

## Young Lives, Young Futures:<sup>1</sup> Key findings and policy recommendations

1. Alienation of young people from secondary school is widespread, with almost one in every two 15-16 year olds reporting that they do not like being at school. The narrow academic curriculum and test-focused culture of the classroom are leaving those interested in more hands on, practical and creative subjects and approaches to learning feeling disengaged, frustrated and having little choice over their education. Many young people also experience discrimination from peers and teachers on the basis of their 'race'/ethnicity, sexuality, gender identity, size and appearance.

Policy recommendations: Schools should be designed to serve the full spectrum of, and not just some, educational purposes, valuing all of the ways in which people can be successful in education and life. This requires schools to be released from the stranglehold of the narrow, top-down exam-focused school accountability system currently in place through its replacement by a more developmental, 'intelligent' school accountability system accompanied by a less prescriptive school curriculum. These things would help to re-professionalise teaching and free up the space, time and resources teachers need to build relationships with their students and develop curricula and teaching methods that are more fully responsive to the full range of young people in the classroom.

2. Careers information, advice and guidance is inconsistent and often inadequate, with young people routinely being denied access to good quality, impartial advice from professionally trained careers advisors. Because schools have a financial incentive to retain their students, and because school-based advisors often lack knowledge of the range of post-16 options available or are biased in favour of A Levels, advice is often skewed towards encouraging students to stay on at school rather than steering them in the direction of education or training routes that may be a better match for their interests and aspirations. Those who are not in school or college often do not access any careers advice.

Policy recommendations: The Baker Clause, designed to build bridges with vocational provision, should be properly embedded in the school system. In addition, a locally administered, national, independent careers service operating outside the school framework should be established to give all young people - including those who are not in school or college - access to professional, independent and non-judgemental careers information, advice and guidance.

3. High numbers of young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) reported experiencing feelings of anxiety, stress and mental health difficulties and serious barriers to their learning at school. The latter included not having their learning difficulties diagnosed and recognised, not receiving the support they needed, and being expected to complete courses within a time frame that was unrealistic for them.

Policy recommendations: Ensure that the current curriculum review considers how the curriculum and assessments can be designed to ensure success for students with SEND. Establish a national network of local youth forums for young people with SEND to advise on and support practice in this area. Set up and ensure robust provision for early recognition and diagnosis of learning difficulties, and ensure that all teachers are skilled in recognising and meeting the needs of their students with SEND.

**Contact:** Visit [www.ylyf.co.uk](http://www.ylyf.co.uk) to find out more. Follow the study on X @YoungLivesKCL



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<sup>1</sup> Young Lives, Young Futures is a six-year ESRC longitudinal study investigating how England's vocational education and training system can better support the school-to-work transitions of young people who don't go to university (currently 51% of 18-24 year olds). The project is concerned with examining the availability and accessibility of educational and employment opportunities for this group of young people and of resources for helping them make and enact decisions about their futures. The study consists of a 3-wave nationally representative survey of more than 10,000 young people, and qualitative interviews with 123 young people and 75 local policymakers and practitioners from across four local authority areas with contrasting labour market opportunities, social and economic geographies and education and training provision.