



Prince's Trust

Confidence Crossroads:

The path ahead for young people

A report from The Prince's Trust

November 2021

CENSUSWIDE

THE SURVEY CONSULTANTS

Foreword

Our Confidence Crossroads report reveals that young people all over the UK are experiencing a crippling loss of confidence in their skills for work and their future prospects.

Following the significant disruption to young people's employment and education in recent months due to the pandemic, and during a time of great uncertainty in the job market, this report shows that more than half of young people have lost confidence in themselves and 44 per cent do not know how they will get their life back on track.

It is also of great concern that young people who are facing disadvantage and adversity, such as those from poorer backgrounds and those who have recently experienced unstable employment, are even more likely to report a drop in their confidence as well as poor mental health.

It is clear that an increase in support for young people is urgently needed to help restore their confidence and build their skills. Without it, we risk losing their potential to the effects of low self-esteem, joblessness and declining mental health, which would have a devastating impact on their lives – and on our nation's workforce – for many years to come.

On the ground in our Prince's Trust centres, we are hearing from talented young people every day who want nothing more than to work and train. Despite their clear potential, many of these young people are clouded by self-doubt and unsure of how to get themselves on track to a better future.

We are committed to helping young people find the courage to take their next step towards realising their goals. Everything we do is geared towards supporting young people on a path to employment; particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds and those who are facing the greatest adversity.

We know just how transformative employment can be in enabling young people to lead fulfilling lives and, in light of the findings in this report, it is clear that the courses we offer to help young people build their confidence, get ready for work and access job opportunities are needed now, more than ever.

It is only with support from the public, private and charity sectors, and through the generosity of members of the public who fundraise on our behalf, that we are able to reach the tens of thousands of young people we help each year. It is vital that we address the challenges facing young people together and help them to prepare for the jobs that are available now, as well as those of the future.

Jonathan Townsend
UK Chief Executive
The Prince's Trust





Prince's Trust



"The affect the pandemic has had on young people's mental wellbeing is significant and cannot be ignored. This report shows young people telling us that their confidence has been shattered and they are worried about their skills for work, and ultimately fearing for their future.

"Support, advice and guidance are vital to improving the outlook for young people at a critical point in their lives. It is therefore in all our interests to provide opportunities to build skills and confidence as young people progress into further education and future careers. Without this, we risk not only further disruption to what has already been a very turbulent time in their lives but also missing out on the immense potential of our future workforce."

– Dr Alex George, Youth Mental Health Ambassador

Methodology

This report is based on research undertaken by Censuswide on behalf of The Prince's Trust.

- All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from Censuswide. Total sample size was 2,007 16 to 25-year-olds.
- Censuswide abides by and employs members of the Market Research Society which is based on the ESOMAR principles. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all aged 16 to 25 in the UK.
- Of the 2,007 young people surveyed, 626 were not in education, employment or training (NEETs) or from poorer backgrounds. References to respondents from poorer backgrounds are those who said they had free school meals throughout their time at school. References to “disrupted employment” refer to respondents who have experienced any of furlough, unemployment, or redundancy over the course of the Covid-19 pandemic.
- Fieldwork was undertaken between 13/08/2021 and 25/08/2021.

Executive Summary

This report shows that the pandemic has caused a crisis of confidence among young people in their future careers and skills for work.

Fears about their jobs, their skillsets and future opportunities are weighing on young minds, with more than half of young people agreeing they have “lost confidence in themselves” as a result of the pandemic.

The report also finds that young people who face disadvantage, such as those from lower income backgrounds and those who have spent time out of work during the pandemic, are more likely to report negative experiences, including a loss of self-confidence and poor mental health.

A crisis of confidence

The findings show that the pandemic has caused young people to lose faith in their skills for work and in their future prospects.

- More than half of young people (52 per cent) agree they've lost confidence in themselves as a result of the pandemic
- Young people from lower income backgrounds and those who have experienced unstable employment during the pandemic are more likely to report poor mental health and lost confidence (more on this in 'Circumstances matter' summary)
- 44 per cent of young people agree they don't know how they'll get their life back on track
- Less than a quarter of young people (22 per cent) say they feel confident in their future career
- A quarter of young people (24 per cent) worry they do not have the skills for the jobs that are available to them, and 44 per cent agree that over the course of the pandemic, they have even lost confidence in their ability to do the job they are trained to do
- However, 45 per cent agree that the time to retrain and gain new skills has made them feel optimistic about their future.

Circumstances matter

There is a clear correlation between young people's personal circumstances and how they feel in themselves and about their future careers. Sadly, the findings suggest that the pandemic is having a greater impact on those from lower income backgrounds as well as those who have experienced unstable employment.

- 60 percent of young people from lower income backgrounds and 55 per cent of those who experienced unstable employment report having lost confidence in themselves as a result of the pandemic (compared to 52 per cent of all young people surveyed)
- Forty-eight per cent of young people who have experienced disrupted employment and 50 per cent among those from lower income backgrounds say they don't know how they'll get their life back on track (compared to 44 per cent of all young people surveyed)
- Less than a quarter of young people (22 per cent) say they feel confident in their future career. For NEET young people, this dropped to just 9 per cent.

- Forty-four per cent of young people overall say that as a result of the pandemic, they have lost confidence in their ability to do a job that they are trained in or have experience in. For young people from low-income families, this rises to more than half (52 per cent).

The toll on mental wellbeing

This report shows the impact of the pandemic on the mental health of young people and, in particular, how those who already face disadvantage are more adversely affected.

- More than half (51 per cent) of all young people agree that day to day life feels harder as a result of the pandemic. This rises to 54 per cent among those who have experienced unstable employment and 57 per cent among those from lower income households.
- 56 per cent of young people agree the pandemic has made preparing for the future feel like an uphill struggle. This figure rises to 58 per cent among those who have experienced unstable employment during the pandemic, and to 61 per cent among those from lower income backgrounds.
- The pandemic may also have impacted young people's overall self-esteem, with 53 per cent agreeing they have lost confidence in the way they can handle social situations and 54 per cent finding it harder to build new relationships.

The gender divide

The report highlights significant differences between the views held by young men and those held by young women, particularly when it comes to their confidence and how they feel about their futures.

- 57 per cent of young women say they have lost confidence in themselves as a result of the pandemic, compared to 47 per cent of young men
- 42 per cent of young women say their levels of anxiety have increased as a result of the pandemic, compared to 23 per cent of young men
- While more than half of young men (52 per cent) feel that preparing for their future is an uphill struggle as a result of the pandemic, this rises to 60 per cent among young women.

A crisis of confidence

The confidence young people feel in their future career and skills for work has substantially eroded since the pandemic began. During this time, many young people have experienced significant disruption to their employment and education and missed out on many other interactions at a critical development stage in their lives.

The findings in this report show the effect the pandemic is having, not only on the day-to-day lives of young people, but also on their outlook on the future.

Of all young people surveyed, more than half of young people (52 per cent) reported that they have lost confidence in themselves as a result of the pandemic. Only a fifth (22 per cent) say they feel confident in their future career and one in five (19 per cent) feel like they have the confidence to go after the job they want.

Furthermore, a quarter of young people (24 per cent) worry they do not have the skills for the jobs that are available to them, and 44 per cent agree that over the course of the pandemic, they have even lost confidence in their ability to do the job they are trained to do. This may help to explain why only one in five (19 per cent) feel like they have the confidence to go after the job they want.

The findings also suggest that many young people feel their lives have been derailed by the effects of the pandemic, with 44 per cent of young people reporting that they do not know how they will get their life back on track.

The findings also expose a concerning disparity between young people who are facing challenging life experiences, such as unstable employment and low income, and those who are in more fortunate circumstances, with the former more likely to report a loss of confidence and poor mental health. Our 'Circumstances Matter' chapter looks at this in more detail.

On securing employment, young people also expressed the following sentiments:

- More than a third of young people (33 per cent) of young people feel under pressure to take any job rather than hold out for the job they want
- Three in five young people (60 per cent) agree not being able to find a job makes them feel anxious
- More than half of young people (54 per cent) agree that constantly applying for jobs makes them feel hopeless
- Three in five young people (60 per cent) agree getting a job feels impossible now because there's so much competition

Isaac's story



Twenty-one year old Isaac Langran, from Neath, struggled throughout the pandemic with his mood and self-confidence. Although he successfully completed a politics degree in the summer, he was left feeling uncertain of his next steps after finishing his studies.

“I have autism and I find it helpful to have clear routines in place. I felt the disruption to my routine, caused by the pandemic, not only impacted my academic performance but also my mental health in a really bad way. After graduating, I was unemployed with no work experience, and being at home constantly was getting me down. I didn't feel like any of my future goals were achievable.”

Isaac was referred to the Prince's Trust Explore Programme, a six-week programme to help young people boost their confidence and learn new skills.

“I was very nervous at the start of the course. Travelling to Cardiff to meet people was a huge change for me, as I had mostly only done work and interactions online for more than a year. I was really scared, but as soon as I met the other young people on the course and got to know the staff at The Prince's Trust, a lot of my fears went away.”

While on the Explore programme, Isaac realised that trying new things lifted his mood. He threw himself into activities such as rock climbing, despite having a fear of heights. At the end of the course, Isaac wanted to do more with The Prince's Trust and signed up to The Trust's retail programme in partnership with M&S.

“I have never had a job before and didn't feel like I had the confidence to engage with unfamiliar people. I am generally quite shy, so on the first day I was nervous about how to answer customer questions. However, I was treated like a full employee and being given that responsibility was a huge boost to my confidence. I now have 160 hours of work experience in a retail store which I can put on my CV, and I am also looking forward to securing my first ever job as a result of experience gained on this course.”

The toll on mental wellbeing

An alarming number of young people are struggling with their mental health in the wake of the pandemic, with more than half (51 per cent) saying that day to day life feels harder as a result of the pandemic, and 56 per cent agreeing the pandemic has made preparing for the future feel like an uphill struggle.

The situation is even more stark for young people who are already facing disadvantage and adversity. Among those who have experienced unstable employment during the pandemic, 54 per cent reported that day to day life feels harder and 58 per cent said preparing for the future feels like an uphill struggle. For those from lower income backgrounds, these figures are higher still, at 57 per cent 61 percent respectively.

The findings also show that young people's self-esteem has been a casualty of the pandemic, with 53 per cent of young people agreeing they have lost confidence in the way they can handle social situations and 54 per cent finding it harder to build new friendships.

The research shows a correlation between young people's personal circumstances, such as their socio-economic background, or whether they have recently experienced unstable employment, and how they feel about their future prospects. Sadly, it is those who are already experiencing challenges in their lives who are more likely to report a loss in confidence and poor mental health.

60 percent of young people from lower income backgrounds and 55 per cent of those who experienced unstable employment report having lost confidence in themselves as a result of the pandemic, compared to 52 per cent of all young people surveyed.

Forty-eight per cent of young people who have experienced disrupted employment and 50 per cent of those from lower income backgrounds say they don't know how they'll get their life back on track. This is compared to 44 per cent of all young people surveyed.

Similarly, 44 per cent of young people overall say that as a result of the pandemic, they have lost confidence in their ability to do a job that they are trained in or have experience in. For young people from low-income families, this rises to more than half (52 per cent).

The realities of being out of work

"It was hard to find work in the pandemic. I briefly worked in retail over Christmas, but that was all. Confidence isn't something you always have, it's something you can gain and lose.

"Training and getting my job at the hospital has helped me come out of my shell and feel more positive about my future. If you're struggling to find work, don't be afraid to change direction. All it takes is finding the right opportunity and dedicating yourself to getting the job that's right for you." – Chris Holland, 24-years-old, Oldham

We know that for young people who are not in education, employment, or training (NEET), the challenges presented by the pandemic can feel even more significant. For example, while 30 per cent of all young people would rate their mental health as 'poor' or 'very poor' during the pandemic, this figure increases to 39 per cent of those who are NEET.



Prince's Trust

Sentiments expressed by Non-NEET young people, compared to NEET young people:

	Non-NEET young people	NEET young people
I feel confident about my future career	24% agree	9% agree
I worry I don't have the skills for the jobs that are available	24% agree	31% agree
I feel more positive about my future	28% disagree	38% disagree



The Gender Divide

The findings of this research suggest that the mindsets of young women are more negatively affected by the impact of the pandemic than those of young men. Young women are more likely to have experienced a drop in self-confidence and to be more concerned about their future.

Sentiments expressed by young women, compared to young men:

As a result of the pandemic...	Young Women	Young Men
I have lost confidence in myself	57%	47%
My levels of anxiety have increased	42%	23%
Preparing for my future is an uphill struggle	60%	52%
I am scared I'll be trapped in a job I hate	29%	20%
I feel more anxious about meeting new people	61%	51%
I have lost confidence in the way I can handle social situations	58%	49%





“So many young people want to be out in the world, contributing to society and progressing in their careers. Confidence and self-esteem are skills that can be seriously overlooked and have a huge impact on how young people perceive their futures.

“With the right support, these skills can be built on and developed, and the next generation will not only achieve but thrive in their environments. We just have to listen to young people’s voices and take action, not only now, but long into the future.”

– **Elise Williams, Prince’s Trust Alumni and Founder of The Pocket Mentor**

Acknowledgements

The Prince's Trust would like to thank Censuswide for conducting and supporting this research.

Many thanks to everyone who helped to create this report, including the young people who have shared their story, and Elise Williams, Prince's Trust Alumna, for contributing. The Trust would also like to thank to Dr Alex George for his contribution to this report.

About The Prince's Trust

The Prince's Trust helps young people all over the UK to build their confidence and skills and supports them into jobs, education and training. Founded by The Prince of Wales in 1976, the charity supports 11 to 30 year-olds who are unemployed, struggling at school and at risk of exclusion.

Many of the young people helped by The Trust's youth support workers and mentors are in or leaving care, facing issues such as homelessness, mental health problems, or have been in trouble with the law.

The courses offered by The Trust give young people the practical and financial support needed to stabilise their lives, helping develop self-esteem and skills for work. Three in four young people supported by The Prince's Trust move into work, education or training.

The Trust has helped more than a million young people to date.

WE'RE HERE FOR YOU



Prince's Trust

 princes-trust.org.uk

   PrincesTrust

0800842842 (9am-6pm Monday – Friday)

Live chat (9am-6pm Monday - Friday)