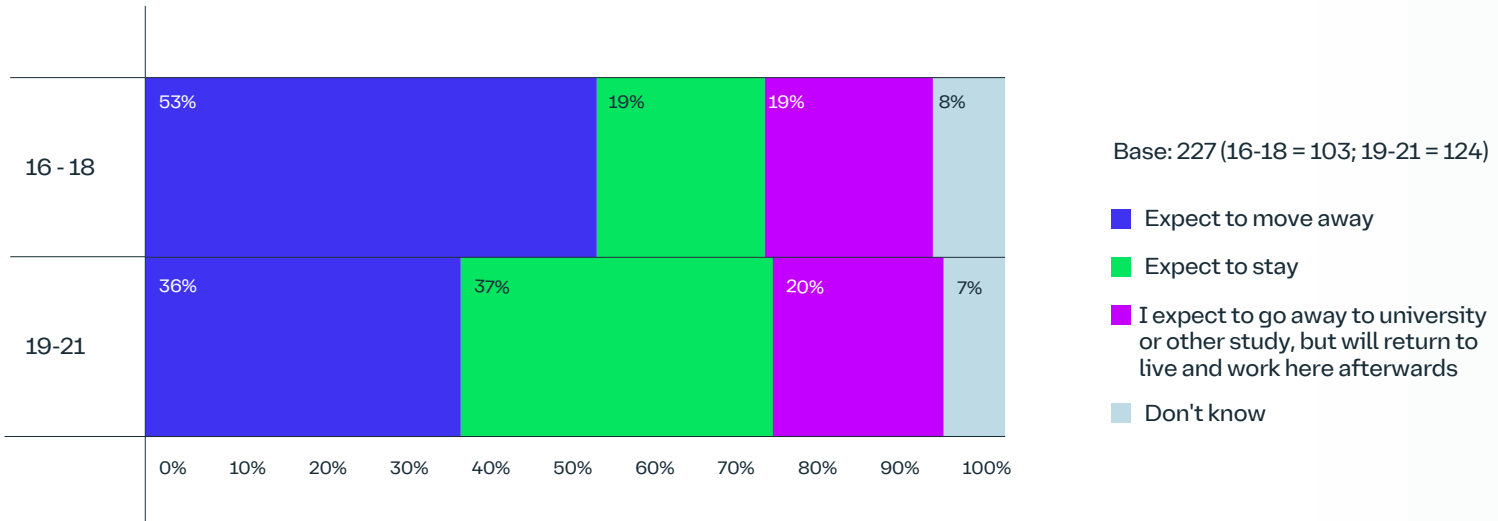


FIGURE 15. PLANS TO MOVE OR STAY BY AGE GROUP.



YOU SAID THAT YOU EXPECT TO MOVE AWAY FROM THE AREA WHERE YOU LIVE NOW. WHERE DO YOU THINK YOU WILL MOVE TO?

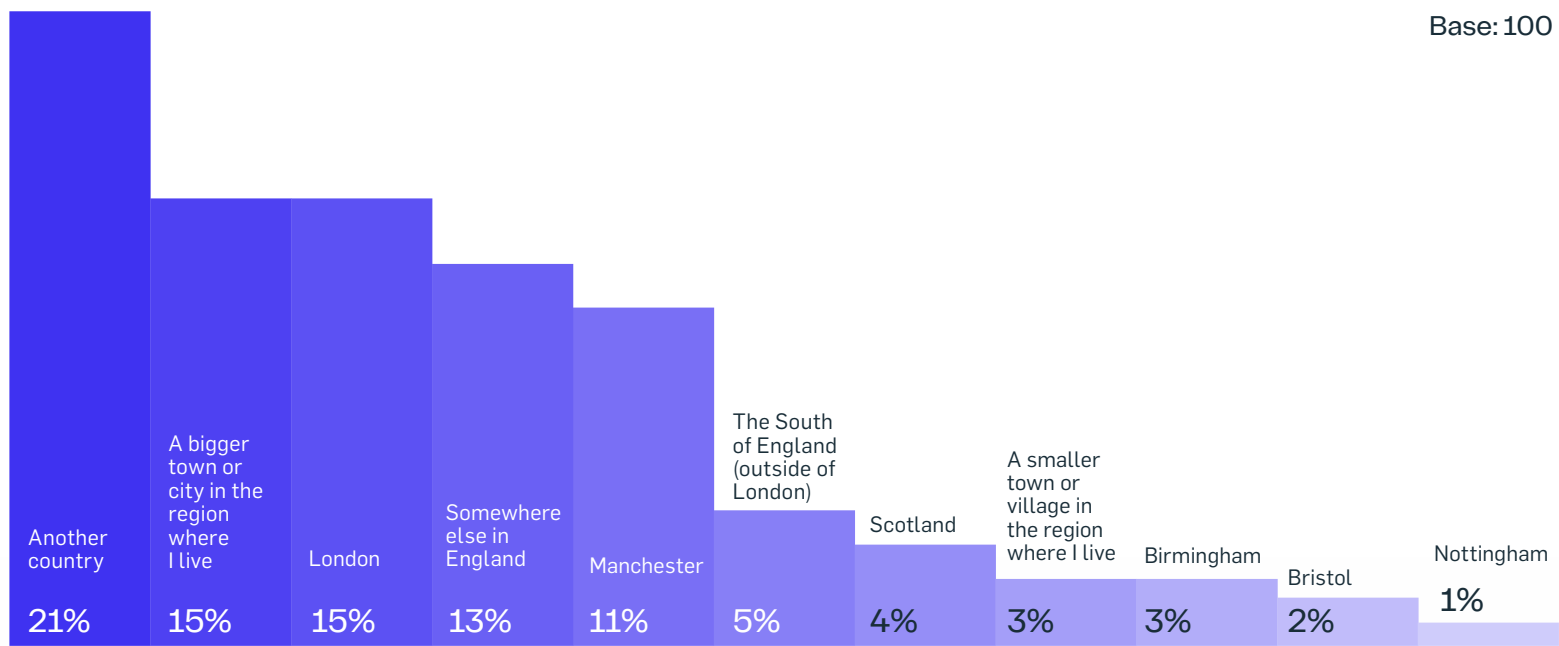


FIGURE 16. WHERE YOUNG PEOPLE EXPECT TO MOVE



# PERCEPTIONS

HOW YOUNG PEOPLE FEEL ABOUT  
LIVING IN THE NORTH OF ENGLAND

DEVOLUTION AND LEVELLING UP  
CRIME, DRUGS AND HOMELESSNESS  
MENTAL HEALTH  
OLDER GENERATIONS

# PERCEPTIONS

## HOW YOUNG PEOPLE FEEL ABOUT LIVING IN THE NORTH OF ENGLAND

Even for all the perceived faults that were discussed in the focus groups, most people could find something positive to say about where they live. This section looks at awareness of political initiatives that affect the North, such as devolution and levelling up, and of social issues such as crime, drug use and homelessness, mental health, and climate change. It also looks at views on the older generation and the legacy they have left young people.

**"I quite like where I live (Keighley), but everyone else thinks it's pretty naff. It has mostly just been neglected by the government. We used to have lots of textiles that weren't profitable and we just got left behind... there's some nice looking buildings and it's a place with promise. There's just not much being done with it." (19-21 West Yorkshire)**

### DEVOLUTION AND LEVELLING UP

Most of our focus group participants had not heard of Metro Mayors and English devolution or of the government's Levelling Up campaign. Some had a vague idea and were aware of some of the politicians involved and a minority were well informed and with strong views on each of these topics. Those who were not aware of devolution were generally in favour of the idea when it was explained to them.

**"This is a good idea. The government doesn't understand what people need in our area." (16-18, Liverpool)**

However, most of those who were aware of devolution were critical of how it was being implemented.

**"The Mayor called Ben... has worked on a new airport for Teesside which is great for transport. But he's been too focussed on this rather than public services." (19-21, Teesside)**

Like devolution, those who were not aware of levelling up, thought it sounded like a good idea when it was described to them, but the views of those in the know ranged from dismissive to apoplectic.

**"Levelling up is a political slogan. Tory areas get more money." (19-21, M6 Corridor)**

**"Levelling up is just another means to gentrification. Dumping money into an area, making it more valuable and driving out the people who live there." (19-21, Teesside)**

**"Their idea of levelling up is gentrification and displacing poor working class people with more affluent people." (19-21, West Yorkshire)**

**"I think it is performative. Doing tiny steps to address inequality, but not addressing the real issues." (19-21, West Yorkshire)**

Around two thirds of young people surveyed (68%) have heard the phrase 'levelling up', however only **60%** of those who have heard the phrase say they have a clear understanding of what it means. This equates to around **40%** of young people overall – which is perhaps more than would be expected given the lack of knowledge we found in the focus groups. People aged 19-21 are significantly more likely to have heard of levelling up (**75%**) than those aged 16-18 (**59%**).



Figure 17 shows that despite most young people thinking it is a good idea (80%), more than half think it hasn't worked in practice (54%) and only 31% think that their area has benefited. It is notable that a high proportion of people neither agree nor disagree with the statements about investment in their area (43% and 46%), suggesting that a lot of young people don't really know the specifics of what has been done.

**LEVELLING UP IS THE IDEA THAT GOVERNMENT SHOULD PROVIDE MONEY TO INVEST IN PARTS OF THE COUNTRY THAT ARE DOING LESS WELL THAN OTHERS, TO MAKE THINGS MORE EVEN THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY. TO WHAT EXTENT DO YOU AGREE OR DISAGREE?**

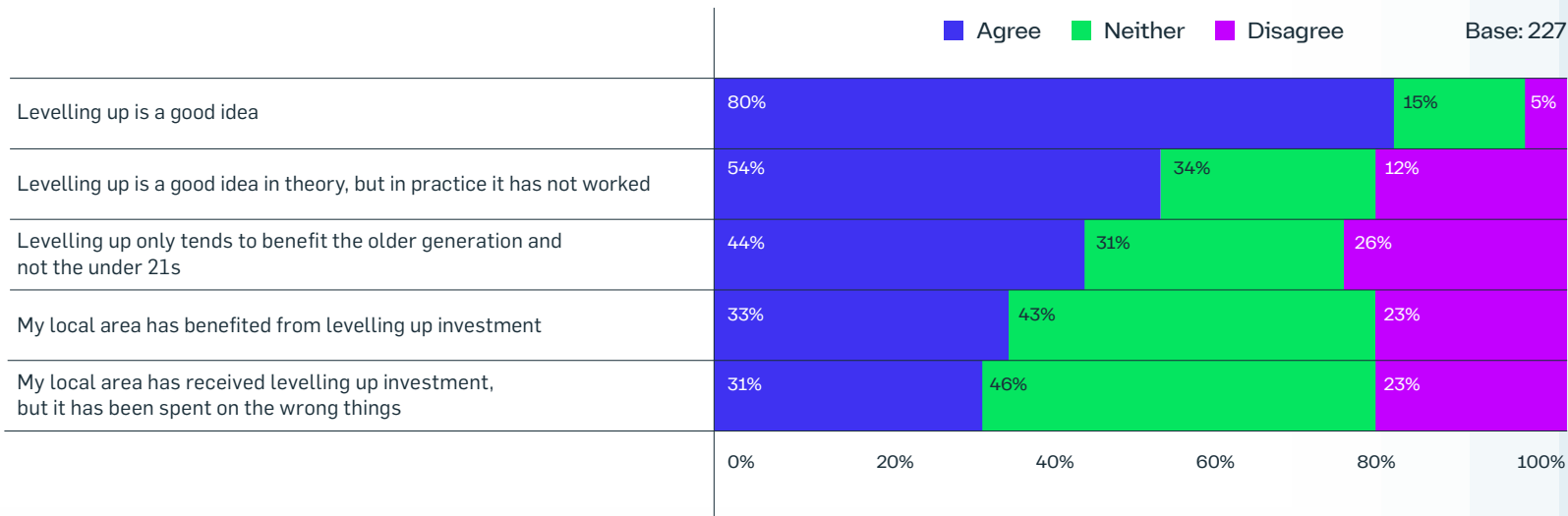


FIGURE 17. VIEWS ON LEVELLING UP



## CRIME, DRUGS AND HOMELESSNESS

We didn't ask specifically about these social issues in the focus groups, but the young people brought them up spontaneously, because of the impact on how they feel about their home area.

**"Violent crime is a real problem here, and I am talking about gun crime." (16-18 M6 Corridor)**

**"It is not really the safest around here. People follow you home. It is not safe at night." (16-18 Liverpool)**

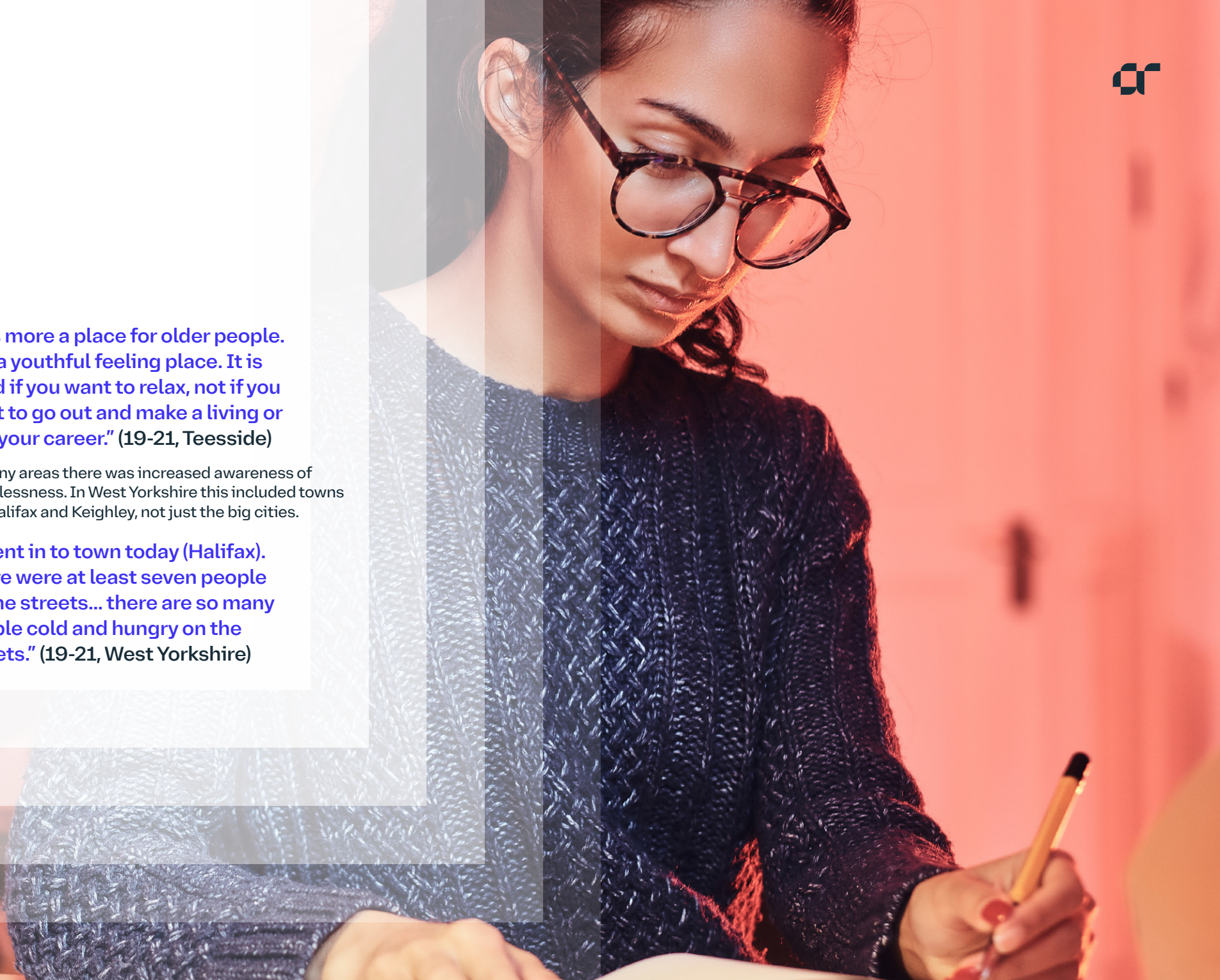
People living in smaller more rural places recognised that although there were fewer leisure opportunities than in bigger towns and cities, they did feel safer.

**"Where I live is better than most places because it is quieter and safer than places like Leeds or Huddersfield." (16-18, West Yorkshire)**

**"It is more a place for older people. Not a youthful feeling place. It is good if you want to relax, not if you want to go out and make a living or find your career." (19-21, Teesside)**

In many areas there was increased awareness of homelessness. In West Yorkshire this included towns like Halifax and Keighley, not just the big cities.

**"I went in to town today (Halifax). There were at least seven people on the streets... there are so many people cold and hungry on the streets." (19-21, West Yorkshire)**





MENTAL HEALTH

The young people we spoke to had a firm belief in the link between place and mental health; where there isn't much to do, high levels of crime or places that are run down with empty retail spaces and poorly maintained town or city centres can contribute to depression and poor mental health. They told us that in places where there are visible drug problems can make drug use seem like the norm. In contrast, they thought that having parks and open spaces are good for both physical and mental health.

“Having a really nice park nearby is important for wellbeing. To chill out. It really does help.” (19-21, West Yorkshire)

The survey backed up the link between environment and mental health: only **30%** of people said their local environment didn't affect their mental health and nearly half (**49%**) said it had a positive effect which is good news for the North and much more positive than we might have expected from the conversations that we had in the focus groups.

THINKING ABOUT THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT WHERE YOU LIVE - THE HOUSES, PUBLIC BUILDINGS, FACTORIES, ROADS, PUBLIC PLACES - WHAT, IF ANY, IMPACT DOES IT HAVE ON YOUR MENTAL HEALTH?

Base: 227

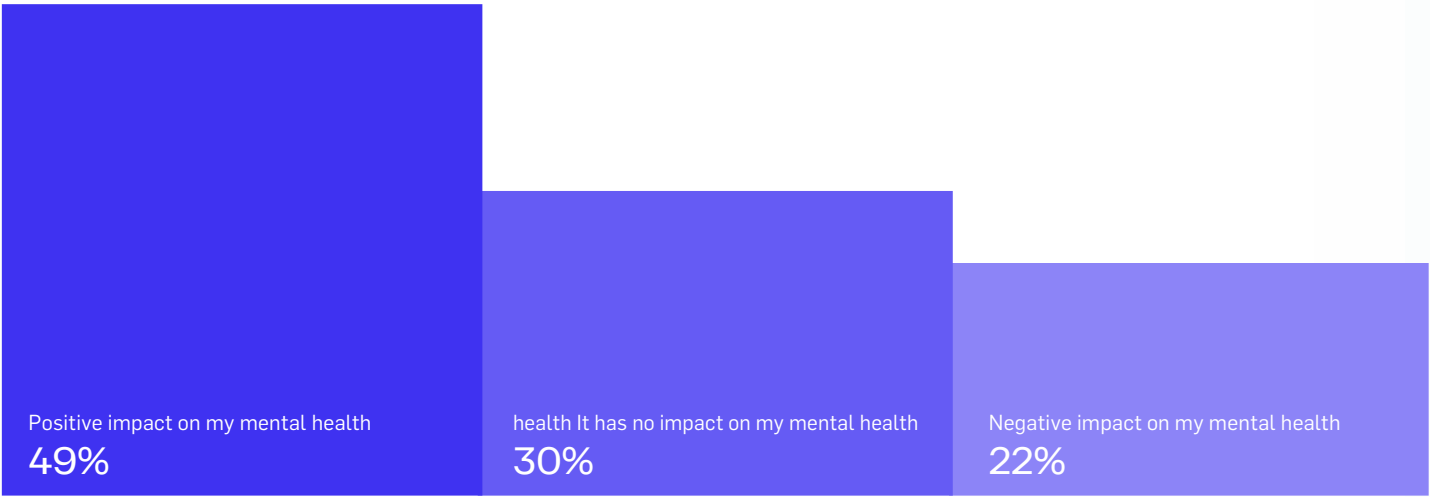
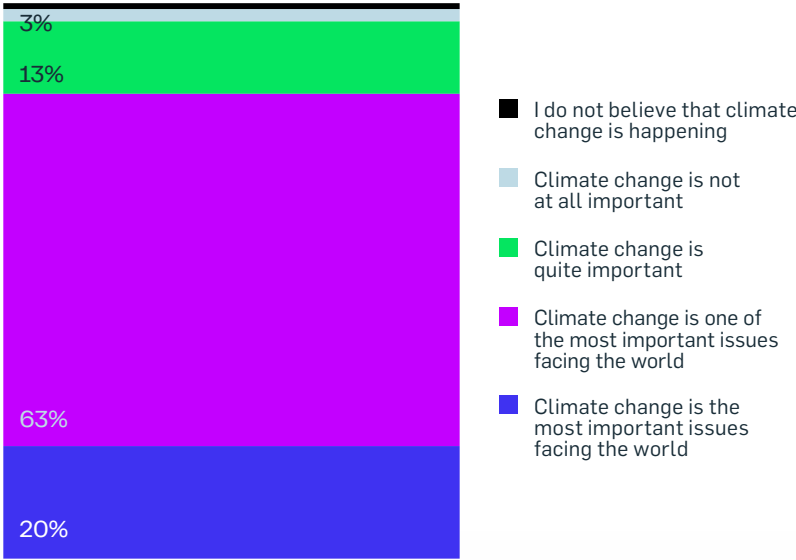


FIGURE 18. IMPACT OF ENVIRONMENT ON YOUNG PEOPLE'S MENTAL HEALTH

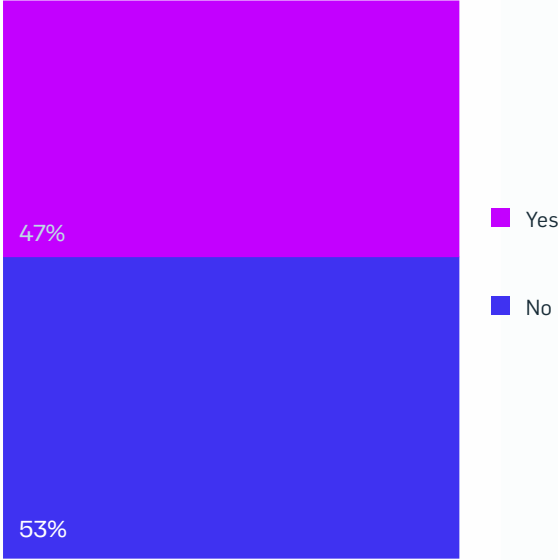


The environment is important to young people in a broader sense too. The survey showed that more than four fifths of people (**83%**) think that climate change is one of the most important issues, or the most important issue, facing the world. However they are not necessarily well informed about this either; less than half (**47%**) have heard the expression 'net zero' (Figure 19).

WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS BEST REFLECTS YOUR VIEWS ABOUT CLIMATE CHANGE?



HAVE YOU HEARD THE EXPRESSION, "NET ZERO"?



Base: 227

FIGURE 19. YOUNG PEOPLE'S VIEWS ON CLIMATE CHANGE



## OLDER GENERATIONS

It's often said that older generations had it easier and that by doing so – buying up property when it was affordable, for example – they have made it harder for the generations coming up after them. Our focus group participants expressed a certain amount of intergenerational sympathy and solidarity, rather than conflict. Many respected their parents' efforts and felt that they had worked hard and/or not been dealt a great hand. Even those who felt their local area had declined did not necessarily blame their parents' generation.

**“It is not their fault, but there used to be more jobs, used to be a community centre, a school that isn't there anymore, a high street with shops and more going on in general. I wouldn't blame one group, but it is not as good as it used to be.” (16-18, West Yorkshire)**

They thought that much of the change in the area was beyond their parents' control – especially the decline of big industry, but they had less sympathy for politicians and decision makers. The previous generation's record on climate change and local environmental degradation drew more criticism, especially in rural areas.

They even saw some positives for their generation: although they thought that jobs were more plentiful and better paid than the jobs of today, they felt that today's jobs were more varied and diverse and possibly more interesting.

**“There's a lot more opportunities open to us [younger generation] in terms of what we can study, where we can go to college and university, there's the internet. But trying to get your foot in the door after education is a lot more difficult than however long ago.” (16-18 West Yorkshire)**





Survey respondents were more critical – but again reserve their harshest judgment for the older generation’s record on the environment. Figure 20 shows that nearly three quarters feel that the older generation should have done more to tackle climate change **(73%)** and protect the local environment **(71%)**.

HOW MUCH DO YOU AGREE OR DISAGREE WITH THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS?

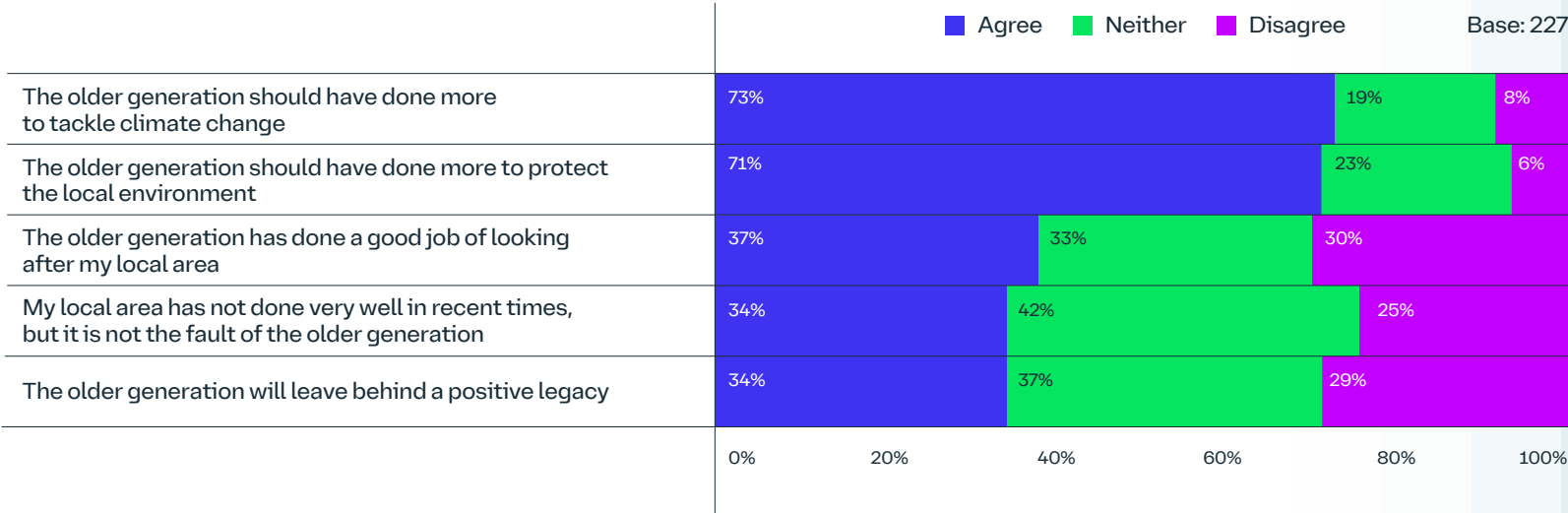


FIGURE 20. YOUNG PEOPLE’S VIEWS ON THE OLDER GENERATION



# CONCLUSION

As we have seen, none of these regions is serving its young people better than the others. Whilst there was a strong, instinctive tendency to 'stick up' for the place where they live, and a desire to see it improve and succeed, many young people feel let down by what their local area has to offer them both now and in the future.

## A TRANSPORT CONSTRAINED PRESENT

Starting with the present, the main outtake is the crucially important role of public transport in determining the quality of many aspects of young people's lives. The quantitative research suggests that public transport is letting down around a third of young people. We have pointed to the intersection of transport and education in this report because it is fundamentally important to young people's future prospects. We have seen examples of poor transport affecting young people's ability to attend school/ college. But we could equally have highlighted public transport's impact on young people being able to take a job (you can only take a job if you have a reliable means of reaching your workplace) or enjoying their leisure (infrequent, unreliable and expensive transport narrows young people's leisure options).

## A FUTURE JOB PROSPECTS EXODUS

Looking to the future, just over a third of young people feel that high quality jobs will be available to them where they live now. A third think that high quality jobs of the future will be available in their local area, but they will not be able to get one. The affordability of housing locally and the overall quality of the living environment were also seen as problematic by many. In this context, it is perhaps not surprising that almost half of the young people surveyed expected to move away from the area where they live currently. The pursuit of better job prospects and a better quality of living environment being the key drivers of the exodus.

## TREAT ME AS A PERSON FIRST, AND AS EMPLOYEE SECOND

There are crucial lessons here for employers looking to recruit from this age group. Two of our findings around the future of work and employment were particularly striking. First, is the absolute demand of young people to be treated with respect by employers. This means be listened to and having mental health issues taken seriously. All three elements (respect, being heard and mental health) are more important to young people than high salaries. Second, and linked to the first, is the importance young people place on 'softer' workplace skills such communication, collaboration and teamworking.

## LEVELLING UP: GREAT IN THEORY BUT...

Awareness and understanding of levelling up was patchy. When the policy concept is explained to people who were previously unaware, they think it is a great idea. However, those who were aware of levelling (not surprisingly they tended to be more politically active and aware generally) were extremely negative about what they saw as the reality of levelling up in practice. Many felt that their area (especially those who did not live in cities) had not benefited from levelling. Those whose areas had received levelling up funding often felt that they investment priorities reflected the needs of other people and age groups.

## ONE SIZE DOES NOT FIT ALL

Finally, we analysed the data by all the sociodemographic information available to us. We found two major differences that it is important to be aware of. First, the needs of the 16-18 and 19-21 year olds were quite different. The younger age group were focussed on the quality of their education and wanted more leisure opportunities, especially indoors. The older group was more focused on better pay, job prospects and affordable housing. Both age groups wanted better, more frequent and more reliable transport links and easy access to better shops. Geography was the other big differentiator. Those living in cities felt that they benefit from more investment and have better leisure facilities, more job opportunities, but there is more crime and violence, and housing is expensive. Those in rural locations feel they have few leisure and job opportunities, that transport links are poor, leaving them isolated and with expensive housing but that they did benefit from a safer and more relaxing environment. Those in towns felt that they had the worst of both worlds in that there isn't much to do or many opportunities and there is still violence and crime.

# COMMENTARY

## A WAKE UP CALL

### RICHARD ROBINSON

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OF ATKINSRÉALIS

This Next Generation research inspired a sense of urgency in me. I suspect it will do the same for many others involved in, and committed to, levelling up. An urgency to deliver change faster and better and in so doing, improve the lives and prospects of many, many people, in particular those of the next generation. The daily accounts of transport travails for some and the fact that **44%** of our younger generation plan to leave their area permanently highlights the need for action.

The research can perhaps also be seen as a wake-up call to business, or at the very least, a reminder of the value of discussing current issues and engaging with young people. Their views on a whole range of topics are valid and valuable and help us understand what the future might - and perhaps, should - look like. Their views in the report on what makes a place good, their preparedness for the jobs of the future and the skills they will need, their willingness to move and their views on what makes a good employer provide much food for thought.

I note also the importance of transport in their lives, the need for leisure facilities, the high priority they give to climate change, the value they place on 'soft skills and the importance of mental health and its relationship to place.

These findings and insights should not be wasted and business should discuss and engage more.

### The role of business

We engaged in this research because we wanted to listen, learn, share and ultimately, contribute more to the challenges around levelling up. On one level, we at AtkinsRéalis can claim to make a reasonable contribution because of the very nature of our work. As an infrastructure company we help deliver and regenerate built environments and places. As a transport expert we help connect towns, cities and regions. Our increasing involvement in net zero projects means that we are equipping our places for a more sustainable world. These are all things our younger people want.

But there is more that can and should be done, and I return to that sense of urgency I mentioned at the beginning. Business has a crucial role to play in helping deliver a levelled up country, working in partnership with local authorities, universities, agencies and other stakeholders - all within a framework provided by government.

It also has a crucial role in reducing inequalities and creating social value - levelling up people is just as important as levelling up projects. The need is urgent.

So, on reflection, this is my wake-up call for business: engage more with the next generation, understand what they want from the future and help to deliver it; redouble our efforts to create jobs and opportunities, working within a government framework; drive skills and achievement in partnership with local authorities (our Regional Rebalancing research emphasised the appetite for local decision makers to work with the private sector); partner with other stakeholders to create a de facto coalition of the willing and determined to help deliver a levelled up future; while ensuring that our places of employment respect the individual and are environments where all can flourish.

Does that sound a little utopian or ambitious? Well, without vision and ambition where would we be? Certainly not pursuing the kind of world the next generation wants. And that is another reason to engage with the young: for the energy and drive and, when ours is flagging, the inspiration. And, given the decades-long struggle to right the regional imbalances in the country, nothing less than such an effort will suffice.



For our part at AtkinsRéalis we will continue to engage; will reach out to future gazing organisations such as the UK2070 Commission and look to deepen our relationships with some of the world class universities in the North. How might the future look and what should we be doing to bring it about is a key question we will be asking? The research also provides fresh insight and inspiration for the evolving work we are doing around social value and we will look to increase our focus on skills and education. We recently announced an industryfirst Governors for Schools programme whereby AtkinsRéalis employees work on a voluntary basis with primary and secondary schools across England to help promote STEM subjects and careers. We will build on this and are looking to engage with schools in the North East to create greater awareness of the jobs and skills taking place in their local communities.

In addition, as Deputy Co-Chair of the Construction Leadership Council I would like the organisation to look at ways it can increase its engagement with the young. What, for example, do they think of the work that the construction industry produces? Are we missing something? It would be interesting to find out.

**One final point:** not everything in the research invokes gloom. There are positive findings and a clear distinction needs to be drawn from the geography of the respondents. For example, cities and villages have their pluses and minuses, only the towns seem to have the worst of all words. However, taken in the round, I end where I began, with an overall sense of urgency and a determination to play a full part in helping to help drive the change the North deserves.



# COMMENTARY

## PLACE, PROSPECTS AND PERCEPTIONS: LOOKING AT LEVELLING UP FROM THE PERSPECTIVES OF THE NEXT GENERATION

**HENRI MURISON**

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OF THE NORTHERN POWERHOUSE PARTNERSHIP

We are delighted to once again have had the opportunity to collaborate with AtkinsRéalis on this timely and interesting research, the second phase of a wider collaboration. Our first joint report, delivered in 2022, explored the challenges of rebalancing the North's economy from the perspectives of our critical civic leaders and senior officers. I'd like to thank Richard Robinson and his colleagues across AtkinsRéalis for their continued commitment to closing the North – South divide, and supporting them and those involved in conducting this work has been a privilege.

As a former trustee of the British Youth Council, I retain a strong interest in the issues of young people in our places. Their voices, their priorities and above all their hopes deserve to be listened to. As demonstrated by schemes like the Our Pass in Greater Manchester, offering free travel and wider benefits for school and care leavers introduced by Metro Mayor Andy Burnham in his first term, I know my interest is shared by the North's political leaders. Likewise, the opportunities for apprentices and for graduates in AtkinsRéalis show their commitment.

By bringing together business voices alongside civic leaders we are collectively tackling the big questions around the persistent productivity gap holding the North back. It is those growing up in the North, and starting to make their way into it including entering the job market, who will throughout their careers both help deliver and benefit from the transformational increase in productivity we are focused on realising. Alongside delivering an extra million jobs this will also increase incomes, closing the gap of £8000 a year with what workers in more prosperous areas of the South receive.

The findings show that young people care about their local places and want them to do well. Two thirds had an awareness about the levelling up agenda, while 40% claimed to have a good working knowledge of what it meant. 83% thought climate change was the one of the most important issues, while transport was often the priority for improving a local area.

What stands out to me is the strongly held view that young people in the North have fewer opportunities than those in the South, and the evidence on the gap between how the long term disadvantaged do in their early twenties that Education Data Lab produced for us earlier this year highlights this problem starkly. On skills we see a remarkable awareness about the jobs of the future, yet only half of respondents felt they had been prepared for the future job market.

Just under half of the young people interviewed expected to move away from where they live, and it is a little concerning only **15%** of these planned to stay in a town or city in their immediate region; suggesting that these travel to work areas were not perceived to have what they were seeking in terms of employment.

We hear loud and clear that credible social mobility needs to be available here if people want to stay, and that we are going to need to keep retaining those who come to study from far and wide at our world class universities in cities like Manchester, Newcastle or York to meet the needs of our economy, particularly in growing sectors like digital and health innovation.

More devolution can change the realities of what is available for those who choose to stay, as well as the wider North providing a mega region as attractive to build a career in as London is, or those well-connected regions more comparable to the North around Europe. Our recent work on fiscal devolution sets out a radical blueprint for the transfer of many financial levers to places, giving Metro Mayors and local authorities far greater powers over how to raise and spend money to transform their areas in the most appropriate way to them. Now is the time for the next stage of the devolution journey and we remain committed to working alongside our partners in business as well as across the political spectrum to help make that a reality.



On transport we need radical, brave, long-term and transformational policy making to tackle decades of chronic under-investment. From the delivery of Northern Powerhouse Rail in full, through to revisiting decisions on HS2, and from better empowering Metro Mayors on buses for cities, towns and villages through to the delivery of mass transit systems; it is clear that the challenge is great but the prize is worth it. And when it comes to education and skills, the persistent long-term disadvantage gap, which is so persistently over-represented in our northern places, needs genuine placebased approaches which can tackle problems at source, far removed from the Department for Education's 'one size fits all' approach. And building on the new devolution arrangements announced in the Budget, we need to accelerate the devolution of skills funding.

### About Trajectory

Trajectory is a specialist insight and foresight consultancy founded in 2008. They are experts in using a variety of techniques – including complex quantitative analysis, qualitative research and forecasting – to understand how change affects individuals, organisation, society and markets.

Trajectory is a supplier to HM Government's Future Framework and has considerable experience of working for government departments including the Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy, the Department for International Trade and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. The consultancy also carried out the Regional Rebalancing research report for AtkinsRéalis, NPP and Durham University in 2022.







# FOR MORE INFORMATION

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