

Unlocking the Potential of Young People:

An Open Letter to
the UK Government

Dear UK Government,

Young people represent an enormous source of energy, creativity and potential for the UK. Yet, too often, the systems designed to prepare and support us don't fully unlock this potential.

As members of the Future Voice Group, and a group of young people with diverse and intersectional lived experiences, we believe that there is a real opportunity in addressing the youth employment challenge to ensure that every young person has the chance to thrive.

This letter highlights the barriers that stand in our way, and our views on the solutions.


Our Voices: Our experiences

We all have different experiences.

Some of us have grown up in care, where the feeling of being unsupported didn't end at 18, but continued into the world of work. Others have faced disrupted education, frequent school changes or a lack of guidance. Even after doing everything expected of us: studying, applying and showing up... we still find doors are closed.

These barriers are well evidenced:

- 1 in 8 young people in the UK are NEET (not in education, employment or training) (*Youth Employment Outlook, 2025*).
- Marginalised young people face significant barriers to employment, particularly those with special educational needs and disabilities and those with experiences in the care system (*Youth Employment Outlook, 2025*).
- 48% of ethnically minoritised young people say they experienced prejudice or discrimination when seeking to enter the workplace (*Discrimination and Work, 2024*).



I'm not lazy. I'm lost.
Not broken- just bruised.
Still waiting
for someone to open a door
instead of closing another.

Our Realities: The Cost of Exclusion

You've seen the evidence – **this is our reality:**

We're told to "gain experience" before getting a job, but how do you get experience when you're locked out of your first chance?

We're told to "network", but how, when you weren't born into any?

We're told to "stand out", but how, when your CV is filtered out before anyone sees your strengths?

*We are young people with potential.
And we are asking you to help unlock it.*

Too often, employment support systems treat us as problems to be fixed rather than people with skills and talent.

Labels like "disadvantaged" and "at risk" don't reflect the quiet frustration of being overlooked despite our best efforts. But we are not broken. The system is.

So, whilst our lived experience is often seen as a imitation, we believe it is also a source of insight, resilience and creativity - the very qualities workplaces need. Unfortunately, they often remain invisible in a system not designed to recognise or support them.

Our Call to action

We don't require sympathy; we need policies and leadership grounded in empathy and justice. We want to live in a society where meeting diverse needs isn't left to kindness alone but is recognised as essential for fair and lasting progress.



When young people's potential is ignored, it doesn't disappear. It is displaced. In communities where opportunities are scarce, other risks often take root, from negative impacts on mental health to cycles of instability and harm. These challenges are not isolated; they are symptoms of a system that struggles to provide stability and meaningful pathways to work.

That must change, so here's our call to action:

1. Co-designed systems with lived experience at the centre:

Young people, especially those from marginalised and care-experienced backgrounds, should be directly involved in shaping training, employment support programmes. Our insights should be a foundation, not an afterthought.

2. Support that reflects real journeys:

Consistent presence of a trusted adult, to connect young people with the right interventions, should be part of every pathway into the labour market, offering guidance and consistency through transitions.

3. Mandatory understanding of hidden needs:

Training in schools on invisible disabilities and mental health, fostering awareness, empathy and stronger communities from an early age.

4. Joined-up support services:

Healthcare, employment and vocational guidance should be integrated, with advocates to help young people navigate complex systems.

5. Better mental health and work pathways:

Investment in open access mental health support to alleviate pressures on clinical mental health services and ensure support is available, early enough, to those who need it. We are not asking for handouts. We are asking for a fair runway, to be seen not as risks, but for our talents and untapped potential.

6. We believe diversity is strength:

Inclusive workplaces harness a range of talents, perspectives, and abilities - not because it's an obligation, but because it leads to better thinking, stronger teams, and more effective outcomes. Why? Because complex problems demand diverse solutions and we simply cannot know whose expertise is missing until everyone feels supported and empowered to contribute in their own way.

The maths is simple: Diversity x Support = Better outcomes for all. For example, supporting 567,000 more young people into work, education or training would generate £86 billion for the UK economy.

Youth Futures Foundation has set out a long-term ambition for the UK to be world leading in ensuring young people are in good work. Achieving this will require many things, such as better funding and reorganisation of support, alongside rethinking how we design young people's journeys into employment. But at its heart, it takes the will and courage to back us: our futures, our potential, and the contribution we can make to wider society. **Please don't let another generation be left behind.**

Signed,
Ghazal, Ishrat, Shana and Yusra

Ghazal Ishrat Shana Yusra

On behalf of the Future Voices Group Policy Engagement Team, Youth Futures Foundation.

We invite other youth ambassador groups working alongside us to join our call if this message resonates with your vision to bring about change.

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FOUNDATION

Left Behind

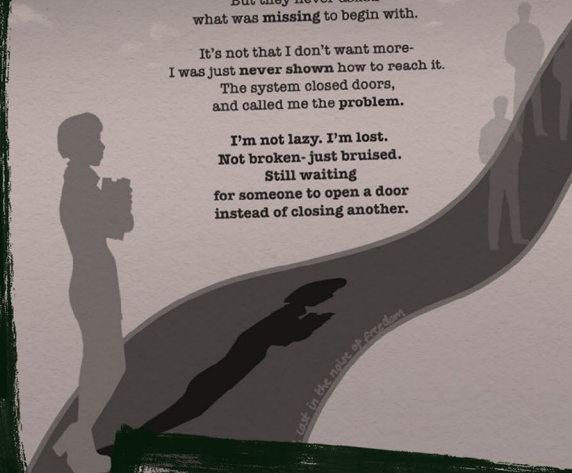
They said,
"You're free now- go make a life."
But freedom without support just feels like falling.

No job, no course, no plan-
just days that blur together.
Not in work, not in school.
Just not.

They ask,
"What's stopping you?"
But they never asked
what was missing to begin with.

It's not that I don't want more-
I was just **never shown** how to reach it.
The system closed doors,
and called me the problem.

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Panic Attack

If I hit him then I'm dumb, but if he clips me he's the man

I can't win, there's no way I'm handling that

If I run then I'm a neek, but if I don't then I'm a fool

So on road I'm looking happy but I'm screaming in my head



STABBING ON BRITAIN'S STREETS...

WHEN WILL IT STOP?

Latest victim knifed **SIX** times



BARRIERS

"We're Looking for a Culture Fit"

Lack of Experience

"You're Overqualified"

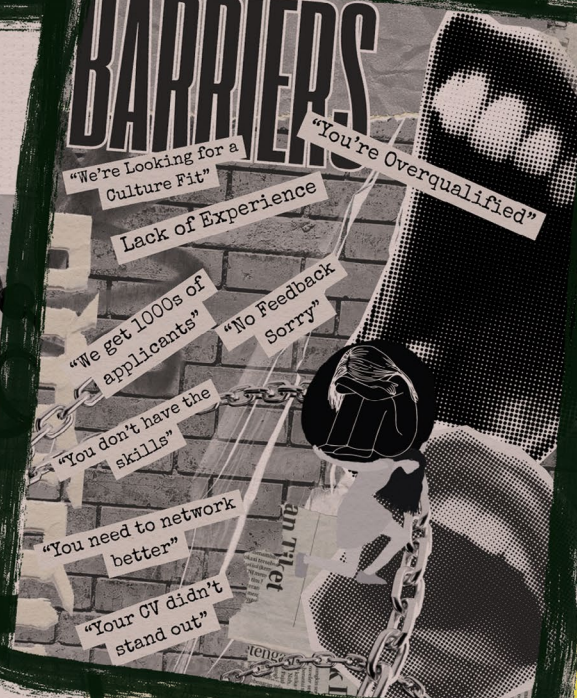
"We get 1000s of applicants"

"No Feedback Sorry"

"You don't have the skills"

"You need to network better"

"Your CV didn't stand out"



Credits

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Some doors can only be opened with the sum of our parts

