

# THE ASPIRATION GAP

A report from The Prince's Trust  
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**CENSUSWIDE**

THE SURVEY CONSULTANTS



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# The Aspiration Gap:

## The lost hopes and ambitions of a generation

### Foreword

This report shows how the coronavirus pandemic has done more than disrupt vital education, training and job opportunities for young people. It has eroded their confidence in their future, to a point where some feel they won't ever be able to succeed in life.

Young people are losing hope, with many abandoning their ambitions for the future and, sadly, those from disadvantaged backgrounds are being hardest hit.

We need to ensure the odds don't stay stacked against these young people. We must support them to upskill, retrain and access job opportunities, or else we risk losing their ambition and potential to long-term unemployment - to the detriment of their future and to the recovery of our economy.

As The Prince's Trust marks the significant milestone of supporting a million young people since 1976, we face profoundly difficult times for a generation just starting their working lives. More than half a million young people are already unemployed and youth joblessness is soon expected to reach record highs.

Young people need us now more than ever, and we know from experience that even the smallest interventions can be a turning point towards a more positive future.

The Trust has a track record, over the last 44 years, of helping young people facing challenges such as unemployment, homelessness, poverty and mental health issues, to develop their skills, build their confidence and find work. Three in four of those supported on our programmes move into jobs, education or training.

In the weeks and months ahead, it is more important than ever that government, employers and charities work together to stop a generation from losing hope.

**Jonathan Townsend, UK Chief Executive, The Prince's Trust**



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# 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 2,000 16 to 25-year-olds. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all aged 16 to 25 in the UK.

Of the 2,000 young people surveyed, 620 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.

Fieldwork was undertaken between 4th September 2020 and 14th September 2020, approximately six months into the coronavirus pandemic in the UK.



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# Report findings

## The Aspiration Gap

This report highlights an “aspiration gap” as young people lose hope and abandon their ambitions, six months into the pandemic in the UK.

According to the survey, more than a third of young people (39 per cent) claim to have abandoned their aspirations for the year ahead.

This increases significantly among those respondents who are NEET. Forty-four per cent of NEET young people surveyed claim to have abandoned their ambitions for the year ahead, compared with 38 per cent of those in education, employment or training.

Other findings include:

- Forty-four per cent of 16 to 25-year-olds say their aspirations for the future are now lower as a result of the pandemic.
- Forty-one per cent of young people believe their future goals now seem “impossible to achieve”, with this rising to half (50 per cent) of those surveyed from poorer backgrounds.
- 38 per cent feel they will “never succeed in life”, and this increases to almost half (48 per cent) of those surveyed from poorer homes.
- More than one in three (36 per cent) of all young people surveyed say they have “lost hope” for the future.
- More than one in ten (11 per cent) say the job or training they were about to start has been cancelled as a result of the pandemic.
- Fifty-five per cent say the coronavirus crisis has made them fearful for their future, while 46 per cent say thinking about their future makes them feel “hopeless”.



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## Set back for life

Young people have missed out on crucial education as a result of the pandemic. Although the full impact of this is still unknown, pupils fear it could set them back for the rest of their life.

The following findings are based on a sub sample in the research of 861 young people in school, college or university:

- Forty-one per cent of young people in school, college or university worry the education they've missed will set them back for the rest of their life, and the research suggests this increases significantly (to 50 per cent) for those from poorer backgrounds.
- While more than a third (39 per cent) feel their education has now “gone to waste”, the research suggests this is higher still (at 47 per cent) for those surveyed from poorer backgrounds.
- Forty-one per cent of surveyed young people worry other young people have had tutors or more help than them, and this increases to 47 per cent among those from poorer homes.
- More than half (54 per cent) say they feel pressure to work “even harder” because of the school they've missed.

## The toll on mental health

The mental health toll of the pandemic is hitting all young people.

More than a quarter (27 per cent) of all young people in the research say they feel unable to cope with life.

Almost two thirds (65 per cent) say that not being able to find a job makes them feel anxious, while more than half (56 per cent) feel “panicked” when thinking about trying to find work.

Almost a third (31 per cent) of young people say they have experienced panic attacks, and those respondents who are NEET are more likely to claim this (34 per cent).

Young people also reported the following:

- More than a third (36 per cent) say they struggle to think clearly.
- Thirty-seven per cent have experienced insomnia.
- Forty-one per cent have experienced self-loathing.

Two thirds (67 per cent) agree having a job is, or would be, good for their mental health.







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## Pete's story

Pete, 27, from Bristol, explains that “when I started on the programme with The Prince's Trust and Great Western Railway, it felt like finally I could leave some of my baggage behind and just focus on improving myself. I was doing something for me.

“The course helped me get my foot firmly in the door of GWR and gave me much needed stability. For example, I not only passed my driving test, but I even own a car now, which is something I thought I'd never earn enough to do. I also moved into an amazing flat with my partner so I can walk into work.

“The course completely transformed my life. I was long-term unemployed for at least 7 years due to struggles with my mental health. Before completing the course, I couldn't look to the future at all and really thought this was all life had to give me, making it all seem meaningless and painful. I was often unable to leave the confines of my bedroom and did not want to engage with society whatsoever.

“I love working at GWR and am hugely proud to wear the uniform, I've found it to be a very supportive place and has given me amazing opportunities to progress. The Prince's Trust and GWR helped me catapult myself back into society and to live a life that has a sense of purpose and one that I can look forward to.”

In October 2019, Pete won the Young Achiever of the Year Award at The Prince's Trust Awards in the South West. In November, GWR named him “Railway Person of the Year”, an impressive testimony to his incredibly hard work.

Pete has been accepted onto the training programme to become a train driver, which he says is the “ultimate prize”. Sadly, due to the coronavirus pandemic, this training was postponed, which left Pete feeling demotivated.

“I am still working at the moment, but as you can imagine work is completely different now and the station is empty. It is definitely a test for all of us to remain focused when there is not much going on.

**“I just can't wait for the pandemic to be over so I can get back to normal and back on track to achieving my dream job!”**





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## A dream job or any job?

As young people struggle to pay the bills, many say they have given up hope of a dream job.

According to the research, more than one in three young people (35 per cent) believe they will have to give up their dream job “for any job”.

Forty-three per cent of young people say “I expect I’ll never have a job I really love”, and this increases to more than half (55 per cent) for those from poorer backgrounds.

The research also finds that:

- Seventeen per cent of young people say they are struggling to pay for basic living costs (e.g. food, rent, bills).
- Forty-five per cent say they will have to take a lower paid job just to “make ends meet”.
- More than a quarter of young people (28 per cent) believe they will have to “take any job I can get”.

“The coronavirus crisis has hit a lot of people my age pretty hard. Although being unemployed isn’t easy or what I had planned for myself, I’m staying positive and I know that with hard work and determination, good things will come my way. I’m glad I did The Prince’s Trust’s programme as it helped to keep my focus as the pandemic started and I’ve managed to hold on to that and prepare for life after lockdown.”

Kevon, 21, Hertfordshire





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## More findings

Six months into the pandemic in the UK, many young people have taken on unexpected caring responsibilities.

According to this report, more than one in ten young people (14 per cent) have new or increased caring responsibilities. The survey suggests this rises to almost one in five (19 per cent) for those from poorer homes.

More than half (58 per cent) of respondents are “scared” about being unemployed, while 55 per cent are more worried about being unemployed than they were a year ago.

More than a third (36 per cent) of young people believe they will have a “lower quality of life” than their parents, while 46 per cent claim their generation will have fewer opportunities.

## 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.

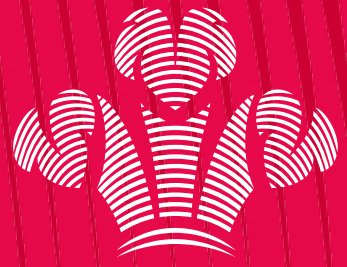
The courses offered by The Trust give young people the practical and financial support needed to stabilise their lives, helping develop self-esteem and skills for work. Three in four young people supported by The Prince's Trust move into work, education or training.

The Trust has helped over a million young people to date. Further information about The Prince's Trust is available at [princes-trust.org.uk](https://princes-trust.org.uk) or on 0800 842 842.

## Acknowledgements

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We would would also like to thank everyone who helped to create this report, including the young people who have shared their story.



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