

"ARE YOU LISTENING?"



Youth Survey Report 2026

If you think you can, you can!

The Importance of Being Heard

A Note from our Chief Executive Officer

This report is built on the voices of over 4,300 young people who took part in our annual survey, with the theme chosen and shaped by our Youth Consultation Panel. Their message is clear: decisions made today will affect them the most, so their voices must be heard on the issues that count.



We know that finding the confidence to speak out can take time, and that digital spaces can sometimes feel daunting. But young people are rising to the challenge, and their voices are powerful. What matters now is ensuring that those in positions of influence truly listen to what they have to say.

The insights in this report centre on four key areas: the current state of youth voice; the confidence young people have or want to develop; their opportunities to be heard across social media and other platforms; and the role leaders can play in demonstrating that they are genuinely listening.

Our founder, Sir Jack Petchey CBE, believed passionately in the importance of young people being heard when he established the Foundation in 1999. His belief continues to guide us today. Empowering young people to use their voices to make a positive

difference has always been at the heart of everything we do, and we're committed to helping them use the many channels they have access to constructively, and in safety. We're also determined to help decision-makers listen more attentively to young people's views, and "Are You Listening?" exemplifies that.

As you read it, we hope you find young people's insights on engagement, confidence, safety and listening both inspiring and energising. Together, we can continue to build a society where young people's voices are not only heard, but also celebrated – because when young people speak up, and when we listen to them, the world is stronger.

Gemma Juma
Jack Petchey Foundation



Standing Up for Youth Voice

A message from our Youth Consultation Panel

The Youth Consultation Panel (YCP) is a dynamic group of young people who meet regularly to ensure that youth voice is at the centre of all the Foundation does. The group plays a central role in the creation of youth surveys and JPF's new programmes. Hetvi, who has been a member of the YCP since 2022, shared her thoughts on the process and findings.

“During a team strategy day, the YCP thought about what was important for young people to discuss right now. With the voting age potentially lowering to 16, we wanted to know how young people felt expressing themselves and if they were listened to. This led to a new youth survey and the creation of “Are You Listening?” What we learned from it will allow JPF and the YCP to give young voices from every background a platform to be heard.

One of the most interesting findings is that only 29% of 11-13-year-olds want to hear from politicians on topics that are important to them, compared to 50% of 22-25-year-olds. If the voting age is lowered to 16, those younger age groups would likely value hearing from politicians more as they will be directly impacted by them.

Another key finding is that young people feel the most important reason they should be listened to is simply that their voices should matter. This suggests young people feel they should always have a seat at the table to discuss key topics that relate to them. Leaders should stand up for youth voice and find ways to directly engage with young people and provide them with safe spaces to do so. Organisations like the Jack Petchey Foundation can help make this happen.” **Hetvi**



Our Respondents

We asked those taking our survey to tell us about themselves – their age, where they live and more. This helps us understand the demographics of young people in our catchment area and how we can amplify their voices.

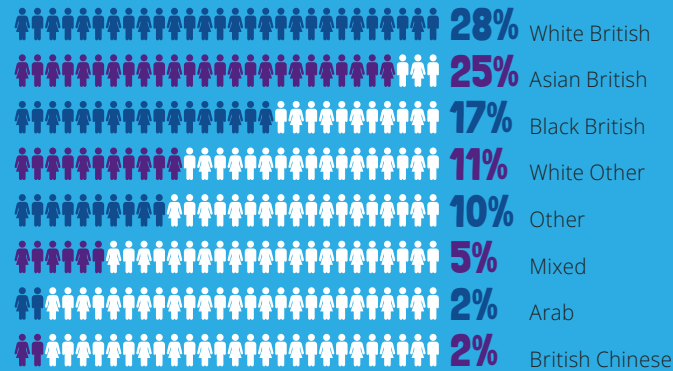


How respondents identify

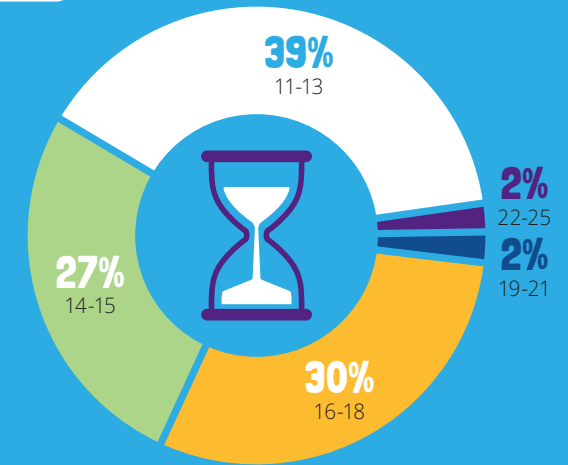
Gender



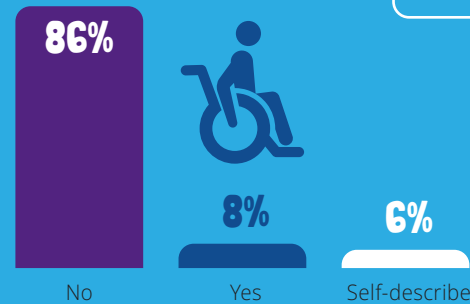
Ethnicity



Age



Disability

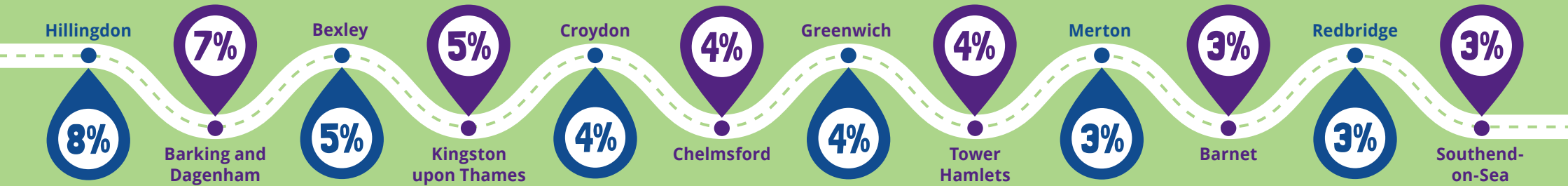


4,372 young people responded to the survey*



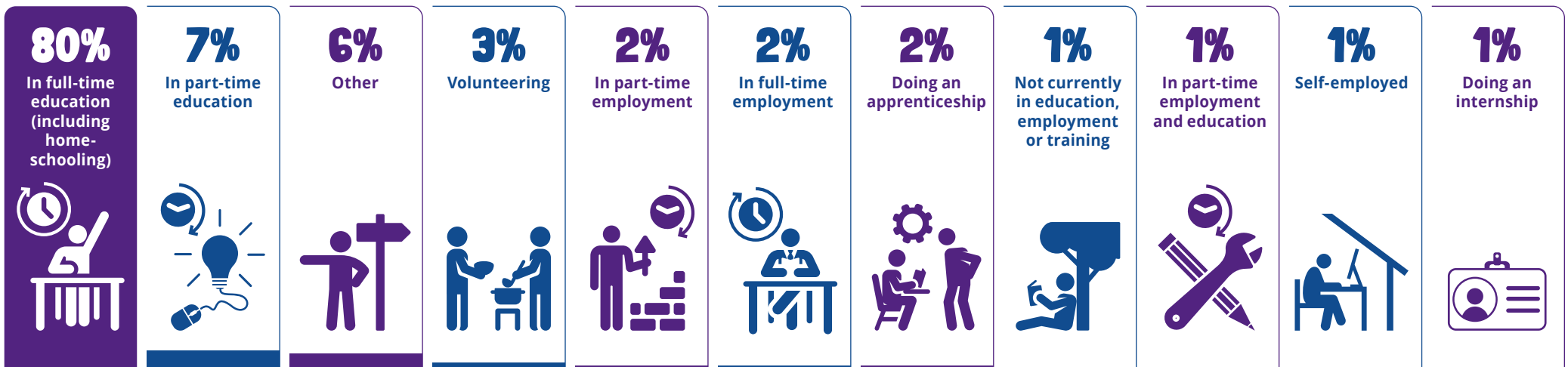
Where respondents live

We had respondents from every borough and district across London and Essex. The highest number of responses came from the following regions:



35% of respondents have won a Jack Petchey Achievement Award

Education/employment status*

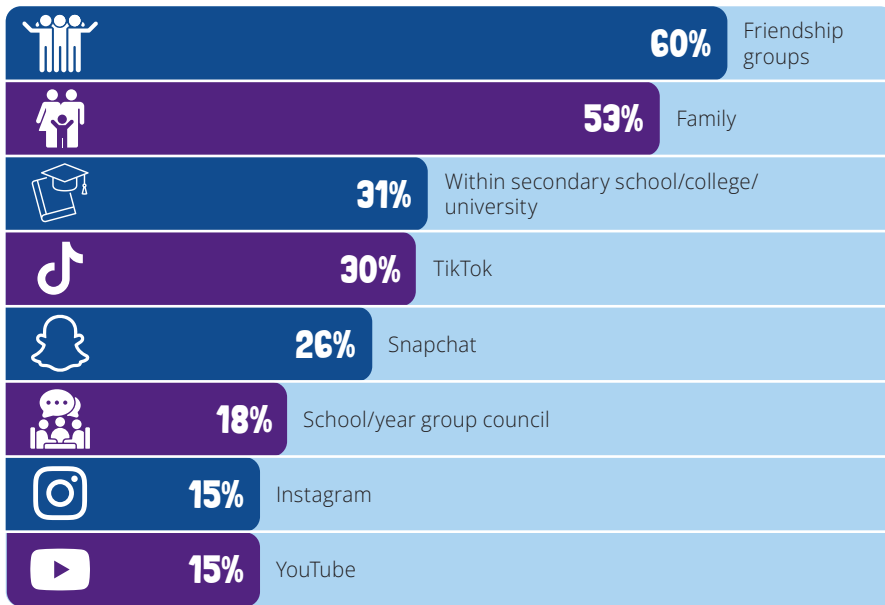


*Respondents could pick more than one option

Youth Voice Right Now

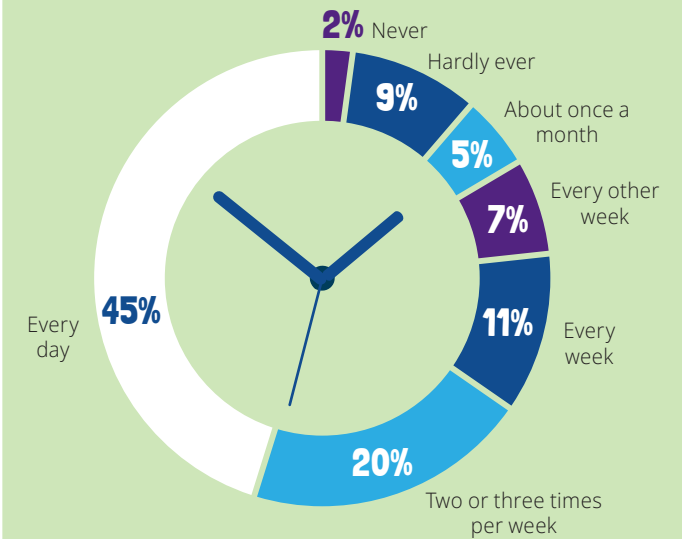
We asked young people how often they express their opinions and where they feel confident doing so. This information represents how young people see their opportunities in terms of where they speak out, who's being heard, and whose voices mean the most to them.

Where young people express their opinions[#]

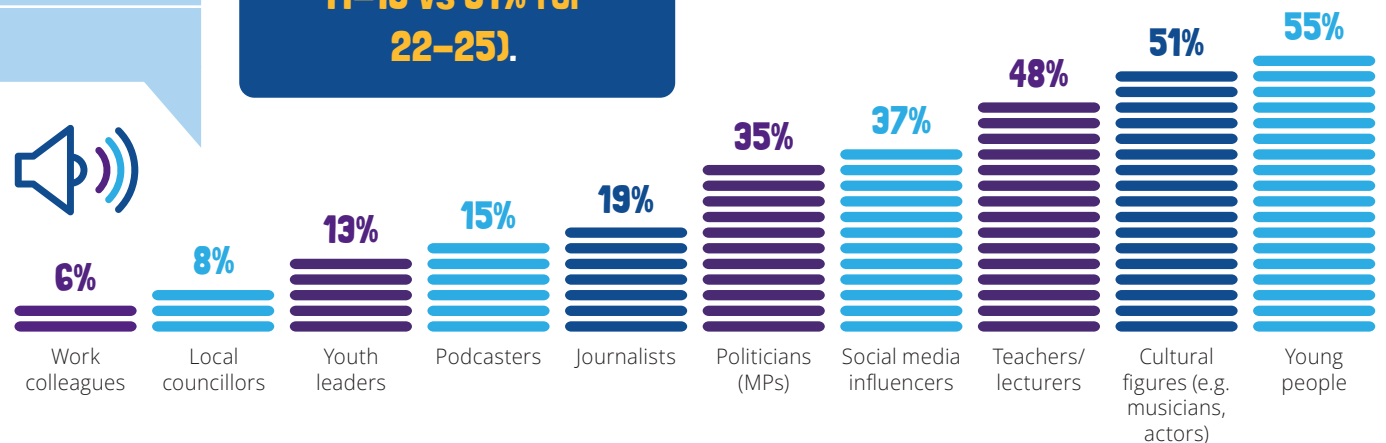


The importance of hearing from politicians increases through the ages (**29% for 11-13 vs 50% for 22-25**), whereas the importance of social media influencers decreases (**38% for 11-13 vs 31% for 22-25**).

How often young people express their opinions



Who young people most want to hear from on matters that are important to them[#]



[#]Respondents picked their top 3 options

Which voices young people think are heard most widely[#]



Social media influencers

58%

Politicians (MPs)

56%

Cultural figures (e.g. musicians, sportspeople etc.)

47%

General public

35%

Journalists

30%

Podcasters

26%

Young people

19%

Teachers/lecturers

15%

Local councillors

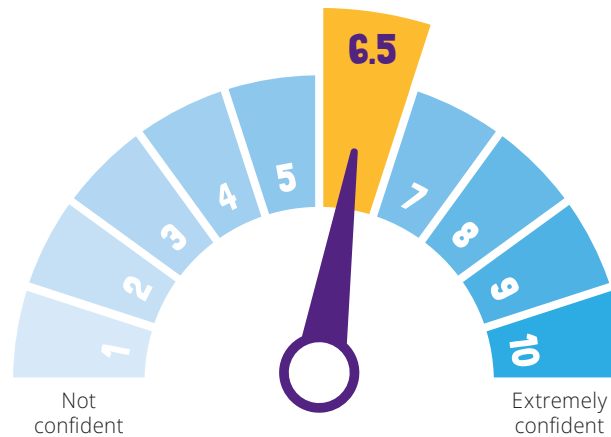
5%

Youth group and charity leaders

5%



How confident young people are in identifying, challenging and reporting misinformation



The stereotype of young people being disengaged is unfounded. There's good evidence that they are frequently using their voices in education and social settings with 45% of young people expressing their views every day.

Social media is such a popular platform for expression that even a high proportion of those aged 11-13, who shouldn't be able to open Instagram and TikTok accounts, said they were using them. This suggests regulation around age-verification is not having its intended impact.

Young people's frequent use of social media to express themselves correlates with their belief that they aren't given sufficient chance to be heard on other platforms. Only one in five of young people feel they are heard when discussing certain topics, compared to the prominence of social media influencers and politicians.



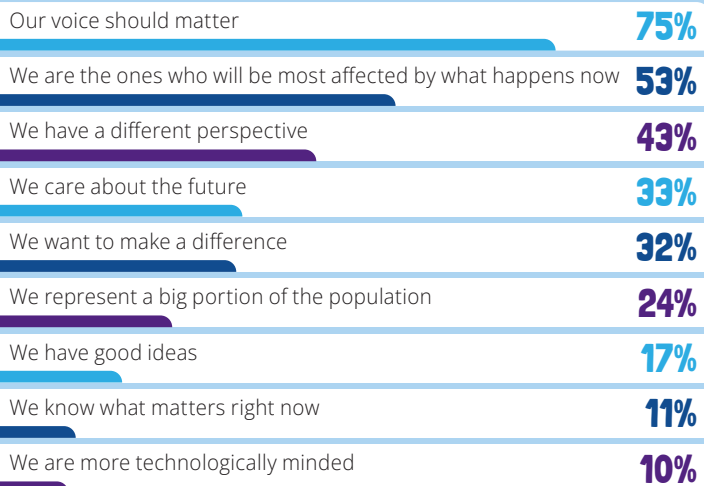
31% of respondents rate themselves as 5 or below out of 10 for feeling confident identifying, challenging and reporting misinformation.

[#]Respondents picked their top 3 options

Speaking with Confidence

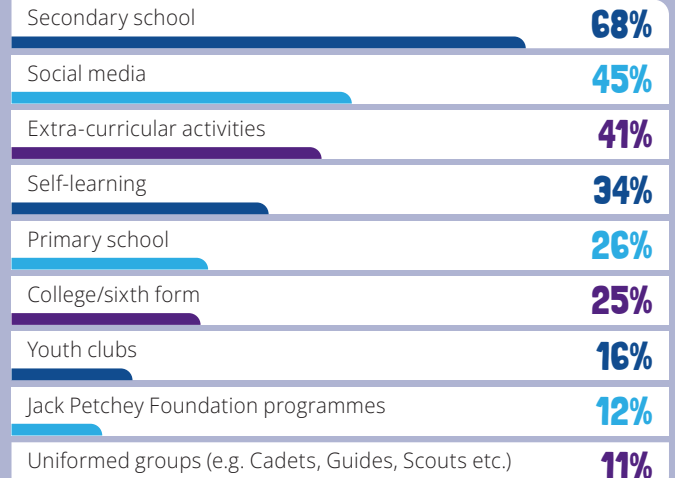
We asked young people why they think it's so important to be heard, what has helped them to express themselves, and how confident they are discussing various topics. This section paints a picture of young people's varying levels of confidence in the power of their speech.

Why young people think it is important for them to share their views[#]



Young people are least confident discussing politics and economics.

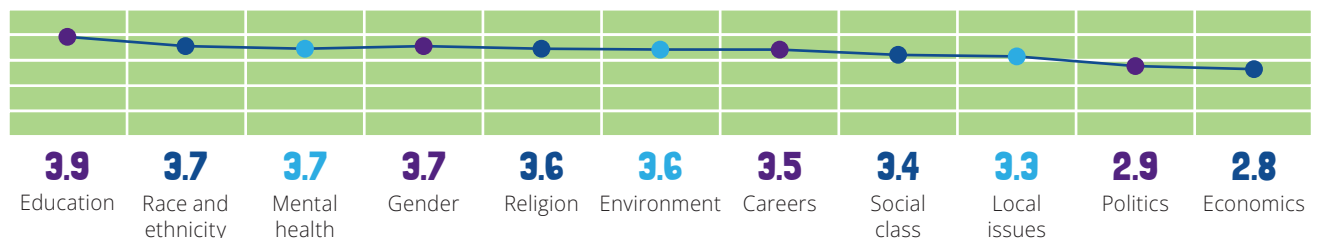
What young people think has had the biggest positive impact on their ability to express themselves[#]



50% of those in their mid-teens (14-18) say social media is influential, but its importance drops in early adulthood (19-25).



How confident young people are in discussing certain topics^{*}



[#]Respondents picked their top 3 options. | ^{*}Rated between 1 and 5, with 1 being not confident at all and 5 being extremely confident.



In their own words

Young people would feel more confident expressing themselves if there were :

Safer and moderated online spaces

“[Online is] not always a safe space as people are often criticised for their opinions so they’re not as keen to speak out. People don’t want to be judged.” **Jowita**



Positive representation of young people in the media, with encouragement and validation of youth voices

“[We need] more people willing to listen to young people and not immediately dismissing what we have to say due to ‘inexperience’ or a ‘lack of understanding’.” **Anonymous**



“It would help if there were more positive attitudes towards young people in the media, showing that our ideas matter and can lead to real change.” **Methsarani**

Better education on topics

“Enlighten and educate young people in different areas, which will make us more knowledgeable on a subject matter which will build the confidence we need to speak publicly. Personally, I lose confidence when asked to speak on something I don’t understand.” **Lehi**



There is an unmistakable feeling that young people’s voices should matter more because in the future they will be the ones most impacted by decisions made now.

Young people are proactive in learning how to express themselves: self-learning rates highly on what has the biggest positive effect on them (34%). Over 40% feel that extra-curricular activities are key drivers of improving their ability to communicate effectively, showing how highly enrichment opportunities are valued.

Young people are least confident discussing politics and economics, and the advent of 16-year-olds voting gives that finding particular significance. Our respondents would clearly support action to enhance citizenship education, to better prepare young people to participate in our democracy. The new curriculum provides an opportunity to make this positive change.

The Chance to Be Heard

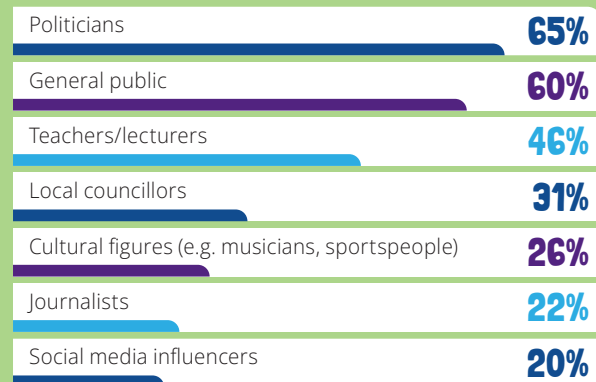
We asked young people what they think needs to change in order for their voices to be heard more clearly: whose responsibility it is, who's already helping, and why certain groups are given a platform.



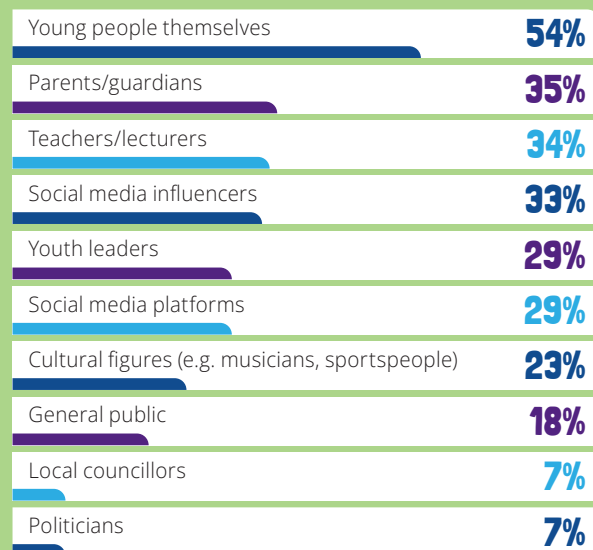
Very few young people feel confident expressing themselves on Facebook or X. Those that do are older.

Who young people believe should be amplifying their voices vs those they feel are doing the most

Whose role is it:

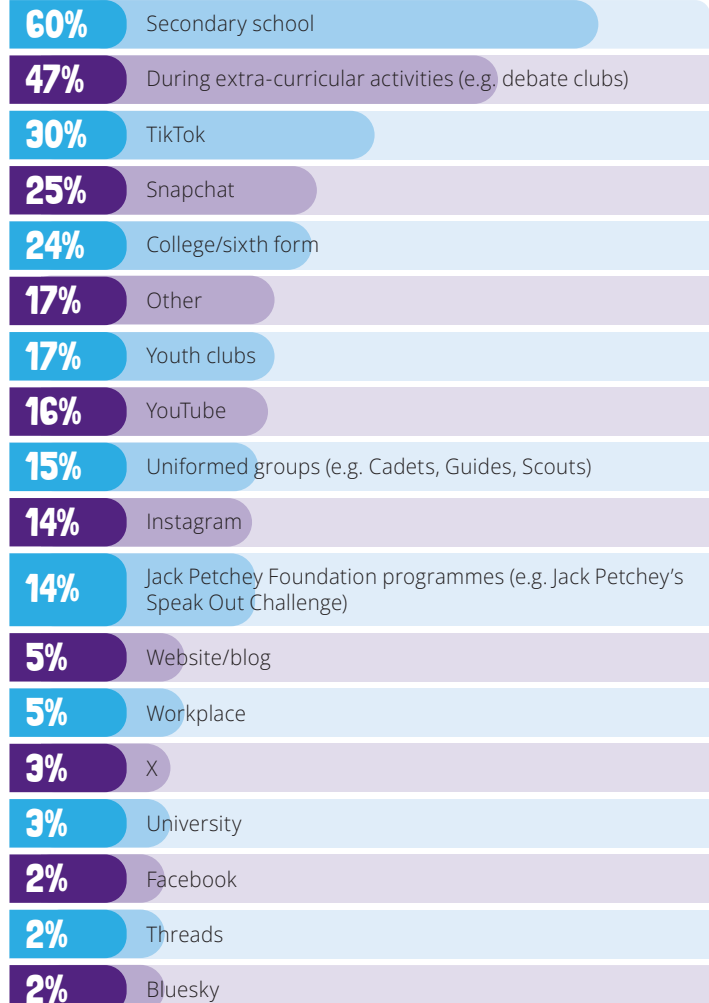


Who is helping:



Young people strongly believe that politicians and the general public should be responsible for ensuring their voices are heard, yet they are amongst those they feel are doing the least.

Spaces young people feel most confident using their voice#



#Respondents picked their top 3 options

“Create safe places for young people to be able to speak out about how they feel no matter what. Show more positive attitudes towards young people in the media as I feel we are seen very negatively such as the hate Greta Thunberg gets. She was just a teenager when she spoke out about the environment and people wouldn't listen to her as she was only young.” **Emily**



Why young people think those heard the most are given a platform#

They have a high status (e.g. an important role in the government, work for a big company)	70%
They have a sizeable following	42%
They have media connections	40%
They speak confidently	32%
They provide false information or exaggerate	17%
They are empathetic (e.g. they seem to care about people like me)	17%
They provide clear facts	16%
They're controversial	14%
They're likeable	13%
They tell the truth	12%
They seem authentic	10%
They're funny or humorous	8%
They sound like an ordinary person	5%

Why young people think some groups aren't listening to them#

They think we're not mature enough to understand topics	40%
They don't feel the need to listen	38%
They don't think we have enough information to make an informed choice	35%
They think we are easily influenced so follow a herd mentality (i.e. we will do what our friends think even if we disagree)	35%
They think we're too young to understand certain topics	34%
They don't agree with our opinions	30%
Our voices don't get coverage in the media so they don't hear us	28%
They think we're too young to care	19%
They are afraid of what we will say	15%
They are afraid of what we stand for	15%
They don't want to admit that we may have better ideas than them	14%
They don't understand us	12%
They're not confident enough to respect different views	10%

#Respondents picked their top 3 options.



The stereotype of young people being politically inactive is not supported by our survey finding that 54% of young people believe they themselves are doing the most to champion their own causes, with many directly referencing the likes of Greta Thunberg as positive role models for doing this.

There's a significant disconnect between who young people believe should be helping them to be heard and those that are doing so. Young people strongly believe that politicians and the general public should be responsible for ensuring their voices are heard, yet they are amongst those they feel are doing the least.

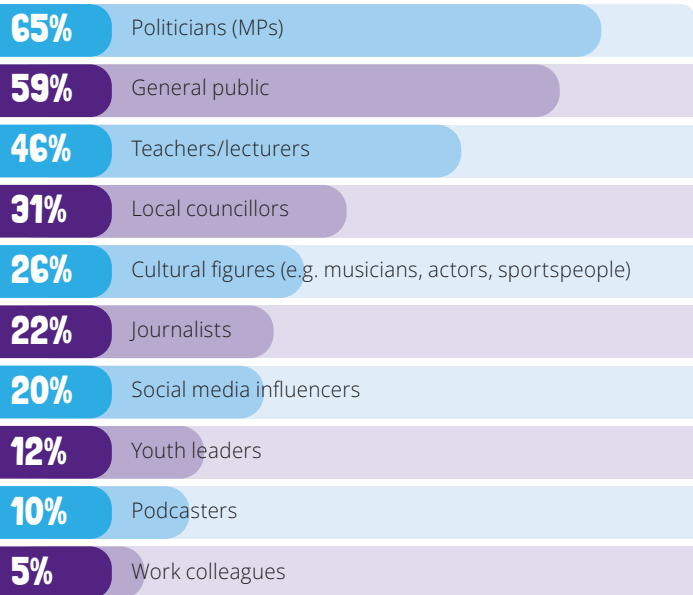
Young people don't see the media as predominantly a platform for clear facts or truth. Apart from high status individuals, those given exposure seem to be just well connected, and as likely to be pushing misinformation or controversy as truthfulness or empathy. Coupled with the prejudice young people feel towards them, access to media platforms needs to be addressed.



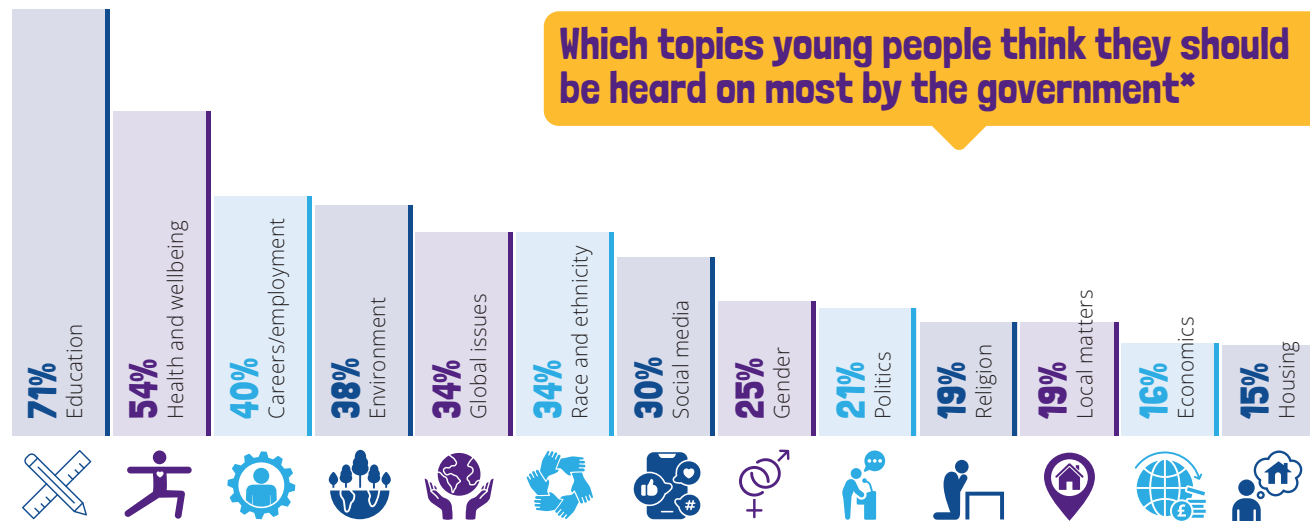
Helping Leaders Listen

We asked young people who most needs to pay more attention to them, what subjects they most want to be heard on, what they think about lowering the voting age to 16, and what they most want our political leaders to hear.

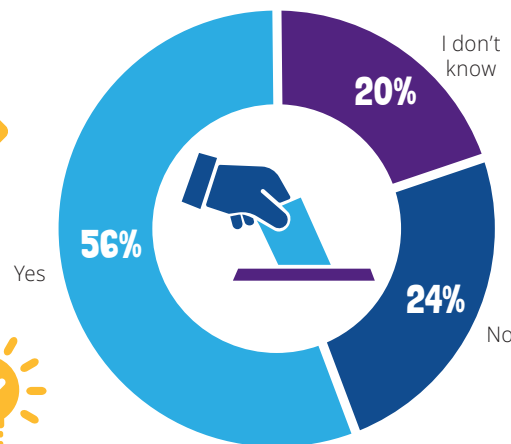
Which groups young people think most need to value their opinions[#]



The importance of local councillors increases the older the respondents are, with 40% of those aged 22–25 saying they should listen to young people.



Do young people think lowering the voting age from 18 to 16 is a good idea?



Those aged 11–13 are the most optimistic that lowering the voting age is a good idea (64%) compared to those aged 19–21 (39%).



*Respondents could pick more than one option. | [#] Respondents picked their top 3 options.

In their own words

Messages young people have for the government

“Listen to young people not just for their opinions, but for their solutions.” Sumaya

“Take us seriously because we are the ones impacted by the way you run the country.” Amelia

“Provide clearer details on what is going on in the world and true information without being hyperbolic.” Amman

“Create genuine, structured opportunities for youth to be involved in decision-making rather than just consulted.” Falisha

“Diversify Parliament, welcome young adults into the field and actually listen to the ideas they propose.” Miruna



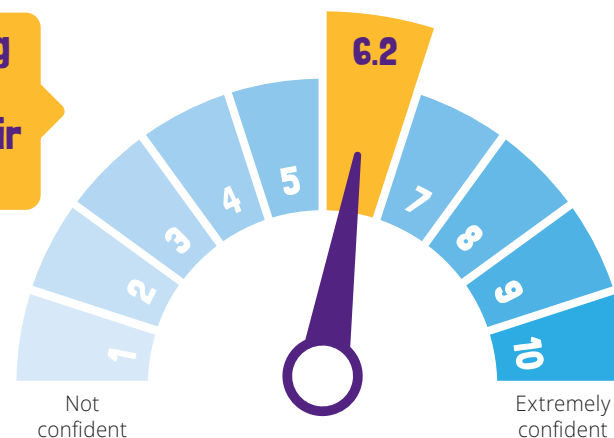
Lowering the voting age would be a very clear demonstration by the government that they want young people to have more say in our democracy, and a majority of our respondents think that this will help their voices be heard.

However, there is more to it than that. When taken alongside the fact that 65% of young people feel MPs need to value their opinion more, but only 21% identify politics as a priority topic for young people to influence, there is clearly more to be done.

If lowering the voting age is to be effective, it may need to be supported by measures to increase young people's trust in politicians, engaging them more effectively with politics, and improving their confidence and safety in engaging with political discourse. With young people rating the likelihood of a lower voting age helping them be better heard at only 6.2 out of 10, there is clearly a big opportunity here.



Out of 10, how effective do young people think that lowering the voting age will be in ensuring their voices are heard



The likelihood of a lower voting age helping young people be better heard was only rated as 5.3 out of 10 by those aged 22–25, while those aged 11–13 rated it 6.5.



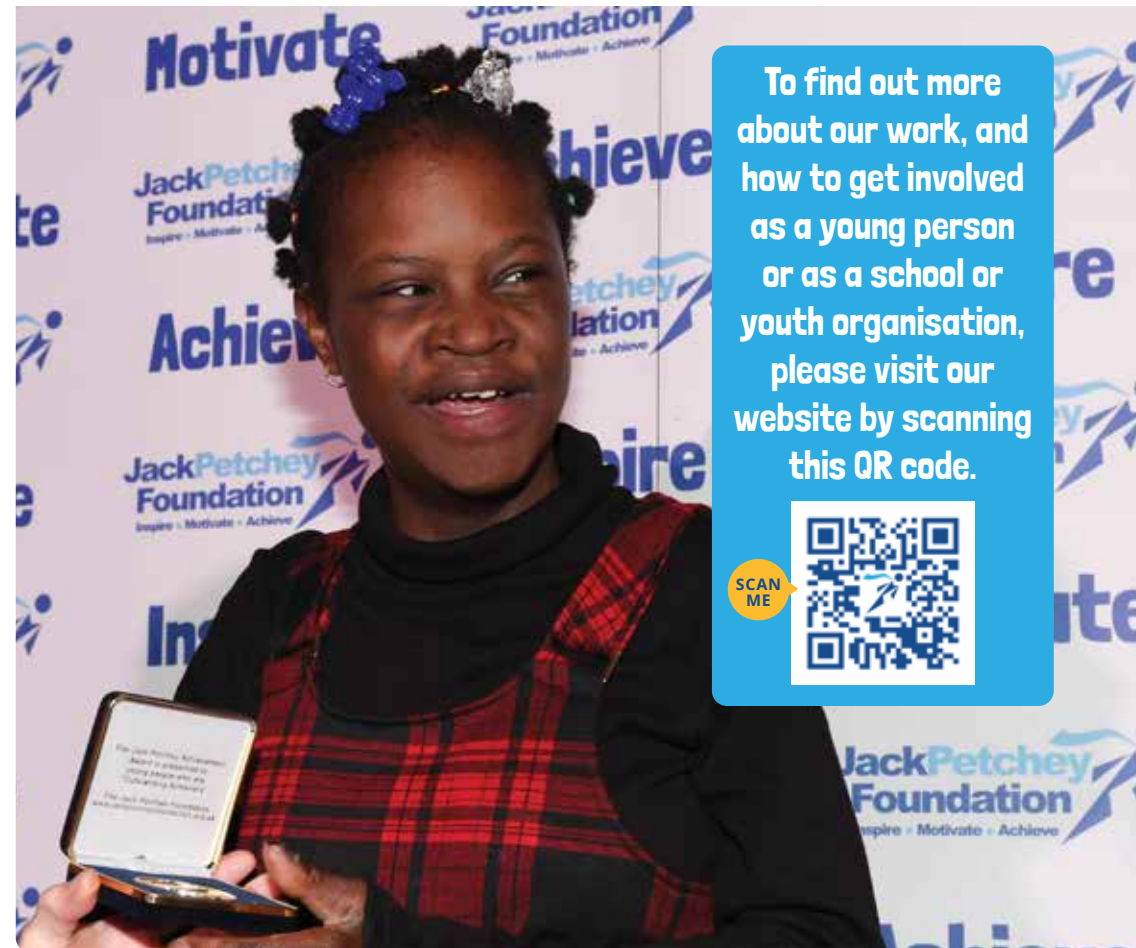
How we will use this report

JPF's Strategic Aims for 2025-2027 include a clear commitment to champion youth voice, alongside the impact we make through our programmes and partnerships. The findings of this report inspire us to intensify our work investing in young people in a range of ways.

The confidence in using your voice has been a central theme for us over the years, and we'll be working tirelessly to invest all we can in growing confidence through the celebration of achievements, working hard to engage young people with their communities, and helping them develop the range of skills they need to make positive contributions.

Communicating constructively, positively and safely already lies at the heart of Jack Petchey's Speak Out Challenge, and is also a part of many of our programmes. We will be actively exploring opportunities to convene spaces in which young people can exchange views with decision-makers, and this report gives us a good starting point.

Sir Jack's vision of celebrating the achievements of young people across London and Essex is the perfect way to defy any negative media narrative about young people so we'll also be working hard to spread his motto as far and wide as we can, with all the evidence we see that it's true. If you think you can, you can!



To find out more about our work, and how to get involved as a young person or as a school or youth organisation, please visit our website by scanning this QR code.



In their own words

How young people think the Jack Petchey Foundation can help young people use their voice

Youth-led platforms



“Fund or support youth-run podcasts, blogs or YouTube channels where young people can discuss issues that matter to them.” Gabriel

Creative expression programmes



“Create platforms like spoken word, rap, art exhibitions or short film festivals so young people can express themselves in different ways, not just speeches.” Habibullah

Training and skill development



“Organise workshops on civic engagement and advocacy to teach young people how to effectively campaign for change and interact with elected officials.” Adam

Please Help Spread the Word

Help us reach more young people by spreading the word about this report and the work we do at the Jack Petchey Foundation.

We currently run our flagship Achievement Award Scheme in over 1,400 youth organisations, state secondary schools and colleges. But we want to work with them all! We are looking for new schools and youth organisations to join the Jack Petchey Achievement Award scheme to help us recognise and empower even more young people with our awards, programmes and funding opportunities.



Visit our website or scan the QR code to find out more information about our full range of opportunities and take our eligibility quiz to see if a school or youth group you know would be eligible to apply.



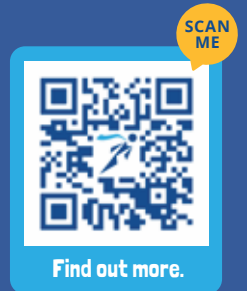
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