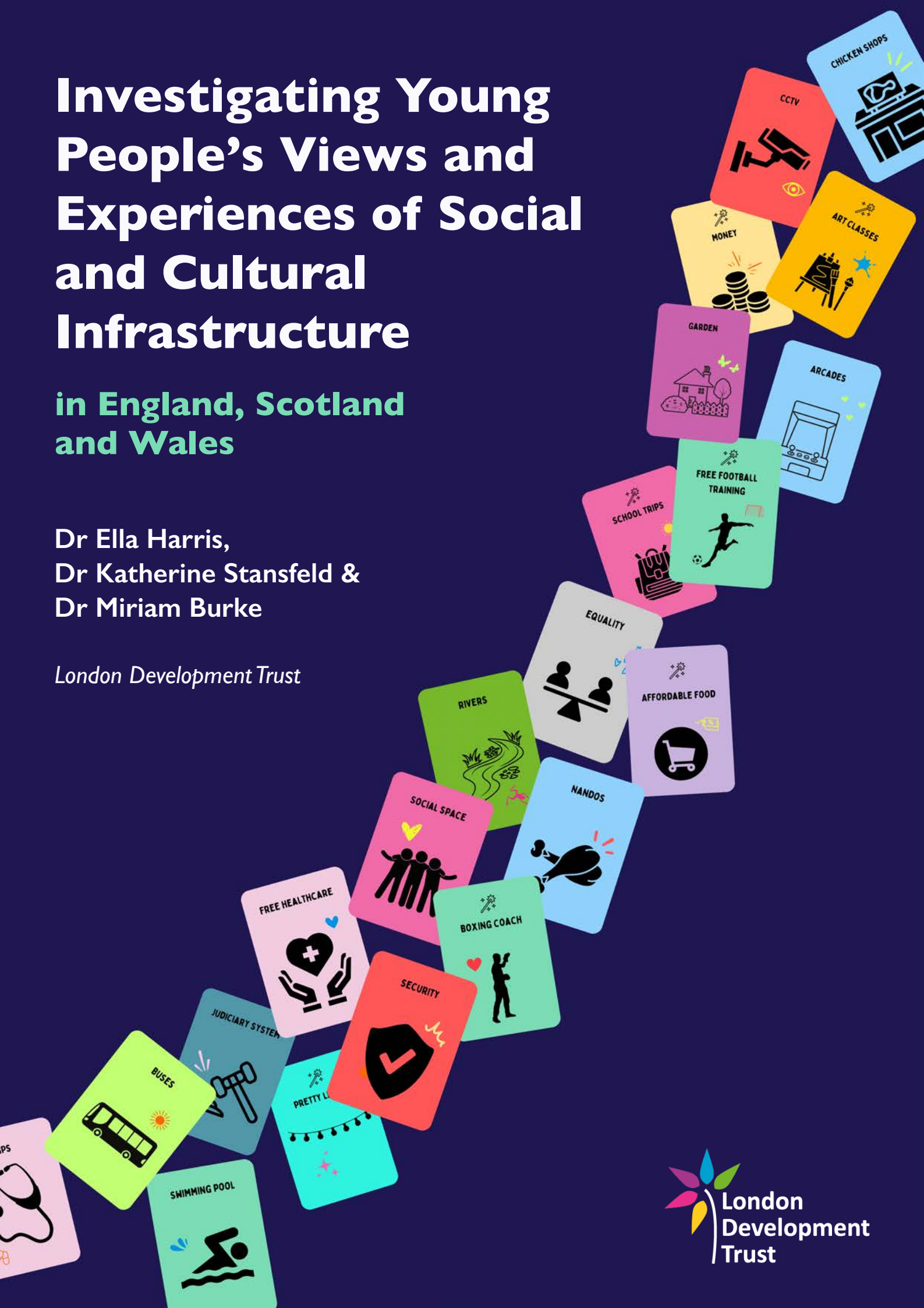


Investigating Young People's Views and Experiences of Social and Cultural Infrastructure

in England, Scotland and Wales

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About London Development Trust

London Development Trust (LDT) is a social sustainability organisation with an embedded research consultancy team. The research team brings a cultural geographical approach to explorations of social and environmental issues as well as to impact evaluations. They specialise in creative ways of doing and communicating research. The work of LDT more broadly includes managing community and creative venues, facilitating community stewardship of green spaces and running large-scale environmental engagement projects.

Acknowledgements

We are very grateful to all the young people and youth workers who generously gave their time and expertise to this project in Brora, Kirkcaldy, Hull, Leeds, Banbury, Brighton and Swansea, as well as in London in Alperton, Manor House, Acton and Peckham. We could not have done this research without the generosity and dedication of the youth, community and arts organisations and colleges across the UK who supported organising and facilitating young people's participation.

A big thank you to our young researchers and in particular, Alexis, Bhavya and Elisha, who were a hugely valuable part of the research team and brought so many insights and enthusiasm to the project. We are grateful to all those who attended our policy roundtable and helped to shape the implications section of this report. Finally, huge thanks are due to the British Academy for facilitating and funding the research, and in particular to Nicola Berkley, Adam Wright, and Isabelle Taylor for their continued contributions and support, and to our Steering Group, Professor Dominic Abrams FBA, Professor Tim Cresswell FBA, Professor Jane Millar FBA, Professor Fiona Stafford FBA for their insightful guidance and feedback on this report.

This report was independently commissioned and funded by the British Academy as part of the evidence base for its social and cultural infrastructure programme. It is an independent research project and is not a formal British Academy policy project and does not necessarily represent the views and policy positions of the Academy.

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Executive Summary

This independent research project was commissioned as part of the British Academy's policy programme on [social and cultural infrastructure](#). Social and cultural infrastructure refers to the spaces, services and structures that bring people together, and that can strengthen the social and cultural fabric of communities. The Academy's current policy programme in this area explores how this infrastructure can best be measured and valued. It aims to deepen our understanding of social and cultural infrastructure, to explore its different dimensions and its value in relation to distinct policy areas, aims and challenges.

This co-creative research used a card deck method to explore how young people across the UK perceive, access, and engage with social and cultural infrastructure (social and cultural infrastructure); the spaces, services, and relationships that support their social and cultural experiences and growth. Following an initial phase of research in London, we expanded the work across England, Scotland and Wales to explore regional and demographic variations, deepen our knowledge of insights from the first phase, and to refine the card deck as a co-creative tool for decision making with young people.

London Phase Headline Findings

Focus groups with 12–20-year-olds across four London boroughs revealed that young people face pervasive feelings of unsafety that significantly restrict their access to social and cultural infrastructure. Affordability and awareness are also major barriers to accessing existing offers in their areas. Young people identified a need for greater 'activation', of social and cultural infrastructure (ways to make spaces and services welcoming and usable). They emphasised the critical role of people (e.g., teachers, sports coaches) in enabling access to social and cultural infrastructure. We found that young people's worlds are often hyper-local, but that they value 'aspirational' places like airports, galleries or penthouse apartments that inspire them for their future. Businesses were as important to young people as cultural and social institutions in feeling connected in their areas.

National Phase Headline Findings

We expanded the research to 7 UK sites (comprising Brora and Kirkcaldy in Scotland; Hull, Leeds, Banbury and Brighton in England; and Swansea in Wales) with a total of 107 young people participating in focus groups. We involved young researchers, recruited from the young people who took part in the London phase, in all stages of the project and also created opportunities for young people from the national phase of work to take part in analysis and output development activities.

This research highlights that young people's greatest concerns are not just about what's available but about whether they can safely, affordably and confidently access what already exists. When young people do access social and cultural infrastructure, they report profound benefits, from improved wellbeing to stronger civic engagement.

Key findings from the research include:

- **Safety and security** were the most consistent and urgent concerns. Most young people felt unsafe in public, on transport, and even in their neighbourhoods, limiting access to social and cultural infrastructure and reinforcing feelings of exclusion.
- **Transport and affordability** emerged as critical enablers or barriers. Irregular or costly transport options often made activities inaccessible, especially in rural or low-income areas.
- **Belonging and community connection underscore social and cultural participation.** Having emotional security at home and social connections and networks in their communities helped young people feel safe and a sense of belonging in their local areas, increasing confidence in accessing services and events.
- **Cultural spaces are highly valued by young people including music venues, gyms, cinemas and museums.** However, young people felt that rising prices had limited their access to some of this infrastructure and noted that they were unevenly accessible across areas.
- **Well maintained nature spaces are important for wellbeing and social lives.** Young people valued natural areas and 'green/blue' spaces for supporting mental and physical wellbeing and social connection, as well as for their ecological importance. However, they reported issues with the maintenance of green/blue spaces, especially in urban areas, which sometimes made these spaces feel unsafe or unpleasant.
- **Activation still matters.** Young people often emphasised greater interest in the means by which social and cultural infrastructure is activated and made useful to them, demonstrating that *how* infrastructure works is as important as *what* it is.
- **Diversity of needs.** Young people called for more inclusive infrastructure, especially for mental health, neurodivergence, LGBTQI+ support, and safe spaces for young people away from adults. They also recognised the importance of having inclusive spaces for adults, especially the elderly.
- **Place influences expectations.** Young people's desires were shaped by the size and character of their area, including rural vs urban distinctions. For example, in Brora, young people accepted travelling to Inverness for some services, while in London, young people rarely ventured outside their local area and wanted amenities closer by. Isolation from services and transport issues were also more pronounced in rural areas.
- **Identity influences access.** Place is an important factor in young people's experiences of social and cultural infrastructure, but their ability to access resources also varies by identity categories such as race, gender, sexuality, disability, neurodivergence, as well as by the intersectional experiences of these identities. Equally, wealth and cultural capital have a bearing, especially because of the bearing on whether young people can travel to other areas or outside of their locale.
- **Disparities in trust and aspiration.** Young people in some areas expressed deep distrust in institutions, while others were more engaged and hopeful, often due to supportive educators or youth networks.

- **Tensions between ideals and realities.** Some things were recognised by participants as both harmful yet convenient or necessary. For example, social media was seen as bad for mental health but essential for communication and fast food restaurants were seen as unhealthy but also as some of the few places young people can go to hang out.
- **Co-creation yields deeper insight.** Young researchers shaped the direction, interpretation, and output of this study, enhancing its relevance, rigour, and impact. Their involvement also proved transformational for the young people themselves.
- **The card deck method can support young people to take part in decision making.** We found that the card deck is a valuable activity for allowing young people to practice the skills needed for decision making in relation to place and citizen participation and could be used as part of consultations or policy co-design processes.

The full report provides in-depth analysis by region, age, and identity and offers practical recommendations for designing, funding, and sustaining youth-inclusive social and cultural infrastructure across the UK as well as for using the card deck method to engage young people in decision making.

Policy Implications Summary:

- Young people across the UK feel excluded from the design and delivery of social and cultural infrastructure, despite its critical role in their wellbeing and future outcomes.
- Meaningful youth engagement must move beyond consultation to tangible change, with clear feedback loops and visible outcomes
- Barriers such as safety, affordability, transport, and lack of inclusive support limit access to meaningful opportunities and need to be addressed.
- A stable, long-term commitment to investment in youth-focused infrastructure including spaces, activities and staff should be prioritised.
- Investment in improving and maintaining the public realm including parks and streets, providing adequate lighting and youth-inclusive design is vital for wellbeing, sociability, and equitable access to nature and public space.
- Policymakers must take a holistic, relational approach that considers how infrastructures connect and operate as part of young people's everyday ecosystems.

Introduction

Background to the Research

The London Phase

In 2024, we were commissioned by The British Academy to conduct an independent research project on young people's experiences and perceptions of social and cultural infrastructure in London. This study complimented [wider work commissioned by The British Academy](#) into social and cultural infrastructure, including a major research project led by The Bennett Institute on the measurement of social and cultural infrastructure.

Our research project was pertinent to ensure that, amidst growing interest in and attention to social and cultural infrastructure, young people's perceptions and experiences are considered. The research involved holding focus groups in 4 sites across London (Alperton, Acton, Manor House and Peckham) where we worked with young people aged 12-20 using a creative card-deck method. The card deck portrayed items that other researchers had identified as aspects of social and cultural infrastructure. Things like 'theatres', 'supermarkets', 'universities' and 'cafes.' We had grouped these items into themed, colour coded categories in the card deck and written question prompts on the back to help participants consider how important (or not) this item might be in their area.

Through a series of game-based and creative activities we asked young people to debate which of the cards were important to them and then to add their own cards to the deck, reflecting what they thought was missing.

Our key findings from the London phase of work were as follows:

- Ontological security is crucial for young people's access to social and cultural infrastructure. Young people in London feel pervasively and acutely unsafe and this is a huge barrier to them accessing social and cultural infrastructure
- Young people's scales of access in London can be much smaller than that of adults. Many young people seldom leave their local areas meaning that the closure of social and cultural spaces and resources in local areas impact them more intensely
- 'Hard' elements of social and cultural infrastructure are only valuable to young people with the right 'soft' elements to 'activate' them (e.g., security and surveillance are deemed essential by young people to create an environment in which they can access and enjoy social and cultural institutions)
- The 'how' is as important as the 'what' of social and cultural infrastructure. The term 'activation' can also capture this idea, showing, for example, how streetlights are needed to 'activate' a park, or female-only sessions are needed to 'activate' a gym. This concept also illuminates how what 'activates' social and cultural infrastructure varies from person to person
- Accessibility and awareness are key. Young people are often unable to access social and cultural places, activities and events because of safety or affordability. Furthermore, young people have poor awareness of the social and cultural infrastructure that is available to them.
- People are an important dimension of social and cultural infrastructure. From teachers to sports coaches to corner shop staff, people are important to young people for making them feel comfortable in an area and supporting them to develop social and cultural capital

- It is hard to differentiate 'good' and 'bad' social and cultural infrastructure. Some 'bad' social experiences can be formative for young people, especially with regards to developing independence, making it hard to create a clear binary between good and bad social and cultural infrastructure
- Businesses are important social and cultural spaces for young people. While the role of business is normally seen as funding and supporting social and cultural infrastructure, young people identified local businesses as important social and cultural spaces in their own right
- 'Aspirational Infrastructure' is important to young people. Young people value the existence of spaces that support their social and cultural dreams, even if they don't access these spaces day to day

From this phase of work we identified a need to widen and deepen the study in order to understand:

- How young people's experiences differ across regions of the UK
- How young people's experiences differ by age (in the first phase we didn't have an easy way of differentiating the experiences of 12-20 year olds)
- How intersectional identities impact experiences and perceptions of social and cultural infrastructure
- How the card deck method could be developed into a tool useful for young people and policy makers

We also identified an opportunity to work with young people from the London phase of work, hiring them as young researchers, so that the process, analysis and outputs from a national phase of work could be better informed by young people's insights. We discuss this in more detail in the section on co-creation.

Progressing the National Phase of Work

To progress the national phase of work we identified seven locations across the UK for further focus groups.



Figure 1, UK Map of focus group locations

These were:

- Brora, Scotland. A small industrial village in the highlands with a population of just over 1,200 people
- Kirkcaldy, Scotland. A town in Fife with a population of just over 50,000
- (Kingston upon) Hull, England. A maritime city with a population of around 269,000
- Leeds, England. The largest city in Yorkshire with a population of over half a million
- Banbury, England. A market town in Oxfordshire with a population of just over 54,000
- Brighton, England. A seaside resort city on the south coast with a population of nearly 278,000
- Swansea, Wales. A coastal city and the second largest city in Wales with a population of just over 240,000



Brora, Source: Stanley Howe, Harbour Road, Brora, CC BY-SA 2.0

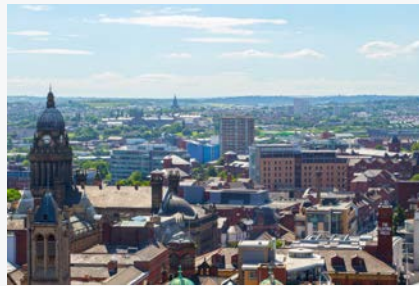


Figure 2, From top left to bottom: Brora, [Kirkcaldy](#), source: Thomas Nugent, CC BY-SA 2.0, [Hull](#), source: John Bannon, CC BY-SA 3.0, [Leeds](#), source: Rory 89, CC BY-SA 4.0, [Banbury](#), source: Reading Tom, CC BY-SA 2.0, [Brighton](#), source: Jim Linwood, CC BY-SA 2.0, [Swansea](#), source: Numero007, CC BY-SA 4.0.

Locations were chosen on the following basis, combining strategic sampling with pragmatic considerations.

- Ensuring a variety of urban, rural and suburban areas so that we could explore experiences of young people in different kinds of settlements
- Ensuring a variety of regions of the UK to consider regional variations
- Including some locations which had experienced the [2024 far-right riots](#) (Leeds and Hull), as there was an interest from the first phase of work in if this would impact young people's experiences of social and cultural infrastructure
- Building on our existing links and networks in order to organise focus groups as efficiently as possible

Although England, Scotland and Wales were included in our research we were not able to hold a Northern Ireland based focus group because of time and budget restraints.

In each location we aimed to recruit ten 13-15 year olds and ten 16-18 year olds. However, recruiting 13-15 year olds was not possible in Brighton or in Swansea where we just worked with the older cohort¹. In total, 107 young people participated in the focus groups across 7 locations with an average (mean) of 15 per focus group.

In the next section we set out the conceptual context for this research, before the following sections provide more detail on our methodology and recruitment.

Conceptual Context

In this project, we see social and cultural infrastructure in a broad sense as the spaces, services and relationships that support social and cultural life. Social and cultural infrastructure are terms that are increasingly being discussed and prioritised in both academic and policy agendas, particularly as they are recognised to have an important role in creating social and cultural value and building social/cultural capital and cohesion, which, in turn, offers more fertile and attractive ground for investment and growth. Strong infrastructure can also provide resilience to more pervasive challenges such as the Covid-19 pandemic when communities with stronger community-led social infrastructure responded better.²

The British Academy and Bennett Institute highlight, in their recent report 'Measuring Social and Cultural Infrastructure', that social and cultural infrastructure provides "among other things, opportunities for interaction, participation, and the formation of local pride and identity" (p.9). These are the infrastructures that support people to come together, build networks of support and connection, and both produce and consume forms of culture. As Layton and Latham (2022, p.757) neatly summarise, "social infrastructures make life in cities liveable. Liveable in that they create affordances for – and make available – a range of essential services. And liveable in an expanded sense of helping make life better".

This understanding of social and cultural infrastructure, and particularly of social infrastructure, builds on literature and research that has explored public spaces and semi or quasi-public spaces (also discussed as third spaces, prosaic publics, micropublics, etc.) as key arenas in which differences, socialities and forms of belonging play out. This suggests that "the free and unfettered mingling of humans in open and well-managed public space encourages forbearance towards others, pleasure in the urban experience, respect for the shared commons, and an interest in civic and political life" (Amin, 2012, p.6). This premise is supported by Eric Klinenberg in his notable book 'Palaces for the People', namely that "social infrastructure is crucially important, because local, face-to-face

¹ See the section on recruitment (p.79-83) for more information.

² The British Academy (2021) The COVID Decade: [understanding the long-term societal impacts of COVID-19](#)

interactions -- at the school, the playground, and the corner diner -- are the building blocks of all public life” (2018, p.5).

However, we need to think about more than just social spaces and structures for public and collective life, and we reiterate the suggestion that we need to also “think infrastructurally about culture” (The British Academy and Bennett Institute, 2025, p.12). This means addressing how a cultural ecosystem of spaces, assets and policies “are fundamental to the ways in which communities, from the local to the national, communicate and contest their feelings of collective identity and shared values” (ibid, p.12-13). Culture - whether seen as the arts, heritage, the creative industries or food, language and religion - is the shared systems of meaning that are intrinsic to collective life. Followingly, it should be thought of together with social infrastructure in public planning and policy and research. Accordingly, we also conceptualise social and cultural infrastructure as “closely interconnected, without diminishing a sense of different kinds of entity to which these terms typically refer and the different types of value they create” (The British Academy and Bennett Institute, 2025, p.13).

Much empirical research into social and cultural life has focused on spaces such as streets and junctions; green and blue spaces like parks and beaches; marketplaces; urban transport; libraries, community spaces and spaces of worship; ‘linguistic landscapes’ through public signs and material culture; and galleries and museums. Increasingly researchers and institutions (e.g. see British Academy policy theme on Digital Societies) are also recognising the role of digital spaces and platforms in constituting infrastructures that are at the core of our societies ([Eaves et al. 2025](#)) and facilitate variegated forms of social interaction and cultural reproduction.

However, research is also increasingly recognising the way in which power relations, intersectional identities and inequalities can affect the experience of these social and cultural infrastructures. The picture is more complicated for young people who can often feel unwelcome in public and ‘semi-public’ spaces and are subject to increased policing and forms of social exclusion (Hil and Bessant, 1999; Gray and Manning, 2022) and face unique risks in their use of social media.

This can mean the normative implications of social and cultural infrastructure cannot be simply assumed. There remains a question of how we define ‘assets’ in relation to social and cultural infrastructure when value can be contested and differentially experienced. Accordingly, attention needs to be paid to the unequal experience of these infrastructures and the ways in which provision and networks can mitigate this. Additionally, care should be taken in the way ‘social value’ is attributed to social and cultural infrastructure. The British Academy and Bennett Institute (2025) highlight its fluid, flexible and intangible nature, encouraging a broader recognition of spaces, events and networks that may be impermanent or unnoticed but nevertheless important in cultivating social connection and cultural engagement. This supports an understanding of community as ‘event’ - not something that is coherent or static but ongoing and shaped by places being ‘eventful’ through their role in gathering “people, things, and stories into a variety of configurations, with effects dispersing across time and space” (Moore, 2025).

Consequently, it is important to address how social and cultural infrastructure interacts with other forms of infrastructure and is part of a networked space or an “interconnected system of

infrastructure rather than a collection of standalone assets” (The British Academy and Bennett Institute, 2025, p.10). This is especially important as Layton and Latham (2022) and many others argue the provision of social and cultural infrastructure has been under threat from austerity measures and pathways to support it “remain undefined” (The British Academy and Bennett Institute, 2025, p.14).

In our focus groups, one of the first ice breaker activities was asking the young people to respond to “yes/no” questions by lining up in the room according to how much they agreed with the question, with one side of the room being “yes” and the other being “no”. We asked them whether they felt their voices were heard by decision makers. Time and time again across the different locations they gathered in the “no” side of the room. Some felt that “no-one really listens”, while others reflected, “some organisations have tended to try to listen to [young] people. We get like, young people get like, almost like, ignored, especially when it comes to like, bigger things that have been happening” (Hull). Even when they were more ambivalent or positive, they had caveats that when their voices are heard they don’t feel this is often acted upon.

This research aims to better understand and advise on how we can ensure young people’s voices are heard and addressed in conversations and plans about how social and cultural infrastructure is measured, valued and supported. This means considering young people’s needs, what matters to them and what the ‘activating’ factors are that enable social and cultural resources to be accessible to them.

Report Overview

In the remainder of this report we start by describing our methodology, including our innovative card deck method and the co-creative dimensions of the project. We then present our findings and discuss key themes arising from the research. We consider variations by place as well as by intersectional identities. We then conclude by exploring the potential of the card deck method as a tool for decision makers to use with young people and by outlining policy recommendations based on our findings.

Methodology Summary

This section presents a succinct version of our methodology. A fuller methodology is presented in Annex 1 for those interested in the details of the co-creation process, card deck method, demographic survey and ethical approach.

A Co-Creative Approach

The national phase of this research took a co-creative approach, meaning young people were not only participants but active partners in shaping the project. This built on learning from the London phase, where we saw how helpful it would be to have support from young people in analysis and clarification of findings. We realised that embedding young people in the research team would help us resolve interpretive challenges and keep our methods grounded in their perspectives and needs.

To achieve this, we recruited seven young researchers from the participants who had taken part in our London phase of work; three who worked with us throughout the project, and a further four young people who joined a one-off workshop focused on refining our card deck method. Selection was guided by a desire to create a balanced group in terms of age, gender, experience and the area of London they came from. Those not selected for the longer-term roles were invited to join the refinement workshop. The three core researchers were paid £450 each for their contribution across the project, while the four additional participants received vouchers.



Figure 3, Co-creation workshop at The British Academy with our seven young researchers

The young researchers were involved in every stage: they helped to plan the research, co-facilitated focus groups, and helped present findings at an online event. They also supported method development, for example reviewing demographic survey questions to make them more accessible for younger respondents. Their input helped ensure that our methods were clear, inclusive, and engaging. The benefits extended in both directions. As one young researcher put it: “Research isn’t just about data, it’s about people. And being a young researcher helped me become who I am today.” In this way, co-creation enhanced the rigour and relevance of the study while also providing skills and confidence to those involved.

We also extended co-creation into the analysis stage. At the end of the focus group process, we hosted an online analysis workshop with representatives from five sites, alongside the young researchers. This enabled participants to check and challenge our early interpretations. Their feedback reshaped our analysis in key ways: for instance, where we had placed strong emphasis on the role of “pivotal people” in accessing infrastructure, young people deprioritised this in favour of structural concerns such as safety, affordability, and accessibility. This process underscored how co-production can shift not only methods but also findings.

The Card Deck Method

At the heart of our methodology was a game-based card deck activity, designed to encourage playful yet serious engagement with questions of social and cultural infrastructure. We created the card deck by analysing existing literature on social and cultural infrastructure and making cards that reflected items/things identified by other researchers as part of this infrastructure. We colour coded the cards to represent loose categories (e.g. nature, institutions, transport). We then designed a semi structured game where participants could select, discard, or create cards in order to imagine their ideal place. They were encouraged to use what we called “activation cards” to adapt existing infrastructure (for example, adding lighting to make streets safer, or ‘safe’ to make a bus more accessible). Groups could also spy on each other’s choices to prompt debate. We added arts and crafts materials (plasticine and wire cleaners) so that participants could also build illustrative items for their ideal places.



Rationale

The card deck format was chosen because games allow for “serious play,” enabling participants to explore difficult questions in a creative, accessible way. Games can also level hierarchies, giving all participants equal opportunity to shape the discussion. The card deck method helped to break down the abstract concept of “infrastructure” into concrete, tangible elements, while the inclusion of arts-and-crafts encouraged non-verbal and affective engagement.

Development and Refinement

By the end of the London phase of work young people had created 81 new cards, expanding the deck from 32 to 113. To prepare for the national phase of work, we ran a refinement workshop with the seven young researchers where we made decisions about how to streamline and optimise the card deck. This included merging similar items (e.g., boxing, judo, and karate became a single “Martial Arts” card), simplifying the prompts on the back of cards and redesigning the ‘activation’ cards to give them their own category (rather than belonging to thematic categories), so they could be used more flexibly. We also introduced ‘Test your Place’ scenario cards which challenged participants to test whether their imagined places provided everything they needed to achieve goals, even in the face of crises (for example a scenario card might read ‘get a job you love, in a cost-of-living crisis’).

Structure of the Activity

Each national focus group followed a five-part structure:

- Icebreakers to create a relaxed and discursive atmosphere, while prompting reflection on local experiences.
- “Plan Your Place” by selecting and organising cards.
- “Build Your Place” by creating new cards and using arts-and-crafts materials
- “Test Your Place” by applying scenario cards to explore resilience.
- Summative Discussion to reflect on learnings about values and priorities, as well as on the process itself.

This structure enabled participants to think about not only what infrastructure they valued, but how it connected together and how it might withstand challenges.

The method provided a flexible, engaging way of surfacing priorities, and showed potential as a resource for wider use in youth engagement and policy contexts.

Recruitment and Participation

The national phase involved seven focus groups across England, Scotland, and Wales, with more than 100 participants aged 13–18. Each group was recruited and supported through a partner organisation such as a youth charity, community organisation, or college. Partners provided safe venues, helped with recruitment, and ensured safeguarding measures were in place.

Group sizes varied. Most had around 15 participants, though Brora was significantly larger (34 young people) and Hull much smaller (4 participants). In most cases, participants were drawn from multiple schools or youth groups, meaning they did not all know each other beforehand. The spaces we held

focus groups in reflected differences in local provision, for example, Banbury lacked a dedicated youth centre, so its session was hosted in a church hall. While our recruitment did not target specific interest groups, most participants were linked to youth organisations of some kind, which shaped the sample.



Figure 4, *Young people who attended our focus group in Kirkcaldy, Scotland*

Ethics

Given the age of participants, ethical practice was central. We secured informed consent using written forms and parental opt-outs, supplemented by ongoing verbal check-ins during sessions. Participation was voluntary and withdrawal was always possible. Participants were given the option to be anonymised.

Safeguarding was prioritised, with all researchers holding enhanced DBS clearance, and partner organisations providing trained staff on site. We also had escalation procedures should any issues arise, though in practice these were not required. Participants were reimbursed for their time and contributions through vouchers.

Demographic Survey

To better understand the diversity of our sample, we introduced a short demographic survey, which achieved a 92% response rate (98 out of 107 participants). This captured data on age, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, religion, disability, education, housing, and employment. Housing questions were included as a proxy for socio-economic status.

The survey highlighted variation between sites. For example, recruitment through an LGBTQ+ youth group in Kirkcaldy meant that 69% of participants identified as LGBTQ+. In Swansea and Brighton, recruitment via FE colleges meant participants were older (16-18). Gender ratios were relatively balanced overall, though college-based groups tended to include more male participants, while community-based groups included more females. These patterns provided valuable context when interpreting findings.

Findings

The contributions to the card deck from our national focus groups reveal key interests and concerns of young people across the country. In this section we reflect on the key findings. **Further details including a list of cards added at the focus groups and reflections from our online analysis session are included in annex 2.**

Exploring the cards added to the card deck across the focus groups we can see that:

- Significantly more cards were added in the activation category than in any other category. Building on the conclusions of our London report, this indicates that the *how* is incredibly important to social and cultural infrastructure, as well as the *what*. That is to say, services, facilities and places may not be accessible or valuable to young people unless particular characteristics 'activate' them. E.g. a school might need a trusted adult and a careers advisor, an urban space might need to be pedestrianised, a youth centre might need lifts, or a cafe might need to serve healthy food and cater specifically to under 18s.
- Many more cards were added to the Nature category than we saw added in the London focus groups. More detailed analysis shows that the vast majority of these nature cards were added by young people in Swansea (Wales), Brora (Scotland) or Kirkcaldy (Scotland). This suggests a different attitude to/prioritisation of nature in Wales and Scotland compared to in England. Relatedly, the 'bike tracks' card reflects cards about bike tracks/mountain bike courses added by several tables at our Scottish focus groups, as well as in Hull
- Our young participants added cards that relate to services and spaces for other age groups, including Nurseries and Dementia Spaces. In Kirkcaldy, participants also created an activation card that would make a space suitable for 'Under 12s', noting the lack of youth spaces for this younger age group as most youth clubs start at 13. Many of the cards reflecting provisions for other age groups were created at our Banbury focus group, which might reflect the fact that some of the young people there had undertaken a social work course and were therefore mindful of the needs of other groups
- Many cards were added that relate to inclusive services including for mental health support, neuro-divergences, sexuality and gender, and accessibility for people with disabilities. These were added from across our national focus groups, reflecting a prevalent concern with wellbeing, accessibility and inclusion. Relatedly 'Rage Rooms' were added by groups in three of our focus group locations, indicating a need for spaces to let off steam
- Significant numbers of cards were added to the transport category and at the focus groups were often paired with activation cards that specified wanting better transport to and from school. For example young people in Brighton wanted free Ubers for young people to travel from college and in Kirkcaldy they wanted more regular buses to run at the end of the school day. Other additions to the transport category reflected a concern with environmentally friendly transport, including additions of cycle claims, electric car chargers, trams and pedestrianised areas. The number of cards added to this category reflect the significance of transport across our focus group locations for young people accessing social and cultural infrastructure

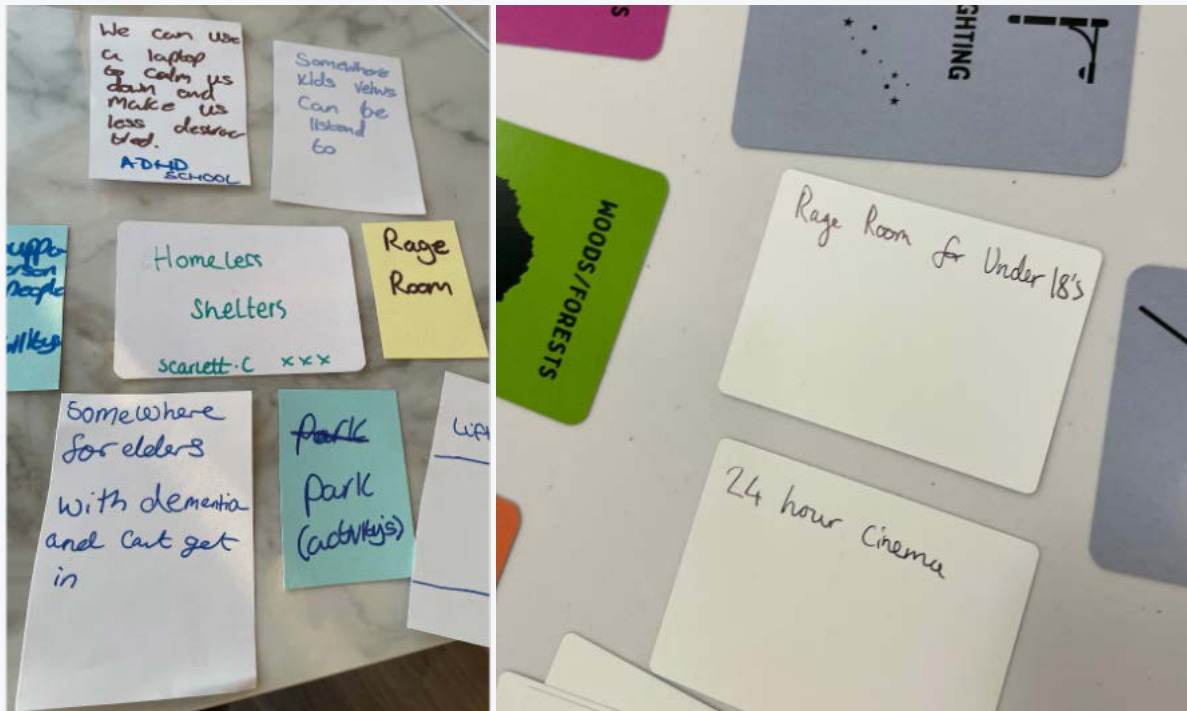


Figure 5, Left, Young people in Banbury make cards that consider the needs of other groups including elders and people experiencing homelessness. ight, Cards made by young people in Kirkcaldy show that the 'how' is as important as the 'what', for example the cinema should be open 24 hours and the rage room should be for under 18s specifically.

Enhanced Findings from our Virtual Workshop

To ensure our reporting reflects the views of young people as accurately as possible following the series of focus groups we held an online workshop where young people from across the focus groups, as well as our young researchers, were invited to give feedback on our emerging findings.

This workshop helped us to refine our findings and add nuance. Key takeaways included:

- The importance of treating England, Wales and Scotland separately because of different cultures and devolved governance
- The centrality of accessibility and inclusion to young people's concerns
- The significance of class/cultural capital as well as geographical location on young people's experiences of social and cultural infrastructure, with a recognition that young people in the same city/town can have different experiences depending on other aspects of their identity
- The importance of variations in where, within a settlement, young people live, for example with young people in suburbs having different experiences to those living centrally
- The prominence of gendered experiences of place including fear on the part of young women and non-binary people about the behaviour of cis men
- The inextricability of different elements of social and cultural infrastructure/the need for different elements to work cohesively to produce healthy places as one young person noted:

“It’s all a bit interconnected. So I feel like what has been done with the different cards actually helps people to see that connection. On how, oh, if we want, let’s say better politics and justice, we need a bit of a community as well because if people are like friendlier with their neighbours and more familiar with the environment, you know, then people will feel safer. So it really gets people thinking and I feel like that’s one important point to just like keep in mind”.

Discarded and Debated Cards

While cards added to the deck are crucial in revealing key priorities and concerns of our young participants, important findings can also be derived from looking at the cards they discarded or debated on their tables.



Figure 6, *Young people in Banbury debate which cards to keep and which to discard*

From analysis of the focus group transcripts we noted the following findings related to cards discarded and debated:

- In many locations, and particularly in smaller settlements, young people discarded cards if they already had something in their area or could travel to it easily. For example, participants in Brighton and Kirkcaldy rejected the airports card on the basis that there were airports near enough already (Gatwick, Edinburgh). In Brora, young people rejected cards including cafes and tennis courts on the basis of already having one in their village. This was not something we had found in London, where young people kept cards that represented things they already had and used, and it wasn’t the case in bigger national focus group locations like Leeds. This pattern might suggest that young people’s desires for social and cultural infrastructure and how/where they access it reflects the character of their local area and what is in keeping with the settlement size

- Fast food and Social Media cards were heavily debated. As we discuss in the next section of this report, these debates indicate a tension between what young people perceive as good for them and what they acknowledge as convenient, pragmatic and/or immediately gratifying
- When it came to sports, young people often discarded cards representing sports they hadn't tried before or perceived to be elitist (e.g. Tennis, Skiing) but wanted specific facilities for sports they were familiar with (e.g. 4G and LIG pitches for football)
- Some cards were discarded on the basis of not being safe, including local streets and buses. This position was held even when we suggested that a 'safe' activation card would help, with some young people asserting that no card could make these environments safe. This indicates an overwhelming concern with safety in many locations.

Discussion

Overview of Discussion Sections

In the following sections we discuss the key findings from our co-creative focus groups. We explore the benefits that young people cited of having effective social and cultural infrastructures in their areas, the issues and anxieties they experience that can prevent them from accessing this infrastructure, and the enabling factors that make a difference. We unpack how these findings vary by region and type of settlement as well as by class, gender, ethnicity and age.

Summary of Key Findings: Importance of Barriers to Social and Cultural Infrastructure

A key finding is that barriers to accessing social and cultural infrastructure are far more preoccupying for young people than the particular details of those spaces and services themselves. Across all our focus groups, conversation quickly turned to issues including safety, transport, affordability and accessibility. Our young participants were much more focused on how they would actually get to the point of accessing social and cultural infrastructure than they were about what they would do when they got there.

Young people also emphasised that different elements of social and cultural infrastructure are inextricably linked, for example they saw safety and affordability as impossible to detangle from community, education and culture. This again underscores the importance of addressing concerns around issues that may not, at first glance, seem directly relevant to social and cultural infrastructure. Due to the importance of these issues, our discussion sections begin by covering these key barriers.

Summary of Key Findings: Social and Cultural Infrastructure builds Social and Cultural Capital and promotes Health and Wellbeing

Nevertheless, the focus groups did highlight the benefits that young people associate with social and cultural infrastructure when they are able to access it, which conveys why tackling these barriers is so crucial. They reported that access and use of social and cultural infrastructure improved their physical and mental health and wellbeing and social and cultural fulfilment, as well as developing broader cultural awareness through meeting new people and experiencing diversity.

Discussions reflected that social and cultural infrastructure facilitates developing their social and cultural capital and civic engagement, and young people recognised the broader positive impacts it has for the communities they are living in, contributing towards social cohesion and feelings of safety in their neighbourhoods. In general, social and cultural infrastructure was also associated with providing new opportunities for young people to gain skills, develop their careers and/or engage in sports, leisure and the arts.

Young people highly valued and articulated the need to have greater independence and autonomy in their mobilities around the places they live, as well as in accessing social and cultural infrastructure in order to increase feelings of 'resilience' in the face of societal challenges. Therefore, for the benefits to be realised these challenges in accessing social and cultural infrastructure need to be addressed.

Barriers to accessing social and cultural infrastructure

Summary:

- Safety was the most consistent barrier, with young people across most areas feeling unsafe in public spaces, on transport, and after dark, though the exact nature of concerns varied from place to place
- Transport problems including cost, unreliability, long waits, and lack of accessibility limiting access to activities, with suburban and rural youth especially disadvantaged compared to those living centrally
- Affordability was a major issue, pushing young people towards cheaper but less healthy spaces and limiting access to activities, while wider funding cuts created a scarcity mindset in how they imagined what is feasible regarding the provision and availability of community resources.
- Healthcare and support systems were seen as inadequate, particularly for mental health, neurodivergence, and LGBTQ+ needs, leaving many young people feeling unsupported and excluded.
- Overall, young people's ability to access social and cultural infrastructure was constrained by overlapping barriers of safety, transport, affordability, and lack of inclusive support, with differences across regions and age groups.

Safety and Security

Safety was by far the most prominent theme across our focus groups. We started each group with an ice breaker that involved lining up across the room to indicate whether the young people thought their area was a good place to live or not. Almost invariably, safety came up immediately in this ice breaker (as a reason for standing on the 'not good' side of the room), and remained a key theme throughout the rest of the workshop, with young people making cards including 'Safety' (an activation card made in Brighton) or, 'Safe Spaces' and 'Safe Roads' (made in Kirkcaldy). It's hard to overstate how unsafe young people felt in the majority of our focus group locations. In Swansea, for example, they said that the activation card 'Safe' needed to be added to everything in the card deck. In Brighton, they went even further, suggesting that 'the bus is still not safe, even with this card' and

discarding the “Local Streets” card altogether because adding the safe card, again, wouldn’t be adequate to make streets safe.

The exception to this pervasive anxiety about safety was Brora where safety concerns were conspicuously absent. As by far the most rural location we visited, Brora stuck out as somewhere where young people are not worried about being stabbed, attacked, approached by malevolent strangers, etc. While they did have many overlapping concerns with young people in other places, including affordability and frequency of transport, they did not share this acute sense of being unsafe in their environment. Presumably this is due to the much smaller population size, meaning most people in the region know everyone in their village or town, and due to the fact that, because of the rurality and lack of public transport, most of their activities are mediated by parents/carers or youth workers/coaches.

From the London phase of our research we had found that young people experience what can be called ‘ontological insecurity’ (Giddens, 1991), a sense of being unsafe or precarious that is so strong that it persists even in situations where they are not actually unsafe or insecure, affecting one’s fundamental understanding of the world and their place within it. We were interested about how this would play out in other areas of the UK. What we found is that there was, across regions, a pervasive sense of insecurity, but this had different characteristics in different places and did not necessarily affect people’s sense of reality at that deeper, ontological level in all locations.

In each area, young people’s descriptions of their day to day lives conjured a generalised atmosphere of insecurity, but this had different inflections in different places. In Kirkcaldy, for example, young people had a sense of their environment being in decline that was stronger than a sense of physical danger. They described there being ‘glass everywhere’, spoke about broken playground items that had been removed but not replaced, and explained how they often encountered people under the influence of drink or drugs.

“like the youth where I live steal a lot of stuff. Like anything they find on the floor they nick it. So there's just not a lot of activities or stuff to do. Especially when parents are chucking their kids out the door when they get home from school and saying “do what you want” ‘

““you always end up walking past someone that’s like absolutely out of it and they always end up talking to you. I had someone sing a Celtic song to me.”

In planning their places, three separate tables in Kirkcaldy added cards reflecting the need for better lighting, reflecting this experience of public spaces that feel dangerous. One group added a ‘no potholes’ card reflecting their awareness of the area being run down and not well maintained.

In Swansea, young people also felt that their city was in decline, but here they were specifically concerned with declining intellectual ambition. They explained that a lack of job opportunities meant people stopped trying to learn or progress towards personal goals and referred to it as ‘a dying city’. To improve this issue they added cards to their imagined places including ‘careers advice’ and ‘safe drug zones’ to limit and supervise drug use.

Meanwhile, in Brighton, young people's feeling of precarity stemmed predominantly from a sense that other people were volatile.

"When I'm out on the street, like no one else can be on the street, no-one walking behind me, not too many people around"

"You could get spoken to by like, an older man"

"I had some like crackhead right behind me breathing on me."

Young people in Brighton definitely did fear for their physical safety, citing recent stabbings, but this sense of unease around other people was more prominent and distinctive than actual bodily threats.

On the other hand, in Hull, young people said they didn't feel safe 'in general' and this sense of pervasive threat was articulated through a need to identify escape routes from wherever they were, to be sure that they could get out quickly if need be. They were worried about their safety in multiple settings, including being kidnapped from parks, and had planned escape routes from schools, parks, their homes and even seemingly from the focus group itself, indicating an experience of unsafety that relates to potentially being trapped in an unknown or dangerous situation. They made arts and crafts additions to their place to represent 'anyone you can trust' including community workers, youth workers and emergency services. Young people in Hull also spoke about experiencing increased fear after the 2024 riots in their area. They made arts and crafts elements representing safe spaces to support refuges, rehab centres and places of worship cards, explaining that these were important generally, but particularly in the context of the riots when they felt a heightened sense of vulnerability.

The group we worked with in Hull was female only and gendered violence was definitely a contributing factor to their anxieties, evident in how their sense of safety in place radically changed after dark.

"even though you know the streets back to front...it's just everywhere feels different at night"

"If I felt more safe, I'd actually walk home at night"

In Banbury, girls also felt unsafe. While the boys in this group didn't mention safety extensively, the girls spoke about not wanting to walk through the park alone and mentioned recent stabbings and gender-based violence that had taken place. Although interestingly, the girls in Hull then discussed that the people they were afraid of were sometimes groups of fellow teenagers who could be other girls. This indicates these gendered spatial dynamics are not always straightforward. While in some places, like Banbury, girls discussed more explicitly feelings of insecurity relating to fears of unknown adults (particularly 'creepy men'), the discussion in Hull suggests who the 'threatening' group is cannot necessarily be assumed.

In Leeds young people's experiences were most similar to those we encountered in our London focus groups. Young people talked about the dangers of getting 'jumped' or 'stabbed' and spoke about

buses as spaces where people drink alcohol, carry weapons and where even the behaviour of drivers can be unpredictable.

In all these instances, the infrequency and cost of transport, as well as the lack of surveillance on transport, was a contributing factor to feeling unsafe. In Swansea young people described that missing one bus or having no money left on your pass could mean waiting for over an hour on the street in the dark. In Fife too they thought that 'buses should be 24 hours so you can get home quicker and also safer.' And in Brighton, Fife and Swansea young people suggested that free taxis for teenagers would be a good solution to safety issues connected to transport. In Swansea, bus prices for college students had gone up while the service had been reduced from every hour to every 30 minutes - this was leaving many students waiting in the dark alone and also meant that when buses did come they were overcrowded and lacking spaces for wheelchairs or prams.

The lack of surveillance and security was also a source of anxiety for young people. In Fife one young person said that they'd had an experience where a 'certain thing was not caught because the camera wasn't facing the right way.' In Swansea, one girl told us a story about how, when she was travelling on her birthday, a bus driver had performatively ripped her bus pass up in front of her (it was one day out of date and she hadn't noticed) before telling her there was no CCTV on the bus so she wouldn't be able to complain. This incident had occurred when she was the last person on the bus and had clearly shaken her.

From the division of young people into age groups (13-15 & 16-18) at our focus groups for key activities and discussions we saw that safety concerns were most prevalent among the older cohort. This is likely because they travel more by themselves and are more likely to hang out in public spaces without adult supervision. However, younger participants also felt unsafe and children as young as 13 said they worried about their safety.

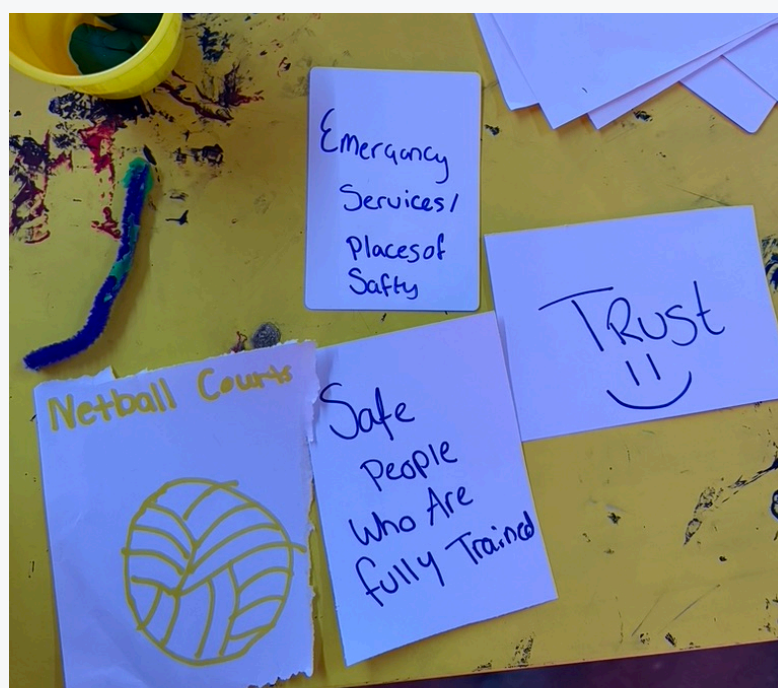


Figure 7, Image of cards made by young people in Leeds, referencing safe places and people

In addition to ontological security, 'structure of feeling' might be a helpful concept for understanding how the character of places shapes young people's perceptions, actions and ambitions in relation to social and cultural infrastructure. This concept (Jameson, 1991) is used to refer to the intangible but very real emotional landscape of a particular time and place. In the experiences described in this section we can see how young people pick up on the structure of feeling in their area, particularly in relation to safety and decline.

Quality of Transport

Safety on transport and on the street was a key barrier to young people accessing social and cultural places and services, but so was the affordability, efficiency and frequency of transport. One young person in Fife spoke about how you can have '2000 things you want to be doing' but 'you can't get there easily' and others had missed lessons at college because missing one bus meant waiting an hour and arriving very late. Even in areas where there were good amounts of activities for young people to do, their day to day lives were shaped by 'sitting on a bus for an hour and a half' and waiting for buses that didn't turn up. One girl in Swansea told us that she had to travel for so long, on unreliable buses, to reach the basketball court that 'it kind of ruins my mood when I get there'.

In some areas young people felt that councils were making bad decisions about transport. For example in Swansea they were offering special discounts while also cutting bus routes and young people would rather have the routes stay. In Leeds, the council were planning to add tram lines which young people thought should be a secondary priority after fixing the bus system, which was expensive and overcrowded.

As the most rural area we visited, Brora stood out as a community isolated by poor transport links. Lack of services locally is compounded by an inability to easily travel to local hubs (such as Inverness) because of the infrequency of public transport. This leads to young people in the area being disadvantaged compared to young people elsewhere in Scotland or the UK, as they have a comparative lack of access to opportunities.

Being 'not old enough to drive yet' or unable to access driving lessons or tests was on the minds of many of the young people. In Swansea, young people said they would have liked to learn to drive to avoid these issues with buses but said that long waiting lists for lessons and tests were preventing them from doing so. They added a 'driving lessons' card to their place to improve this as well as a card for 'better train connections' with 'PLEASE' written emphatically in capitals underneath it.

The one place where a positive experience of transport was mentioned was Banbury where one young person had taken the train for work experience and found it good and frequent. We also found that young people who lived more centrally in cities, and therefore could walk around, had a better experience. For example in Swansea there was a disagreement about how pleasant and easy Swansea was to navigate and spend time in. After a short debate the young people realised that the root cause of the disagreement was where in the city they lived. They realised that if you live in the centre you can walk to most places and access pedestrianised areas, parks, the beach and other free amenities easily, whereas if you live in the suburbs you find yourself getting up at 6 to get to work by 9 or spending half your day travelling to attend a short sports session. This debate is interesting in

showing how young people in the same city can have very different experiences depending on how centrally they live and the transport routes they are near to. It also underscores the importance of debates around 'The 15 minute city' and suggests that, especially for young people, quick and easy access to amenities is very important.

Navigation around places by foot or bike was also a concern of young people. In Swansea they added 'cycle lanes', 'walking paths' and 'make areas more pedestrianised' cards (this was added by two tables) to facilitate access around the city. One young person also added a card for 'clear directions' noting that, as neurodiverse, they found the city hard to navigate.

Affordability and Funding

As well as safety and transport, the affordability of amenities and products was also a concern for young people. Many young people spoke of the struggles caused by the cost of living crisis, telling us, for example in Leeds, that "It can be hard to, you know, like, buy the stuff that you need. Like, sometimes it could be hard to get, like, gas and electric or food" and the cost of everyday pleasures like 'gingerbread men' was rising. In both Kirkcaldy and Swansea young people mentioned that they valued charity shops as places where they could go and browse items that they could actually afford.

"Not necessarily clothes shops, but charity shops. I got this scarf for a quid at a charity shop and it's like my favourite thing" (Kirkcaldy).

Similarly, although young people were often disdainful about fast food from a health perspective, they told us (in Kirkcaldy) that they valued fast food chains as places they could sit and have a conversation without having to spend too much money. This underscores an issue young people encounter, where the spaces and activities that are affordable for them are not necessarily the ones that are most beneficial for their physical and mental health, or social and cultural development.

As well as noting the barriers they face to accessing social and cultural infrastructure on a personal, day-to-day level, young people were also aware of structural issues including economic decline in their areas and lack of local and national funding. In Leeds young people spoke about music venues closing down while in Brighton young people explained that the council had wasted money on the 360 tower, which they saw as a gimmick for tourists. In Swansea young people spoke about problems being caused by 'council houses being like, bought off, so there's not a lot of council housing around.' Many tables across different focus groups selected or added (if it wasn't dealt to their table) a 'funding' card. In the 'test your place' round of our card deck game they cited funding as the main thing they would need to progress goals including getting better at sports or starting a band.

In her 2017 book *Austerity as Public Mood* (Forkert, 2017), Kirsten Forkert explored a structure of feeling typified by guilt, nostalgia and resentment during the austerity period following the 2008 financial crash. In our research we found a different kind of austerity mindset among young people, related to ongoing austerity in the UK. This manifested in a scarcity mindset seen in how young people made unforced choices between different things they wanted in their hypothetical place. In Brighton young people discarded the Ski Slope card because it was not cost effective to run and they would rather save the money for 'transport and charity.' Another group in Brighton discarded the 'shared gardens' card because 'they're too much maintenance...even though they're stunning.' In

Swansea, young people spoke about issues with access to and the quality of GP care, linked to funding cuts and about the role of churches in maintaining communities in the absence of other support.

A sense of funds as scarce, then, clearly shaped young people's imaginations of what was and wasn't possible for them and others in their areas. As one account of youth lives under austerity puts it, "youth adapt their future expectations...to the austerity context, downscaling ambitions" (Van Lanen, 2020). This was more notable in Brighton and Swansea where we only worked with 16–18-year-olds, suggesting that these economic issues are more clearly understood by older young people.

Health Care and Support

Another recurrent theme in our focus groups was the difficulty of accessing health care support, especially in relation to mental health, gender and sexuality and neurodivergences. From 98 young people who completed our diversity and monitoring survey 24 reported having a disability (24%) with an additional 6 being "unsure". 53% of these 30 young people reported that their disability or health condition reduces their ability to carry out day-to-day activities (**figure 8**).

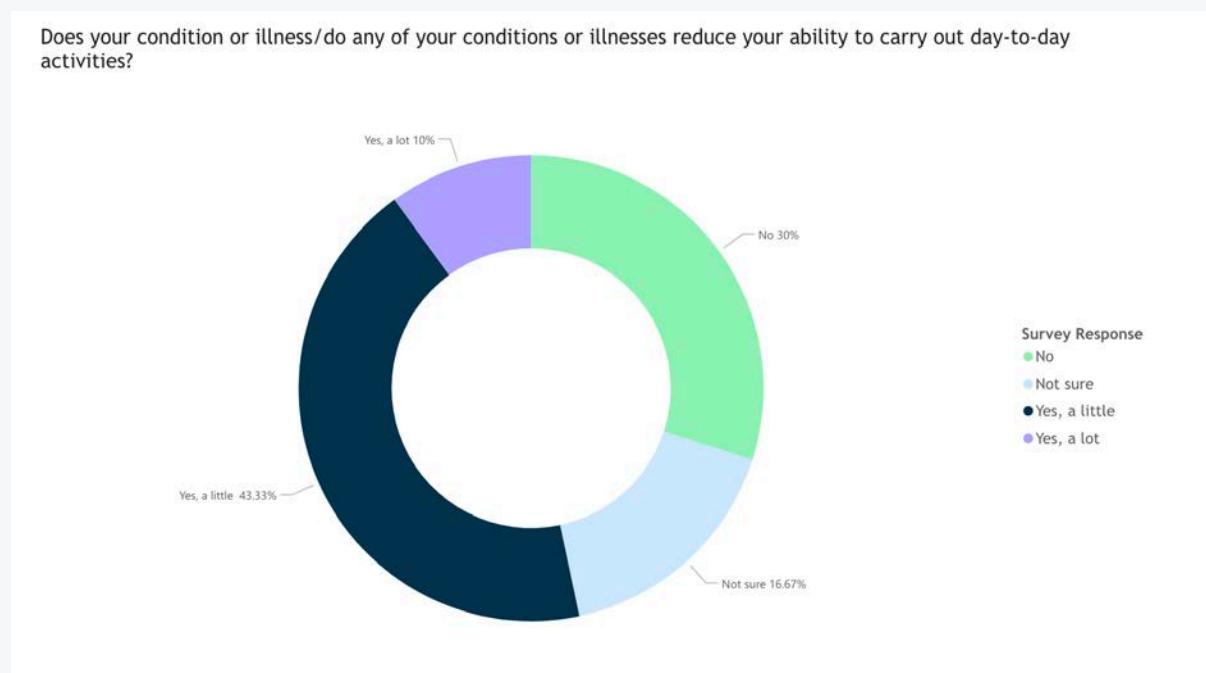


Figure 8, Pie chart indicating the impact of disability/ long term health condition on the young participants

29 identified as either gay, lesbian, bisexual, pansexual, asexual, queer or 'other' and 13 told us that their gender was not the same as that assigned at birth (noting that recruitment at one of our focus groups was via an LGBTQ youth group, this may not be representative of the wider population). Many young people felt unsupported in their journeys to understand and embrace their identities. For example, one young person reported it being 'inevitable' they would be bullied due to being bisexual, non-binary and neurodiverse.

There was a pervasive feeling that educational establishments are not yet inclusive enough for neurodiverse young people and are not offering adequate mental health support for young people facing stigma and hostility or needing support to make sure of their sexual and gender identities. Young people were also worried about the adequacy of physical health care, referring to substandard and inaccessible GP services and hospitals. In Swansea, young people discussed variations in health care, explaining that it was much easier to see a GP in some areas (Llanelli) than others (Marina). One young person told us her mum had waited two weeks with a broken leg before she was able to get an operation. In Brora, young people worried that the hospital was too far away to reach in an emergency.

Young people in Swansea also thought that there was not enough access for disabled people on transport, for example with limited spaces on buses for wheelchairs, and spoke about needing shorter waiting lists for autism assessments and more flexible systems of care for neurodivergent young people in schools and colleges that were less 'formulaic' (Swansea).

Lack of access to health care was clearly a barrier to young people feeling confident in accessing social and cultural infrastructure. In Kirkcaldy participants described how they would benefit from more spaces that provide sports and cultural activities but that specialise in neurodivergence, citing existing examples including 'The Yard, Autism Rocks and ADHD 5.' In our findings workshop, one participant, Emily explained:

"For me being 13 and having to go through quite a lot of changes in my life with being bisexual and non binary, it's really hard for me to like find someone special to talk to. So I think healthcare is more like important to me for that main reason".

The ideal for young people, then, was to have social and cultural infrastructure spaces and services that were more explicitly and intentionally designed to be inclusive, underlining their current experience that this is not the case. Young people made cards reflecting this desire including Mental Health Services, Neurodivergence Services and Queer Youth Spaces.

Home and communities: social capital and spaces for young people

Summary:

- Home is a key site for young people's social and cultural development, that can augment or even replace public and third spaces, especially in the context of COVID-19 and reduced public infrastructure. However, young people's experiences of home vary significantly, with differences in housing type, tenure, and safety reflecting broader social inequalities.
- Safety and emotional security at home are deeply valued but not guaranteed for all. Girls often discussed the importance of safe routes and mobility to and from home and noted feeling safer at home than in public spaces.

- However, a stronger sense of belonging and safety in local areas is fostered when young people feel connected to their local community and supported by trusted relationships. Familiarity with neighbours and local people boosts confidence in navigating neighbourhoods.
- Young people feel the effects of weakened youth services due to years of austerity and long-term underfunding, with regional disparities in access to support and provision—particularly between England and Scotland.
- Youth workers, mentors, and trusted adults as ‘pivotal people’ are vital in supporting young people’s social capital, confidence, belonging and opportunities—though experiences can vary and must be underpinned by proper training and safeguarding.
- Young people highlight the need access to inclusive, safe, and culturally meaningful spaces—but these spaces must be brought to life through people, activities, and support networks. Social and cultural infrastructure should be understood as both physical spaces and the relationships, care, and everyday practices that sustain them.

Home as a foundation

It has been well-documented that domestic spaces are crucial for young people in developing their social and cultural lives, with culture being more likely to be reproduced in domestic spaces for girls and gender-non-conforming young people (McRobbie and Garber, 1976; Lincoln, 2015).

‘Home’ was mostly discussed by young people in the focus groups as a basis for their social and cultural activities and identities. While it was seen often as a foundational space that supports engagement in social and cultural activities, it was sometimes also seen as a substitute for third or communal spaces. A group of 13-15 years old in Leeds discussed that a library may not be needed as “you can read books at home”, while another group discussed options to practice religion at home. This was also reflected in London, with a young person in Acton reflecting that to socialise with friends “you can just go round to their house to be honest”. These perspectives may be unsurprising for a generation of young people whose formative relationships to domestic spaces developed in the context of the need to ‘stay at home’ during lockdowns in the Covid-19 pandemic and who have grown up at a time with declining public social infrastructure (e.g. youth clubs) due to austerity.

However, as the Covid-19 pandemic highlighted relationships to home can reflect wider inequalities and can vary significantly for young people. Our survey indicates that the young people participating in the research represented a variety of housing tenures and types. Although the majority of young people (75%) were living in a house at the time of participation (either detached, semi-detached or terraced), there is variation for the other 25%, with young people living in rooms, flats, bungalows, mobile homes, a croft and farms (**Figure 9**).

There was also a varied mix of housing tenures with 35% living in social housing (household rents from Council/Local Authority or Housing Association), 35% living in a privately owned property and 7% in housing being privately rented³ (**Figure 10**).

³ It is worth noting that this question gives an indication of housing tenure but may be subject to error as young people may not necessarily be informed about housing tenure and report this incorrectly. 13% preferred not to answer this question and 7% reported they did not know.

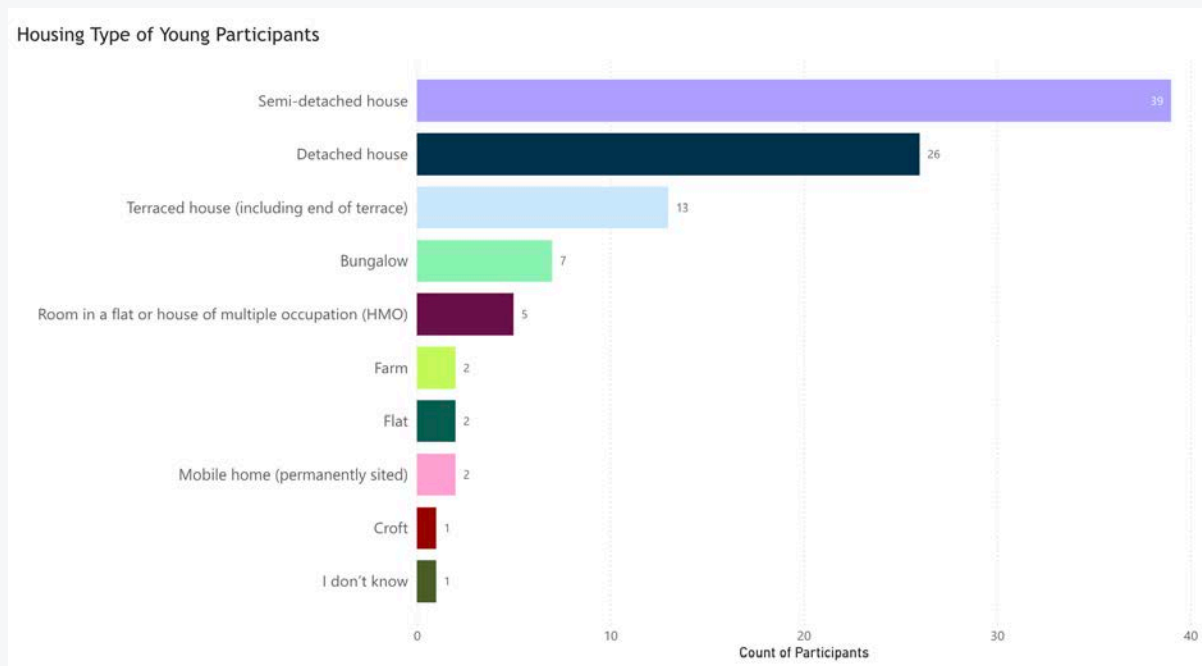


Figure 9, Bar chart showing household type for all focus group participants

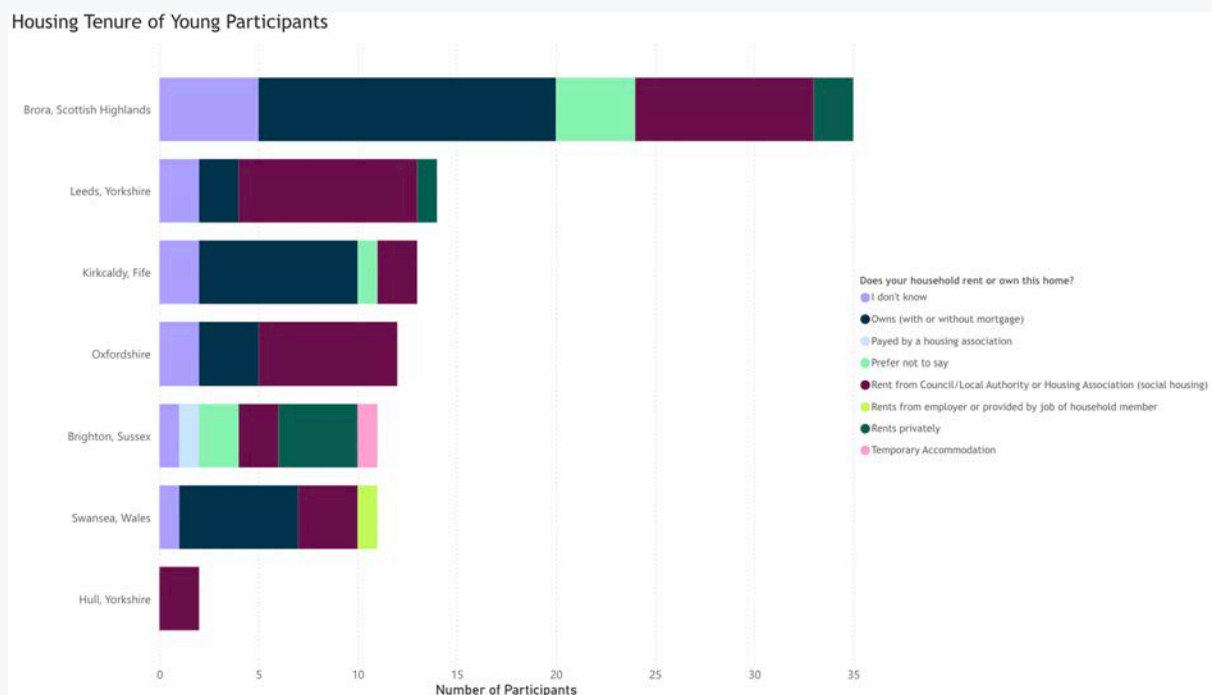


Figure 10, Stacked bar chart indicating participant housing type according to focus group location

The focus groups where young people were predominantly living in social housing (Leeds, Hull, Oxfordshire) had less variation in housing types, whereas locations such as Brighton and Brora had a range of housing types (**figure 11**) which reflect this diversity in housing experience including some experiences of housing insecurity in the private rental sector.

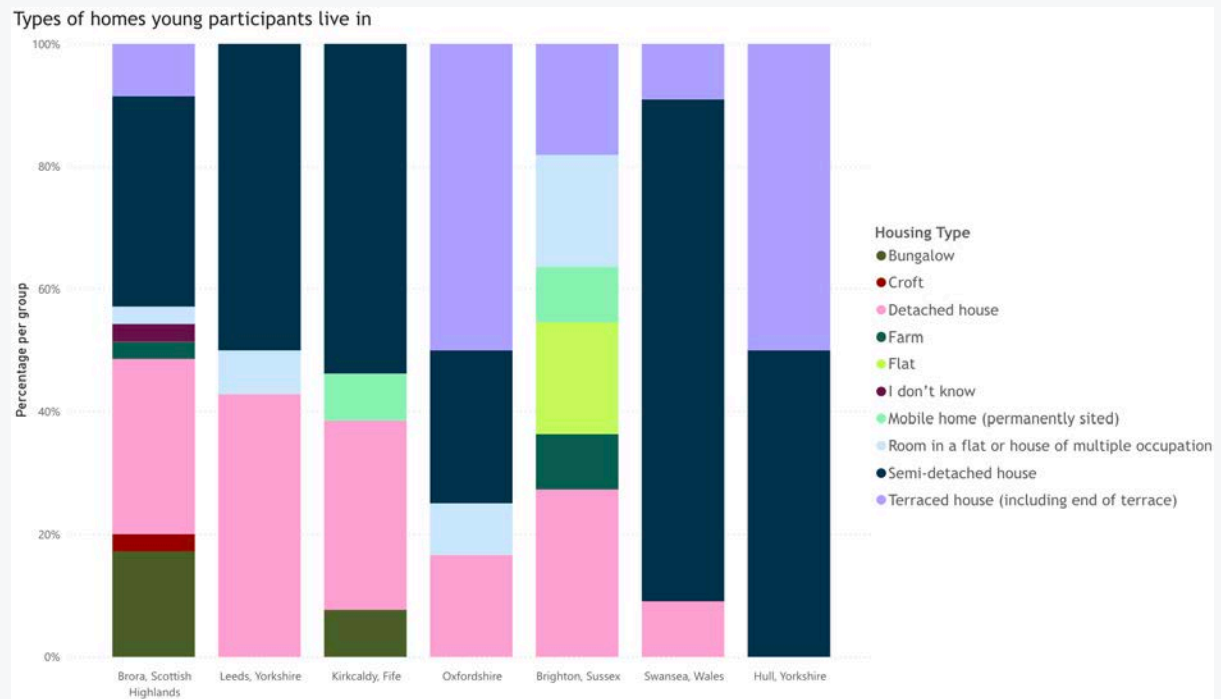


Figure 11, Stacked bar chart showing % housing type according to focus group location

Van Lanen (2020, p. 598) argues, “housing and home are critical spheres through which austerity and recession become embedded in the everyday lives of disadvantaged urban youth and shape contemporary life courses in the city-after-austerity”. This variation in relationships to home is something young people in different locations were certainly aware of.



Figure 12, Left, Home card prioritised in Leeds focus group with a plasticine heart overlaid, right, plasticine model of a house with flower in Banbury

When the young people discussed the ‘home’ card - it more often referred to home life rather than housing specifically. For young people, “housing is not just a shelter, it is stability and dignity” (Wilson, Cumberland Lodge, 2025). For some groups, the ‘Home’ card was seen as one of the most

important cards - valued above all others and yet at times, it was taken for granted as a necessity and wasn't discussed in much detail. Nevertheless, groups across different locations explicitly discussed the importance of having a safe home, recognising this is not a reality for all young people. In Banbury, when presenting their 'place' they began by introducing their "very very safe house and every house in the area is going to be safe and locked in". This strong concern for safe and secure housing reflects broader issues of ontological security (as discussed in the section above). Home and safety were seen as intimately woven together:

"I think home's one of the most important things, because if you don't have a home, you don't feel this secure, and you could end up being homeless or anything" - Leeds

Home also became a proxy for discussions about familial relations and the people surrounding young people at home, as discussed in Leeds:

Sophie: Can we not put home, like at the top [of the ordering of cards]

Faye: Yeah

Sophie: before everything, yeah.

Faye: But some people, some people might not have a very good...

Sophie: ...household.

Faye: No but they might not be safe in their household

Sophie: It depends on the individual's experiences, dunnit?

Faye: Yeah, but I feel like people surrounding them is more important

Here the conversation concludes with a recognition that the people at home are more influential than the environment itself. As Sarah Marie Hall (2019, p.69) has argued "everyday social infrastructure" is made up of "intricate tapestries of care, carefully woven fabrics of familial and extra-familial relationships". For young people, these social relations are hugely influential and affect feelings of safety and experiences of social reproduction. As a girl in Leeds noted:

"As young people, we're influenced greatly by our parents or who we live with, so we don't really have our own opinions. We aren't able to spread our own opinions, because both opinions are put on upon us and like decisions are put upon us. We have to follow that until we, like, grow out of it. We don't really grow out of it".

While mainstream understandings of social infrastructure have largely ignored social reproduction as "the gendered work involved in sustaining lifeworlds" (Hall 2020, p.82), we argue this is especially important for young people and particularly for girls who can feel relegated to being at home due to the pervasiveness of feelings of insecurity outside of the home (as discussed in the safety and security section above). In Hull, a group of girls discussed this on a hyperlocal scale:

"When it's dark, we live two minutes away from each other...so [when] I walk to her house, we are on the phone with each other until the second I walk into my house, just because [if] anything happens..."

This indicates that for young people, relationships to home highlight how social infrastructure "is not simply about keeping 'life in the big city together', but also about how things help to keep spaces and people in the city apart" (Tonkiss, 2014), particularly those seen as dangerous or a threat. For

example, while ‘building her place’, Anna (aged 13), chose to build a bridge out of plasticine to directly connect her separated parent’s houses meaning she didn’t have to negotiate the broader urban environment. Her choice of building physical infrastructure to connect her homes, rather than any ‘third spaces’ highlights how important safe routes and means of mobility to and from home are for girls in particular. This reinforces the need to see “the city as an assemblage of ‘intimate infrastructures’” (Datta and Ahmed, 2020, p. 75). It also highlights the way in which experiences of social infrastructures can be shaped by violence and fear, leading “to the everyday regulation of [even young] women’s bodies through temporalities and spatialities of access, connectivity and safety in the city” (ibid, p.73).

Community spaces and networks: pivotal people as infrastructure

Nevertheless, some young people were keen to express that they didn’t always experience this sense of the local area feeling fragmented and difficult to navigate. The key factor that seemed to define whether they would feel safe and comfortable was whether they felt part of a strong local community where they knew people and were supported by trusted adults.

They reported that this sense of ‘social capital’, what Robert Putnam (1994) has defined as the “features of social organisation such as networks, norms and trust that facilitate co-ordination and co-operation for mutual benefit”, strengthened a sense of belonging and could have a transformational role this could have on their lives.

At times, a sense of strong social capital seemed to correlate with the young people living in smaller villages and towns where lower populations supported a feeling of increased communal relations. For example, in Brora in the Highlands, when discussing what they liked about where they lived, they discussed a “close knit community” and in closing discussions reflected what they valued most was having friends and family living close by. However, this could also apply in larger cities like Leeds, where neighbourhoods such as Seacroft, an area consisting mainly of a council estate housing covering an extensive area of east Leeds, also had a strong social networks:

“Where I live, like, I know the majority of the people, it’s like a quite close community. So for me, because growing up knowing, like a lot of people...I feel like I’m more safe, but possibly for people that don’t like, know the area as much, and don’t know many people, they wouldn’t feel safe because of what it’s like” (Grace, female).

Here, Grace implies that her area might not necessarily be safe for all, but her knowledge of and connection to local people fosters a sense of security and increases her self-confidence in navigating her neighbourhood. Klinenberg distinguishes social infrastructure from social capital, suggesting the social infrastructure is the physical components that support and facilitate social capital. He argues:

“When social infrastructure is robust, it fosters contact, mutual support, and collaboration among friends and neighbours; when degraded, it inhibits social activity, leaving families and individuals to fend for themselves” (2018, p.5).

This suggests that social (and cultural) infrastructure is primarily the physical spaces that support social life, and these spaces are certainly crucial for young people to the extent that they can be prepared to fight for and advocate for them. In Leeds, for example, a young person narrated how the young people in her area became involved with LSI4, the community organisation based in Seacroft who we partnered with. She recalled how young people didn't have access to the local community centre and so they would come and gather outside the centre whatever the weather: "we were just outside in the freezing cold...we still came. Even if it were raining, we'd have to deal with it. But now we do have access to it, and since we've had access to our community centre, a lot more people have joined".

In Swansea, young people talked about wanting more places to meet people and 'make better connections' and cited sporting facilities, religious spaces and 24-hour gyms as places where they could socialise and make new friends.

Spaces are undoubtedly foundational for young people to build a sense of belonging, develop new social connections and relationships and lead culturally rich lives. Young people discussed the importance of community centres, youth centres, libraries, museums, art galleries, cinemas, cafes and restaurants and music venues. However, our research underscores that young people need more than spaces as part of their social and cultural infrastructure. These spaces need to be 'activated' through activity and use supported by structures and networks. While spaces like community centres clearly constitute social and cultural infrastructure, if they are only seen in their relation to their physical components, they are inanimate. These physical spaces are only as valuable as the communities who are able to use them, and they require organisations and people within them to help them cultivate the cultural expression, meaning making and building of relationships that can happen in them. The young people in Leeds recognised how influential LSI4 is in their lives, and in particular, the youth workers in boosting their sense of confidence and increased opportunities. Across many different sites, young people talked about the role and influence of 'pivotal people' and trusted adults in positively shaping their lives:

"With us being a part of a youth group, it's made us all feel more confident than we used to, to actually speak upon like problems and like our thoughts that we have" – Leeds

In fact, we cannot highlight enough how we would not have been able to conduct this research without these 'pivotal people' - the youth, community and voluntary sector workers, volunteers, teachers and coaches who recruited the young people, organised the space to conduct the focus group and in many cases physically transported the young people to the focus group. The young people we spoke to seemed to feel 'lucky' to have these people in their lives - aware that this is not necessarily the norm for all young people in the UK in the context of decades of austerity measures and public funding cuts introduced after the 2007-08 financial crisis that have eroded youth services and facilities with profound impacts for a generation of young people (Davies, 2019). Although there were interesting geographical differences, with the Scotland focus groups being noticeably better resourced by youth workers and groups than the England ones. While this is a general reflection, rather than reliable finding - it does reflect broader trends on governmental support for youth work

in the UK due to devolved powers⁴. However, this policy context doesn't negate regional challenges and inequalities that mean young people in rural areas, such as Highland communities in Scotland, still struggle with isolation from important services and infrastructures. Overall, this eroding of youth services has not only affected young people themselves, but it's also affected the future of the sector.

Not only has this affected young people themselves, but it's also affected the future of the sector. During our research, a community worker in England reflected that it's a challenge to recruit youth workers from a generation of young people who haven't been "youth worked". Research by the National Youth Agency (NYA, 2024) reveals that "fewer than 7% of respondents to a national survey of youth workers are under 26 years old, almost half (49%) are over the age of 46 and over half (59%) have worked in the youth sector for over a decade, highlighting the challenges in recruiting young entrants to this increasingly needed sector".

Our research highlights the importance of these youth workers where they do exist, but also of the other trusted adults and pivotal people who support young people to access new opportunities and build their social capital. Young people highlighted that it was important that these adults are not necessarily teachers or family members, and in Banbury they added a card for "trusted adult in school to talk to" explaining they wanted this to be someone independent from their teachers. In our report exploring findings in London, we discussed the importance of these pivotal people as 'boundary spanners':

"...people that serve as a bridge granting access to different worlds. For young people, a teacher or a boxing coach can be the person that offers pathways into unfamiliar arenas and supports them out of their comfort zone" (2024, p.40).

In London, there was the recurring addition of 'bossman' to the cards (the person who works behind a counter in a corner shop, chicken shop or similar). We noted that "unlike a teacher or sports coach he doesn't (normally) support young people into unfamiliar territory. Instead, his role is about familiarity and a sense of belonging...Local archetypes like 'bossman' may be an important element of community identity. Especially for young people, knowledge of archetypal people in their communities can help them to build social confidence and capital, developing heuristic knowledge of their local area" (2024, p.40).

Consequently, an ecosystem approach to social and cultural infrastructure is needed to recognise the work (training, knowledge, networks, care), or 'community capital', it takes to activate these spaces and make them accessible and inclusive. This, in itself, is social infrastructure.

This resonates with the idea of people as 'nodes' within social networks that support engagement with infrastructure to support both bonding and bridging capital (Kerlaff and Käkelä, 2024, p.91). For young people, the catalyst for engagement often seems to be pivotal people or trusted adults. While

⁴ [Research by the public service union Unison](#) has found that "funding cuts have led to the closure of more than two thirds of council-run youth centres in England and Wales since 2010". As noted by the [Local Government Association](#), "funding to youth services by local authorities in England and Wales saw a real terms decline of 70 per cent between 2010/11 and 2018/19". While Scotland has also suffered from austerity cuts, it takes a more holistic and human rights-based approach to youth work driving policy under the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act (2015), and consequently "youth work in Scotland has survived the worst of centralist policy directives, sometimes bypassing UK Government to engage directly with European partners to develop international policies and fund new practices" (Coburn and Gormally, 2019, p.10).

the 'detached youth worker' model that is increasingly prevalent supports this, it is the combination of people and spaces that enable 'activation' of social and cultural infrastructure.

Hall (2020, p.85) notes that “overwhelmingly, social infrastructures are talked and written about as community-building in community buildings: a sort of ‘physical infrastructure plus people’ approach”. However, we can also see people as part of the structures of infrastructure itself, as AbdouMaliq Simone has prominently argued for, by ‘extend[ing] the notion of infrastructure directly to people’s activities’ (p407). This enables a stronger recognition of and support for the practices and everyday labour that are part of maintaining and sustaining social and cultural infrastructure (Hall, 2020).

Nevertheless, it’s important to note that there were variations in young people’s opinions towards the idea of ‘pivotal people’ and their experiences are not always positive, as highlighted by Zoe from Swansea in our findings workshop when we asked young people to prioritise our key themes:

“I prioritized things that would create community, because while I put community, friends and pivotal people at the bottom because I feel like they're often associated with, like, youth groups. And personally, I've had bad experiences with being in youth groups. I have other friends who have [also had] bad experiences in being in youth groups. And I find that forcing, like an artificial community, can kind of be quite negative. Like, you often have people that abuse their power onto people...It can be a lot. And then for most important, it's things that I think would...create community, such as having a strong culture”.

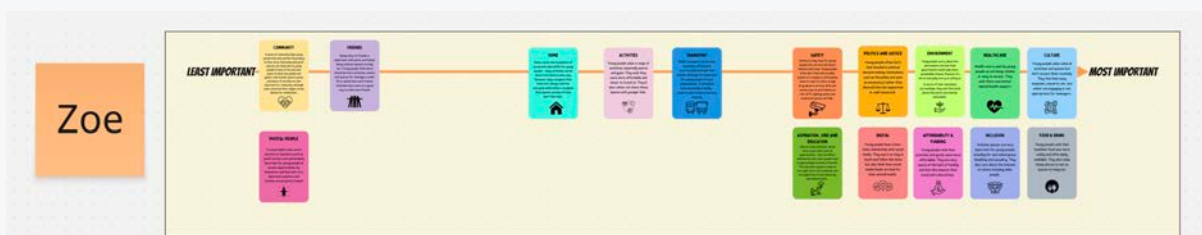


Figure 13, Zoe’s ordering of the research themes in the online findings workshop

She highlights that while community and youth centres may be important for some, they may feel ‘artificial’ for others or even be subject to abuse of power and challenging experiences for young people - reiterating the need for well-trained staff. Zoe suggested that cultural places (museums, galleries, cinemas, music venues) and activities within them could constitute more organic and inclusive communities and friendships. Klinenberg suggests that “people forge bonds in places that have healthy social infrastructures -- not because they set out to build community, but because when people engage in sustained, recurrent interaction, particularly while doing things they enjoy, relationships inevitably grow” (2018, p.5).

This was reiterated by Mia from Swansea: “I find it really hard to see all these ideas sort of in a vacuum. I feel like they're all intertwined with each other...It's really hard to... have a community without culture and inclusion”. Zoe and Mia’s points emphasise the importance of incorporating cultural infrastructure into this understanding of social infrastructure, and in supporting a diversity of spaces, structures and people who make them accessible and thriving.

Experiences of Culture and Sports

Summary:

- Despite barriers, young people deeply appreciated cultural spaces including museums, libraries, cinemas, theatres, and bookshops as places for learning, inspiration, and family or community connection.
- Museums and history were of interest and young people valued free access and a focus on local history. Young people also wanted museums to be more engaging for teenagers including by having more interactive elements.
- Music venues and live events were highly valued across locations as spaces for socialising and belonging, though recording studios were often dismissed as unnecessary. Theatre was appreciated but seen as expensive and unevenly accessible.
- Rising prices (especially for cinema and extracurriculars) limited participation, and young people noted disparities in access across different areas of the same city or region.
- Gyms, sports facilities (e.g. netball courts), and even unconventional options like rage rooms or shooting ranges were seen as vital for wellbeing, friendship, and fun.

While young people experienced many obstacles to accessing cultural spaces, we found that those who had accessed them highly valued the experiences. In Swansea, young people were vocal about their appreciation of having free access to museums, which they recognised was not the case in England, and spoke about museums having 'cultural value' including as spaces where you can learn about 'local history.' Interestingly, in Banbury young people also told us they would like to see more exhibitions on local history, as well as wider history and art, indicating that young people often have an interest in learning more about their immediate areas. In Banbury some young people also wished there were more activities for teenagers in museums so they could more easily engage with the content.



Scan the QR Code or follow this [link](#) to view a short 'vox pop' video of young participants discussing the importance of having spaces and support for culture and leisure in their local area.

In Kirkcaldy young people spoke about the joys of music venues as places to socialise and especially valued live music events that were specifically for younger people as then they could enjoy the music without worrying about drunk adults. They said they would like to see more 'festivals, fairs' and 'gigs' in their area. Young people in Brighton also recognised music as something that 'brings people together' and in Leeds they reiterated the importance of music venues. Interestingly to us, young people often discarded the 'recording studios' card, citing music production as something 'you can do in your house.' Some young people also valued theatres although in Leeds they felt that the theatre could be prohibitively expensive. In Leeds young people also described how there can be a lack of cultural spaces in some areas, like Seacroft, making it harder for people across the city to have equal access to culture. In Banbury young people also spoke about uneven access to cultural experiences due to financial limitations.

"I didn't grow up doing any extracurriculars because my mum didn't have any money, and all my friends were doing, like, dance and all this stuff, and I was just like, well, I've got nothing to do, sort of left on my own devices, just going outside on my own, doing random stuff. So I think there needs to be at least somewhere that kids could just go to. They don't have to, like, like, pay or let like, you don't have to be invited in."

The cinema was also seen as an important social and cultural space by many young people. In Kirkcaldy they wished the cinema was 24 hours and in Leeds they spoke about the cinema as an important space for families to spend time together. One young person spoke nostalgically about family cinema visits when they were younger, noting that rising prices and his mum needing to work more had stopped them going as often.

"Cinema is like a whole thing with me, when we were kids we would go all the time mainly because the tickets were so cheap, but also because it's like, you know, we'd go there with family and spend time with each other and watch a film. And now that we've gotten older, and you know, we've got, like, all of the prices go up, and now that we've got inflation, it's like, they're more expensive. We don't have much time because mom works full time and that. So I feel that when we actually go to the cinema and get a chance to do that, it's like, it feels kind of special. It's got a sentimental value"

Young people also valued libraries as places to learn and explore culture. In Swansea one girl wished the library was 24 hours as she likes to read at night and spoke about how borrowing books had been a source of excitement when she was younger. Young people in Leeds also valued libraries as important cultural learning spaces. Relatedly, book shops were seen as important with one young person in Brora saying 'we need a waterstones' and young people in Brighton decided to keep the bookshops card as 'it's good to read.'

Cards showing the importance of sports to young people, including an added card requesting 'better bike tracks to support positive health'

As well as typical cultural spaces like museums, music venues and cinemas young people also valued less orthodox experiences. Across multiple focus groups young people brought up 'rage rooms' as something they enjoyed or would like to try, with one younger person in Kirkcaldy exclaiming 'I need a rage room in my life.' In Swansea, one young person also wished there were shooting ranges, referring to this as 'a good recreational activity.'

When it came to sports and physical activities, young people recognised their importance for physical and mental wellbeing as well as for socialising. In Brighton one young person said he needed the gym to 'feel happy' and another described how outdoor gyms can be good places to hang out and stay healthy. Young people in Brora also wished there was a bigger and more affordable gym locally as well as a sports centre. While young people were often dismissive of sports they hadn't tried, such as skiing or snowboarding, they spoke about having diverse sports as hobbies, from dancing to ice skating and ice hockey.

Sports were also discussed as a way to make friends and cultivate a sense of belonging, and Netball was mentioned by girls in both Leeds and Hull as a very important part of their lives with both groups adding in netball court cards to ensure that there was appropriate infrastructure to support it in their place. Young people who were involved in sports as a hobby recognised the importance of easy access facilities to practice.

Relationships to green/blue spaces and the environment

Summary:

- While environmental issues weren't always top priority for young people, they still often valued nature and assumed the need for green behaviours, especially in relation to transport and pollution.
- Wilder natural spaces like forests, coasts and woodlands were appreciated in rural areas for offering calm, escape and emotional regulation, though some young people found them lacking in social or recreational value.
- Parks in towns and cities were seen as vital but often poorly maintained, unsafe, or misused; impacting how, and whether, young people used them. Girls frequently reported feeling unsafe in parks due to harassment or lack of lighting, while boys also raised concerns about isolation and crime.
- Despite these issues, young people widely recognised that green and blue spaces support mental health, physical wellbeing and social connection—especially when they are free, accessible, and well-kept.
- Young people expressed a desire for a diverse range of well-maintained green/blue spaces, including both wild and urban nature, alongside more environmental education to better understand nature's role in climate resilience and community health.

While environmental issues were not always at the forefront of young people's minds and their discussions, they nevertheless still often recognised, valued and prioritised nature, green/blue spaces and environmental issues when planning and building their places across the different focus group locations and regions.

On multiple occasions, young people took for granted the need for 'green' behaviours that would be more environmentally friendly and mitigate harmful aspects of climate change. This was often spoken

about in relation to transport. For example, in Brighton a group added 'trams' to their place as they said it was a more environmentally friendly form of transport. There was often also an acceptance that cars could be polluting and harmful and in an ideal world they wouldn't be needed.

This was slightly different from our London focus groups, where "although some young people were concerned about pollution in London's blue spaces, we had no explicit mention of climate change or cards related to environmental concerns. This is in keeping with literature on climate change anxiety which suggests that people have a finite capacity to worry, meaning that for young people fearing for their immediate safety, climate change may not be top of their list of concerns (Whitemarsh, 2011)" (Harris et al. 2024, p.34).

With issues of ontological security being more varied in these focus groups across England, Scotland and Wales, relationships to nature also varied and care for the environment was generally articulated as a social good, with some young people being more explicitly environmental. For example, in Swansea, one young person noted: "They all (political parties) attack things we care about deeply like the environment". Nevertheless, the kind of nature discussed and valued did vary according to location and seemed to vary depending on whether young people lived in urban, suburban and rural locations. At times, these relationships to the environment could be contested and debated.

Wild spaces

In some locations, young people discussed the value of 'wilder' nature spaces such as forests, hills, lakes and reservoirs where they felt they could 'escape' to or find peace and quiet. This was mostly in the places where young people had more direct access to and experience of these places.

For example in Swansea young people told us they value being near the ocean as well as having access to woodlands. In Kirkcaldy, some young people preferred spaces like forests and coastal paths to parks and more suburban green spaces, which they saw as more polluted or run down. They suggested: "Less parks, more outdoor education". They also valued having wildlife and experiences of 'nature' nearby - discussing environmental issues such as deforestation:

"like they talk about [deforestation] in like the bigger forests, but even in like the smaller areas there's still a lot of it. And I just, I don't see the point in it like for crops and things. Like there's thousands of acres of fields like in open areas that are not being used so they can use them instead of like taking away the trees that squirrels can live in.... I think it was yesterday I saw a squirrel and I like audibly screamed. [It gives me] so much joy. We seen the squirrels like chasing each other up the trees. That was like my favourite thing".

Animals and wildlife were discussed at various locations, particularly in the more rural and suburban areas. In Brora, a group highlighted the importance of vets and rescue and wildlife rehabilitation centres, and another group prioritised a 'peaceful place' for relaxation and nature observation and bird watching, while in Swansea groups made various animals for their forest out of arts and crafts materials to represent the animals they enjoy seeing in the woods.

'Wilder' spaces were seen by young people as important to help them feel calmer, emotionally regulate and behave better - as was discussed in the Brighton focus group. They expressed self-awareness in recognising the need for them to have open, outdoor spaces where they could let off

energy. Although, they recognised the limits of these spaces to fulfil their social and cultural lives. For example, in Brora young people discussed that while the views of hills and scenery were nice, “they get boring quite quickly and there is not much else to do”. In Kirkcaldy when discussing lochs, they felt similar:

YP1: Sometimes they're pretty to look at, but it's like - yeah, I pass that every day.

YP2: It's less of a social space.

YP1: Yeah. I wouldn't really sit around the lake. I mean, I look, there's some water...

In London, ‘wilder’ green and blue spaces were seen by some as something that should be outside the city. Additionally, some young people saw natural spaces such as rivers as polluted, dirty and unappealing: “In London our blue spaces are not really blue...they're brown” (Young Person, Manor House).

This rejection, particularly, of ‘blue spaces’ including waterways, rivers, lakes, reservoirs also recurred in focus groups outside of London. For example, in Brighton one table suggested getting rid of lakes and rivers but decided to keep the sea in their place. Another group couldn't see the value in these spaces for their social and cultural lives:

“But I don't get - I don't get what the point of a river with this is. Stairwells, we need stairwells.” - Brighton

Adam: You don't need them rivers. If it's for water...you can just go to the shop and get water.

Researcher: ...okay. And what about, things like, gardens?

Adam: Because if you're growing food in the garden, you could just like, yeah, just go to shop there.

Researcher: So you wouldn't want to, like, play in the garden or hang out in the garden?

Adam: Oh, no, you could just go to the apartment.

Young people could often be practical and straightforward in their approach to these spaces which they didn't relate to or enjoy. In Brora, for example, one young person noted ““Please not a lake, they just flood”. However, these experiences varied greatly and in Leeds when talking about why they need lakes and wildlife, one young person noted:

“Animals and biodiversity is important, and then it's a way to do social gathering or just like, go outside, rather be inside. It's nice to go on walks, it's very important, and we need plants to, like, thrive and survive. So it's like, we could be helping the plants around. And it's like, you know, obviously we use trees to breathe and what if the trees need us? Think about that”.

Parks and urban natures

Young people living in cities such as Leeds, Hull and also towns such as Banbury and Kirkcaldy, were more likely to discuss the importance of parks and accessible green/blue spaces in urban and suburban areas. They highlighted how it is critical for them that these spaces are well-maintained, clean, well-lit and landscaped in a way to be aesthetically pleasing. It was clear that these factors could define whether they would use a space or not, and there was also a lot of discussion if parks don't

have these elements, they don't feel safe or pleasant. Some of these conflicting feelings and varying issues were discussed in Kirkcaldy:

"Where I live there's not a lot...there's one park near where I live [that] is covered in broken glass and has like needles and stuff in it, so. And that's the only park for a while."

"I know where I live they get used, but not the way they're supposed to get used. Like they just get wrecked. So sometimes I think they just get bored of everything. So they just wreck things"

"Cuz where I live in the park, one of the climbing frames was rotting so the council took it away and didn't replace it with anything"

"I think the parks and the woods and the forests we have around Kirkcaldy and Fife are enough. And I don't feel like we need any more shared gardens because we have lots of places to go and be outside and be in. Whether there's loads of walking paths, there's five coastal paths..."

"I feel like if we fix the parks then they just get ruined again"

The ambivalent experience of green spaces was also mentioned in Swansea by Zoe during the findings workshop:

"there's a lot of green nature-based spaces....we have a lot of parks, we have a lot of like forestry areas where teenagers will hang out and some people will do drugs. On the other hand, you get the beautiful areas you hang out in and then you get people who will use them for malicious purposes"

Despite the value of parks for young people, they were in particular seen to hold various risks and dangers from others which could be heightened when they were not well maintained. This experience was particularly (although not exclusively) gendered, with girls highlighting the threat they feel from unknown men and boys in these spaces:

"I've been in the parks and with my friends and we had teenage boys yelling profanities at us"
- Swansea (findings workshop)

"it's really like you have to be like, you're like on the edge everywhere where you're around here. But I don't want to feel like I have to be on the edge. I want to feel like I can go to the park and not be afraid of having someone pop round the bush or someone go round the gate or something. I want to be able to sit there and just have a good time with my friends" - Emily, 13, Banbury (findings workshop)

Boys also felt unsafe in parks particularly when they were dark and isolated, as Evan reflected on a discussion between himself and another boy:

"...they tend to get super dark. They don't have any lamp posts or anything like that. So especially in winter, where it gets like earlier, you know, there's some light and CCTV there, because usually as well, like crimes will be happening in parks" - Leeds

Despite these challenging experiences and fears, young people still highlighted the benefits and importance of parks and green spaces when they are well maintained for their wellbeing, mental and physical health and social/cultural life, particularly as they are free and open public spaces that young people can go to when they can't go anywhere else.

"The whole green space thing, it's positive. It promotes positive mental health, and it's a place for people to get together for social gatherings. And it's good for the wildlife and biodiversity as well. It's really important to us" - Leeds

"And then you also have just general community-oriented spaces in Swansea, which I find quite nice like we do have Castle Gardens which is an area of town which is just a big open space where you'll often have people preaching and playing music and it's quite a hub in Swansea" - Swansea

These were echoed in the London focus groups:

"We have a park so it's good for your mental health to spend time in nature plus you get more reason to go outside rather than spending time at home"

"We also have a park plus a leisure place because although we need to focus on our mental health and physical health, we also need a lot of like free time doing stuff that makes us happy"

"Parks are just fun. I mean, dude, who doesn't like it? Parks are important for your social life - for meeting people - for picnics!"

Scan the QR Code or follow this [link](#) to view a short 'vox pop' video of young participants discussing the importance of having well maintained green and ecological spaces in their local area.



In both London (Woodberry Down) and Hull young people designed their city around green/blue spaces - with a river and a lake being the focal points of their places articulated as places that people would gather, and houses would be built alongside (**figure 14**). Highlighting the importance of blue/green infrastructures to social and cultural infrastructure and the importance of seeing the two relationally.



Figure 14, Left group in Manor House built their city around a river and a tree, right, a group in Hull built their place including 'mushroom' houses around a lake with a bridge

Overall, the varying experiences of green/blue spaces and some dismissal in particular of blue spaces, not only indicates the importance of maintenance and care for local, particularly urban, natures but also of environmental and outdoor education - in helping young people to better understand increasingly prevalent issues around climate adaptation and conservation. Young people require a variety of green/blue spaces - both more manicured and well-maintained parks - but also 'wilder' spaces that may support independence, freedom and wellbeing.

Aspiration and Contextual Environment

Summary:

- Aspirational infrastructure differed by place: London youth valued symbolic markers of success (e.g. airports, penthouses, galleries), while young people elsewhere focused on more modest, practical resources suited to their local context.
- Education was universally prioritised but widely seen as inadequate, schools described as outdated, unsupportive, or even "like prison", with demand for alternative learning spaces and better teachers.
- Employment opportunities were scarce; young people faced barriers such as needing experience to get a job but being unable to gain that first role. Casual work and careers advice were especially valued.
- Political and cultural engagement varied: in places with more youth-focused infrastructure (e.g. London, Leeds, Swansea) young people seemed more engaged. In some areas young people sought political involvement but felt excluded or ignored.
- Feeling de-prioritised was common: many young people believed their areas catered more to older people or tourists, leaving them with fewer opportunities, resources, and a diminished sense of belonging.

- Context shaped aspirations: larger cities fostered broader goals, while smaller or deprived areas tended to encourage modest or symbolic ambitions. Trust in institutions, exposure to training, and intersectional experiences influenced how young people imagined their futures.

From our London phase of work, a key finding was that young people in the capital valued what we termed 'aspirational infrastructure.' We used this term to refer to places and things that they wouldn't use day to day but that inspired them for their futures. For example, young people at London focus groups made cards that included 'airports' (most didn't travel frequently but they wanted to one day), 'penthouse apartments' (one young person said he'd like to buy his mum a penthouse apartment when he was older) and 'art galleries' (not to visit currently but to exhibit future work in when they were successful artists).

In our national phase of work we were interested to see how aspirational infrastructure featured in different areas of the UK. However what we found was, on the whole, very different. While young people in London rarely discarded a card and wanted things they wouldn't currently use, young people elsewhere were much more modest when selecting and creating cards. Interestingly, they were often thinking about what was appropriate for the character of their local area. For example in Brora young people said there 'wasn't space' for a cinema, explaining that they felt it would change the quality of the village. They also discarded tennis courts, cafes and supermarkets because they already had one of each. It wasn't that young people in Brora were content with what was in their area currently (they did have things to add including a 'proper chippy' a 'boxing gym', a 'pool' and various fast-food outlets), but they felt that having multiple versions of things, or things that they wouldn't routinely access, wasn't necessary. They were happy to travel to bigger nearby settlements like Inverness to go to the cinema or use an airport. Similarly in Kirkcaldy young people were happy to travel to Edinburgh for the airport or to see shows. In Brighton young people discarded things on the basis that they didn't already have it locally and/or hadn't tried it before. When confronted with the 'snowboarding' card one young person commented 'well, we don't have it here, just chuck it.' This mindset was notably different to London where young people were keen to have new experiences, to have more versions of resources already accessible to them, and to have things as local as possible (in our Peckham focus group one young person commented that if something wasn't directly in Peckham it was essentially inaccessible to them).

However, despite these variations in how much and what kind of infrastructure young people wanted locally, we found a key commonality in what young people *did* want in order to further their aspirations. In all our focus groups young people valued and wanted to improve infrastructures for education. Almost all the young people we worked with were currently attending school or college.

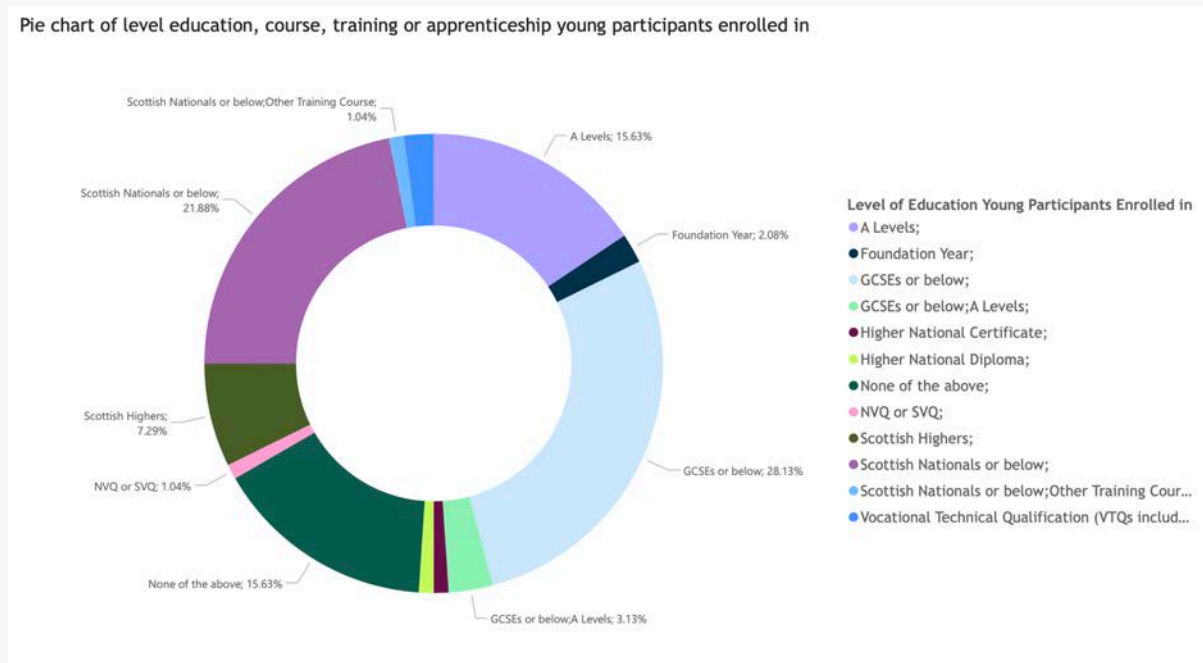


Figure 15, Pie chart indicating count of participant level/enrolment qualification in education

In our survey, only two young people indicated that they didn't currently attend an educational institution. However, young people routinely felt that the education they currently had access to wasn't adequate. For example in Brora one young person decided to 'build a teacher' out of plasticine, commenting that they didn't know how to do their homework because their real teacher wasn't "very good". In Hull young people told us their school felt 'like prison' and in Leeds young people deemed the education system outdated and unsupportive.

"We also thought that places of learning were also important, but it's like specifically not schools, because it, you know, schools are not always the best for like, you know, with students' mental health and stuff. So we've put, you know, places of learning, but not a formal school setting" (Leeds)

Young people in Banbury also identified schools as 'not modern' or 'the best way to learn.' In Swansea, young people at the sixth form college (through which we organised the focus group) seemed content with the education there but said that schools were worse outside of Swansea (e.g. in the neighbouring town of Llanelli) including because students were more disruptive and because schools don't encourage students to be themselves.

When it came to infrastructure to support aspirations, young people across our focus groups also felt a lack of infrastructure for getting jobs, noting a vicious cycle of needing experience to get a job but not being able to get the first job that would constitute that experience.

"They want experienced people, and we can't get experience" (Swansea)

Young participants having a job was more common in bigger cities such as Leeds (**figure 16**) and, for obvious reasons, among the older participants of our focus groups. Only 18.4% of the young people we worked with across our focus groups had a job of some kind, a figure consistent with a national decline in the numbers of teenagers undertaking paid work (Booth, 2020). A 2020 article by the Guardian suggests this decline is due to teenagers wanting to start work later because they know they will work for longer as retirement ages are pushed back, but we found that many young people want to work but are unable to get those opportunities. One young person in Swansea had been working in a nursery for two years but still found that experience insufficient to access secure work and was now planning to take a zero-hour contract job during their gap year. Where young people did have jobs, they saw this as a positive experience. Another young person in Swansea talked about how their older brother enjoys working in cafes and bars and how a friend ‘works in a youth centre’ and ‘loves working there.’

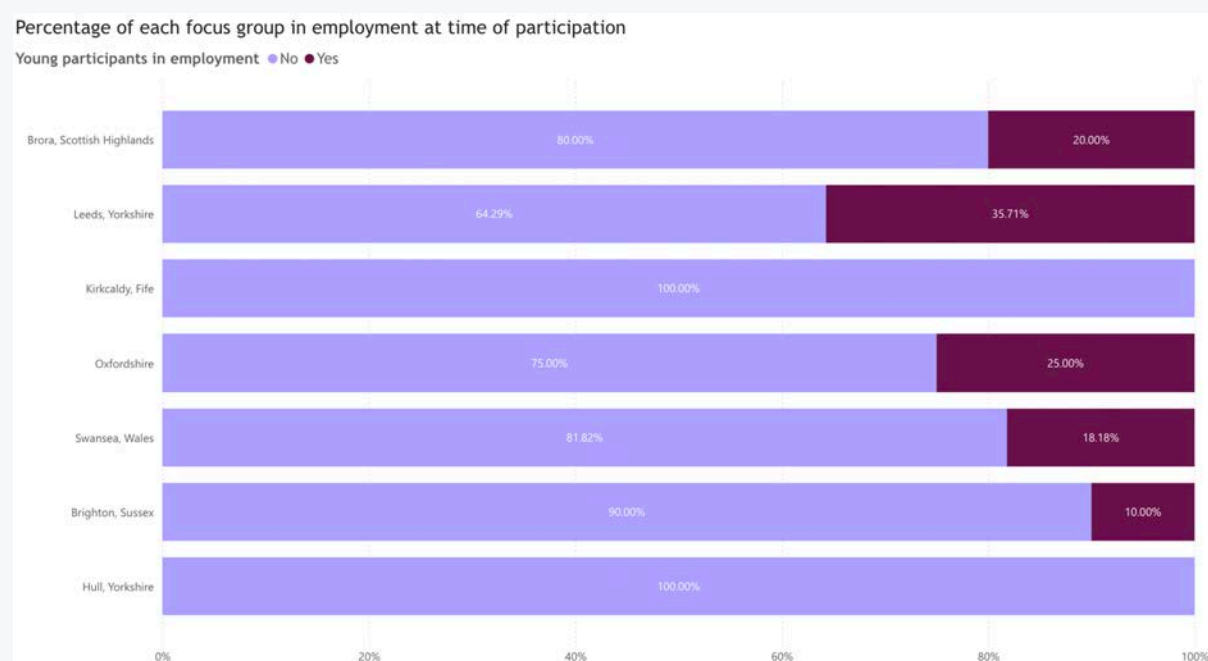


Figure 16, Stacked bar chart indicating % of young people in employment for each focus group

In Kirkcaldy, one table added a ‘job centre’ card, acknowledging the need for better access to work in their area and in Banbury many young people wrote variations of ‘get a job’ on the list of goals we asked them to write down before the workshop started. Young people wanted casual jobs like bartending, which they found there weren’t enough of, but they were also thinking about careers and intellectual development. In Swansea young people had a conversation about how lack of opportunities meant that people in Swansea were becoming less ambitious, especially intellectually. One young person in Swansea reflected that there was no point getting a job because AI would take everything over soon anyway, while others talked about the importance of careers advice services like Careers Advice Wales and added a card for ‘Careers Advisor’. In Leeds the ‘test your place’ stage of our workshop prompted young people to reflect on needing an ‘additional stream of income’ to ensure financial stability. Across locations, then there was a perceived need to be able to access work but also an awareness that these opportunities were not readily available.

Some young people associated the lack of job opportunities with a feeling that they weren't the priority in their local areas. For example young people living in the Mumbles area of Swansea said that the area is more focused on the needs of elderly people and 'because of that there's less opportunities for jobs and to mix with people.' In Brora, young people also felt unprioritized, noting that local infrastructures were more catered to an older demographic and/or to tourists.

We found that in bigger cities that had more youth focused infrastructure (London, Leeds and to some extent Swansea) young people spoke more about future aspirations and had a clearer sense of their future goals. One of the exceptions to this was Banbury where, despite it being a reasonably small town, the young people we worked with had clear goals including having plans to win competitions such as 'Blackpool international dance group', apply to specific university courses, get particular jobs and even achieve specific things in those jobs such as 'change laws around child protection.' This may, however, have been down to how we recruited for this focus group, as many of the young people in attendance had taken a social work course run by one of the facilitating adults.

In Swansea, despite feeling that there was not enough youth focused infrastructure, young people remained ambitious to be involved in decision making including at a Party-political level. Some of the groups were already involved with youth politics, specifically with Welsh party Plaid Cymru and felt that the party was not doing enough to engage young people and instead filled with 'old biddies' who set the political agenda. They felt that more young people in parliament would lead to better decision making and were frustrated that the council addresses surface level issues like 'vandalism and road safety but not deeper issues like toxic masculinity.' As one young person put it 'the youth are cast aside... let's look at these old men who don't know anything' (Swansea).

However young people in Swansea also acknowledged a feedback loop by which 'they're [politicians] not going to listen unless we participate, but we're not going to participate if they don't listen.' The group had an interesting and nuanced debate about whether or not there were a lack of ways for young people to get involved in politics or if it was an issue of not knowing how to find those opportunities. One young person gave an impromptu list of ways you can get involved in local politics including writing to MPs, talking to counsellors, joining queer youth groups and attending Swansea pride. Another pointed out that you can now vote at 16 in local elections.

On balance, then, we found that aspirational infrastructures outside of London are perceived differently by young people, with the focus being more on practical resources for education, employment and political engagement than on symbolic markets of achievement like penthouse apartments, gallery shows or international travel. This is reflected in cards added across these focus groups including 'Youth Politics Spaces and Info', 'Alternative Learning Venues' and 'Better Education.' We also found that young people's expectations and desires for what they wanted in their area correlated to the size and nature of their settlements. Additionally, we saw a trend where young people in areas with more youth specific infrastructure were more engaged culturally and politically and often better able to articulate their future ambitions.

These variations in how young people imagine and articulate aspiration may also relate to how 'ontologically secure' they feel. In our London phase of work we found that many young people felt ontologically insecure, an experience which is associated with reduced sense of agency. As Plage et al. explain, "In conditions of ontological insecurity, a person is prevented from acting meaningfully on the

present, because what the future holds is in doubt.” (Plage et al. 2023). For young people, experience and awareness of the housing crisis, cost of living crisis and climate crisis, as well as fears for their immediate safety, understandably lead to a lack of faith in a better future and difficulty in imagining the steps that might lead to a better future. Arguably, this is reflected in the more symbolic markers of future success that some young people in London often cited. Some of the young people from our London focus group in Manor House had symbolic aims to buy their mum a ‘penthouse apartment’ or ‘travel the world’ but no clear sense of how they’d get there, whereas in Banbury young people had detailed plans including higher education pathways, goals to win particular sports competitions, and identified volunteering opportunities.



Figure 17, Young person in Hull holds up a ‘university’ card

Variations in ability to imagine the future perhaps also relates to differing levels of trust in institutions. In Banbury many of the young people we met had experienced adversity, including, for example, caring for disabled parents, yet their sense of possibility was strong, potentially because of the experience some of them had had of undertaking training in social work and, from this, their trust in institutions and systems to improve material conditions for themselves and others. Similarly in Swansea, young people had many worries and grievances but also saw the possibility of educational and political institutions delivering change. They spoke about getting involved in local politics and campaigning and cited successful examples they knew of such as a campaign for a new skate park that had gained traction and won. In contrast, young people in Hull had very low faith in institutions

including schools, the government and articulated much more modest and insular goals such as to 'gain weight', be 'in bed' more and 'actually use' their oven alongside more symbolic goals, similar to those expressed in London, such as to 'race round Abu Dhabi race track' or 'move abroad.'

This is, of course, a generalisation; no two young people's experiences of perceptions were the same and there was significant variation within focus groups. As well as place, background and intersectional identities impacted young people's experiences and plans. For example, one recent migrant to the UK in our Swansea focus group spoke about how, as a newcomer to Wales, she felt better able to recognise and appreciate opportunities than some of her peers. We also found a clear difference in sense of engagement with social and cultural infrastructure according to whether older students (16-18) were at sixth forms studying A Levels or equivalent (as most young people were in Alpertown in London and Swansea, see **figure 18**) or whether they were taking more vocational courses (as most were in Brighton), which likely maps onto differences in academic attainment and class.

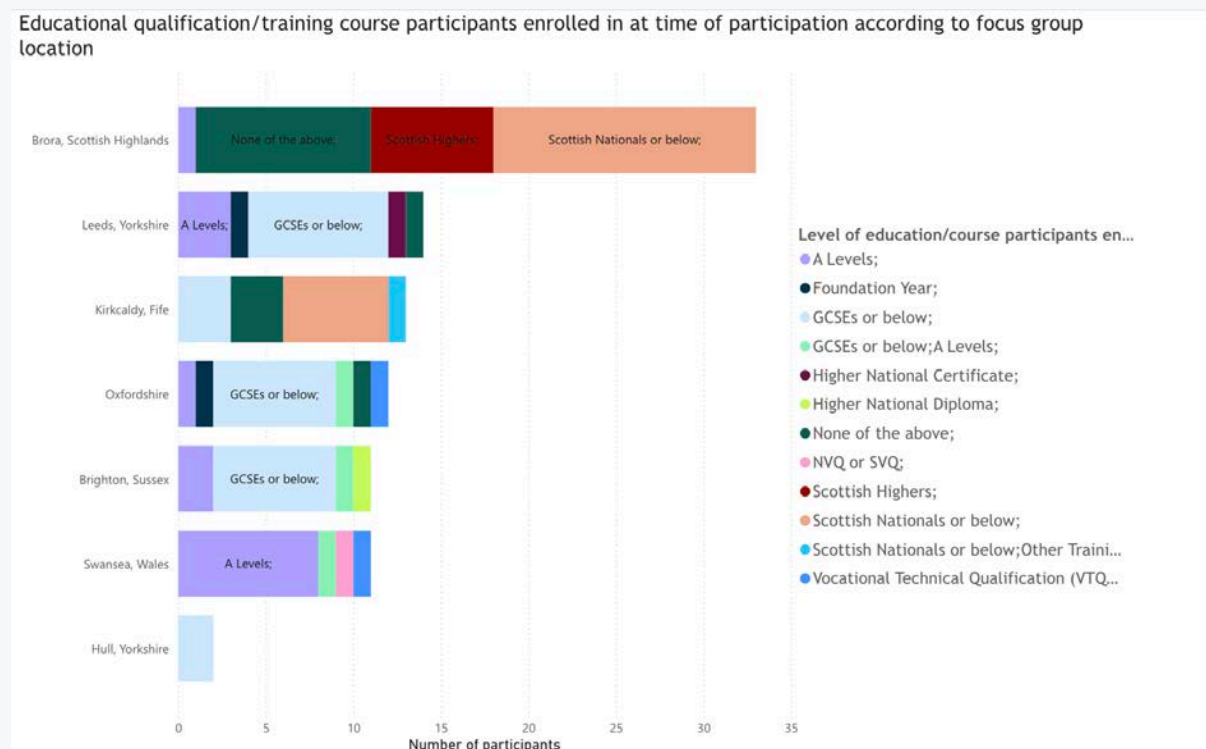


Figure 18, stacked bar chart showing responses to the survey question “what level of education, course, training or apprenticeship are you currently enrolled in?” according to focus group location

Equity and inclusion

Summary:

- Young people consistently prioritised inclusion and equity, envisioning places that are accessible, affordable, and supportive for all—especially for marginalised groups such as refugees, the elderly, and those facing mental health challenges.
- Despite varied backgrounds, many young people supported cultural diversity and recognised the role of religious spaces in fostering community care—though views on religion's place in society were mixed and often context-dependent.
- There was a strong call for age-appropriate spaces and activities, as young people often felt excluded from adult or child-centric environments, with cultural and social venues seen as increasingly inaccessible.
- Youth emphasised the need for infrastructure that supports different identities—discussing the importance of sports teams for girls and non-binary young people, LGBTQ+ spaces, and neurodiversity-aware environments.
- For infrastructure to be inclusive, young people suggested implementing flexible opening hours and even 24/7 availability, with places like gyms and youth centres recognised as valuable social spaces, especially during evenings.
- Young people embraced an ethic of care and resource-sharing, echoing ideas of infrastructure as a “commons” that should support collective wellbeing, solidarity, and community resilience.

As has been highlighted, young people across locations highly prioritised creating inclusive and accessible places - with the cards 'equality' and 'justice' being highly ranked by many groups. In Banbury, for example, a young person in the younger age group (13-15) placed the equality card on top of all their chosen cards and said: “The equality card goes on everything”.

Figure 19, Left, Equality card placed on top of the other selected and created cards, Banbury focus group



Similarly, when young people from the older 16-18 cohort in Banbury presented their place, they explained that in 'our place...everything's accessible and everything is affordable and everything is inclusive, so everyone has access to what they need when they need it including mental health services and food banks and education and enrichment.' In Leeds, there was a focus on what makes a good place for everyone with young people taking an altruistic approach and food banks were also discussed with a particular recognition of inclusion through affordability.

Young people had genuine concerns for different marginalised groups that are not always adequately supported in society, and while building their ideal places they made clear they wanted these places to be welcoming and supportive of everyone, often creating cards for the elderly, disabled or those in need of refuge, including refugees and asylum seekers, people fleeing domestic abuse or creating rehab centres for those struggling with addiction. In Swansea, one group discussed slow improvements in accessibility in their area and talked about the need for accessible swings in children's play parks. Their views aligned broadly with Lauren Berlant's argument for seeing infrastructures as 'commons'. She suggests 'the commons is an action concept that acknowledges a broken world and the survival ethics of a transformational infrastructure' (2016, p.399). Many young people identified the need to share resources and develop an ethics of care when building their place.

As well as valuing social inclusion, on a number of occasions, young people valued and talked about the importance of cultural inclusion and diversity - appreciating having opportunities to meet and spend time with people who were different from themselves and experiencing unfamiliar cultures as discussed in Hull:

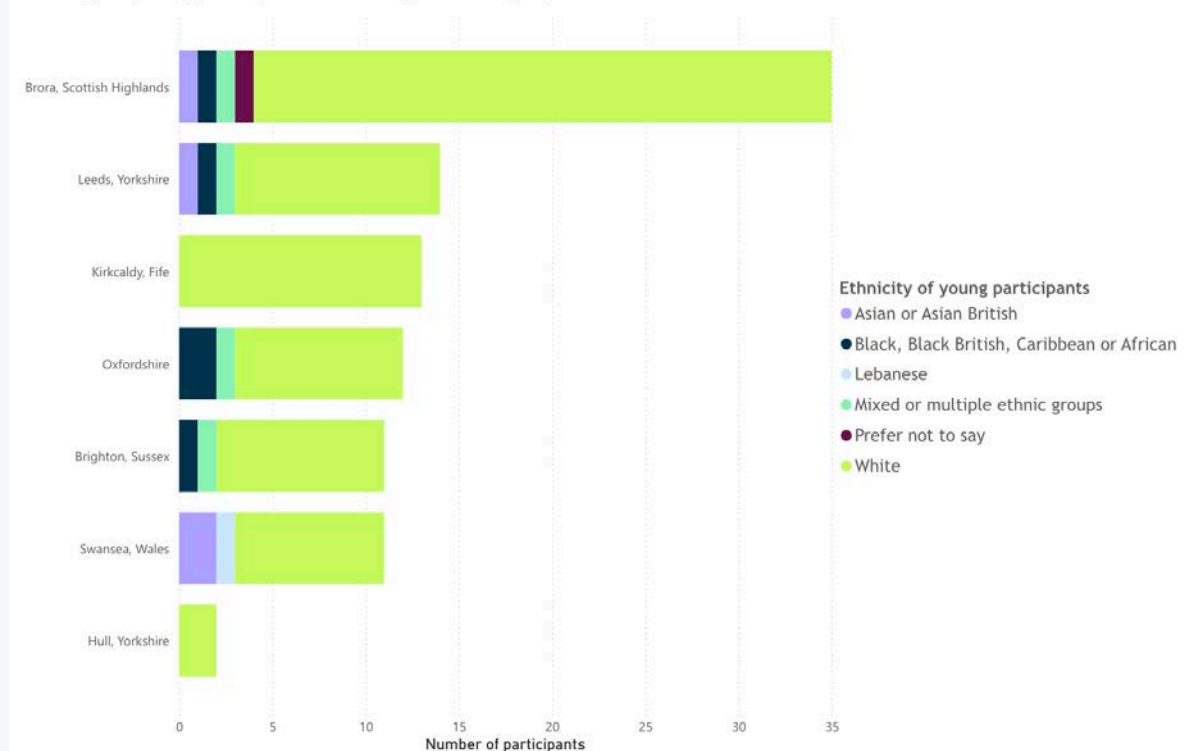
Izzy - [I'd like there to be more] community areas to like, you know... like how London has got like areas, split up into different streets. Have that but in Hull so they've got like, more like areas that say, like areas that focus on one group and everything. So, like, you know how they got, like, Chinatown, have stuff like that, but in the different parts of Hull,
Debbie – So some more recognisable cultural places where everyone can meet
Izzy - Yeah

Izzy later went on to present some of her arts and crafts creations including a person she'd made to represent "togetherness between the communities" and a lake where people could come together. Interestingly, Hull is less ethnically diverse than the national average⁵ and this was reflected in the focus group participants for this group (**figure 20**)⁶. However, despite perhaps less experiences of multiculturalism compared to bigger cities like Leeds or London, cultural cohesion was still recognised and prioritised by young people which may be in part a response to the far-right anti-immigration riots that happened in 2024 that were discussed in the focus group.

⁵ In 2021, 16.1% (43,051) of usual residents in Hull identified as a Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic (BAME) group (which includes white, but non-British, residents). This compares to 26.5% nationally ([Hull City Council](#)).

⁶ The focus group participants for this group were all of White ethnicity. Although it was also our smallest focus group with only 4 young people and 2 youth workers in attendance, so this is not surprising given the sample size.

Ethnicity of young participants according to focus group location

**Figure 20,** Stacked bar chart indicating ethnicity of young participants according to focus group location

For the most part though, cultural diversity was not explicitly discussed but valued through proxies such as food, with young people in some locations stressing how they wanted variety of food options including “giant noodles”, kebabs or other restaurants: “We have a lot of fast food so it’d be nice to have cafes and restaurants that aren’t fast food”- Swansea.

Young person: This is what Hull needs a massive noodle shop – that makes jumbo noodles!

Youth worker: I think Hull needs more independently owned restaurants

**Figure 21,** Right, Arts and crafts used to make food items including noodles and pizza in Hull focus group

Religion was also a proxy to talk about cultural diversity and inclusion. Spaces of worship were cards that were very often kept by the young people and acknowledged as important across locations despite the majority of participants not being religious themselves (**figure 22**). In Brighton, for example, a teacher summarised discussions by one group:

“I think this group, when I was listening to them, they found the benefit in keeping everything but just making it better... They didn't want to get rid of things [even] that they wouldn't use. Like places of worship, for instance”.

In Swansea, one group of young people talked about wanting places to meet people including ‘more religious places.’ Although this approach was common and was also reflected in our London focus groups, it wasn't universal as in Kirkcaldy, when explaining why they got rid of the card ‘places of worship’, they explained:

”because it wasn't important to us. I know to some people, it can be very important and it's part of their culture. But for me, I'm into magical flying creatures and Spider Man”.

Religion of young participants according to focus group location

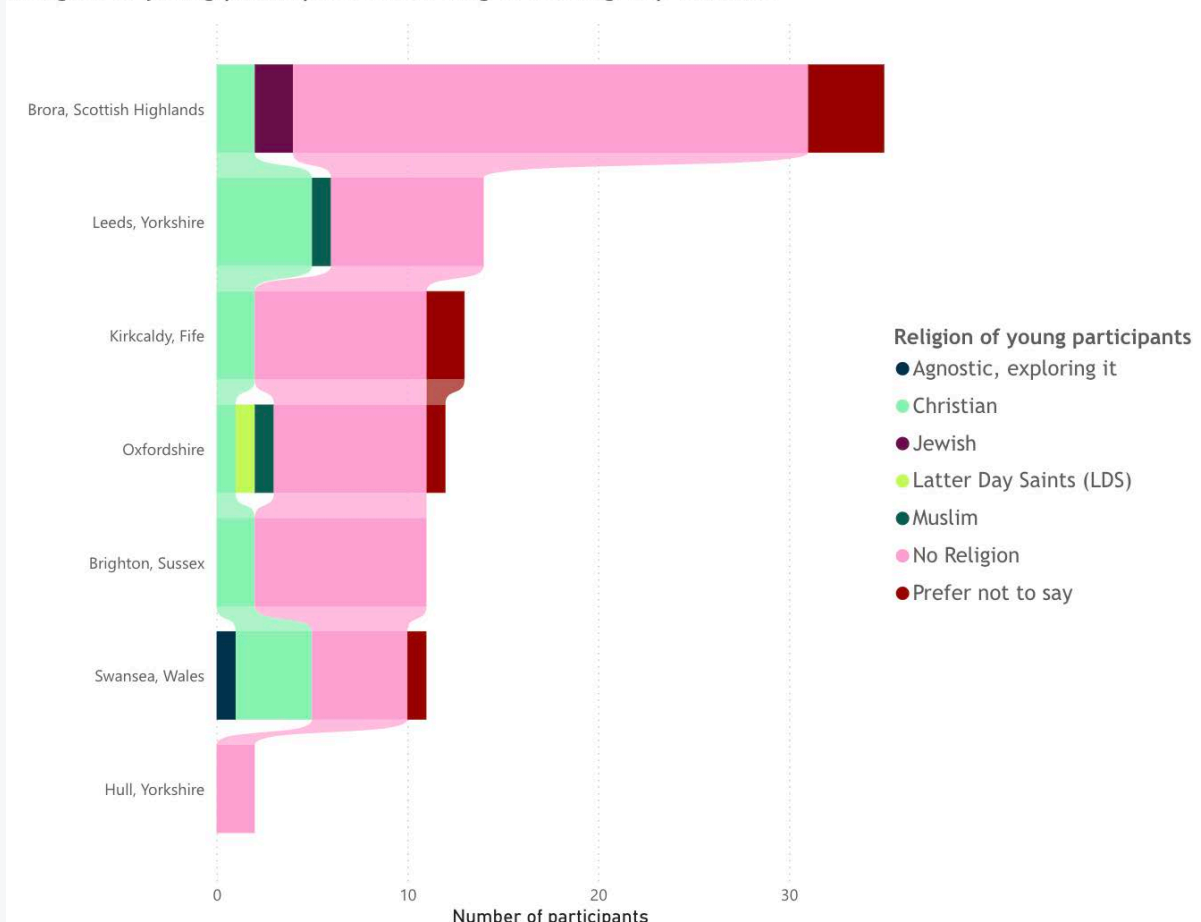


Figure 22, Ribbon bar chart indicating religion of participants according to focus group location

Equally in London, there was one young person who 'wanted to discard the 'spaces of worship' card because 'religion divides society.' These contributions problematise the notion that infrastructure can be easily categorised as good or bad, emphasising the subjectivity of experience' (Harris et al., 2024, p.41).

In Banbury, young people discussed the role of mosques, churches and synagogues in their town in doing community work where other community spaces and services are lacking. Sofia discussed:

"a lot of the places of worship are really cool, like the church here, you always have really nice stuff going on. The mosques always collect food like [they have a] food bank... St Mary's Church, that has like the craft fair, all that stuff. So I think all the ones we have do loads of stuff in the community, but then, like, we need more, for like the rest of the community as well".

Here she is referring to a discussion that they don't have many synagogues in their town, although they do have a small Jewish community. She goes on to reflect on how she values religious spaces being inclusive and open and reflects on the church which is the venue for the focus group:

"I think they're for all religions as well. So like, I'm a Muslim, but I always come here, I used to help out and hang out in the gardens, and the mosque is always open to everybody. It's open to children and the youth. So I think they're all like really lovely spaces"

Her comments reflect a long history of religious spaces filling the gaps of a lack of community and third spaces that provide social care and support and cultural activity. Banbury notably lacks a dedicated youth-only space and one of the 'detached' youth workers helping at the session discussed how they are campaigning to get a youth centre in town at the moment, to which a young person responds, "I think it would be very helpful!".

While inclusive religious spaces can be valuable and fulfilling for young people, there is also a tension between wanting religious spaces that are accessible and the reality that some spaces (e.g. synagogues) require a high level of security and so won't be easily accessible to everyone. Consequently, there is a need for dedicated youth spaces with trained staff to support young people's wellbeing. Young people discussed this across focus groups - highlighting the importance of inclusion and equality in these spaces: "[We want] youth centres, which we think equality is important in" - Kirkcaldy. As well as in schools and other spaces specifically for young people: "There definitely needs to be equality in schools - there's a divide between the haves and the have nots" - Swansea

This generally reflected young people's need for age specific activities as well as spaces. In Kirkcaldy, young people were frustrated about having to share spaces with adults and they recognised adult infrastructures are not appropriate for them, nor are ones designed for children under 12 or so. In many locations, young people lamented having to share spaces with younger children or worse not have any activities available to them, for example in cultural spaces like museums or music venues, as they were only available for adults or young children. In Leeds, there were discussions on music venues now being less accessible for 16-18-year-olds as previous events that allowed 16- and 17-year-olds are no longer running and how much these events were missed.

They also discussed the importance of having these spaces open at different times. To make places more inclusive, young people often used the “Open 24 hours” activation card and talked about how opening hours could be restrictive and mean accessible safe spaces may close early and leave people with nowhere to go. In Swansea, young people commented that 24-hour gyms would give them ‘a way to talk to people’, noting the sociability of gyms as a space to be in the evenings.

As well as age, ethnicity and religion, other identities were discussed as a key to recognise in creating inclusive infrastructures including disability, sexuality and gender. In particular, they discussed how activities, sports and gyms should be inclusive to all genders and also support girls’ teams where they may not exist. As well as a more general need for LGBTQ+ spaces and services and support for neurodiversity (see healthcare and support section).

“Ideal Places” vs Pragmatic Realities

Summary:

- There was a tension between sustainability vs convenience when it came to transport. Young people wanted greener transport (e.g. trams, better public transport, charging points) but also asked for free Ubers and easier driving lessons due to unreliable and unsafe public transport.
- While fast food was criticised as unhealthy, it was often the only affordable, welcoming place to socialise. Young people wished for healthier cafes/restaurants but felt excluded or unwelcome in existing ones.
- In Brora, enthusiasm for fast food reflected a desire to connect with mainstream teenage culture, while elsewhere young people felt oversaturated with it.
- Social media was seen as harmful to mental health and unsafe, yet also valued for peer communication, education, and access to current affairs.
- Young people recognised that current infrastructures fail to support healthy, sustainable lives, leaving them stuck between their ideals and the practical options available.

We found tensions in young people’s desires between things they thought of as being better for their physical and mental wellbeing and things that were convenient, immediately gratifying or easier for them to access.

For example, young people’s concern for environmental sustainability came out in some of their comments on transport. In many locations young people were against having an airport locally for environmental reasons, preferring to travel to the nearest existing airport. In Brighton, one table added trams to their imagined place because they’re ‘more environmentally friendly’ and in Swansea young people talked about the environment as something they ‘care deeply about’ and are frustrated at governments for inaction on, adding electric car charging stations and better public transport accordingly. However, despite this ideal, young people also added cards asking for free Ubers and easier access to driving lessons and tests. In the context of infrequent, unreliable and unsafe public transport, the practicalities of getting around safely came into conflict with their ideals for more environmentally friendly travel.



Figure 23, Young people in Brora made multiple cards indicating they wanted a KFC in their areas

A similar conflict was apparent in their attitudes to food. Fast food was a hotly debated card in most of our focus groups, with many tables rejecting it on the basis that it's unhealthy. Brora was the only place where young people were unproblematically enthusiastic about fast food. As a very small and remote town, there are no chain fast food restaurants locally and young people told us they have to travel over an hour to Inverness to buy fast food. They wished there was a McDonalds, a KFC, 'an actual good chippie', 'an ice cream shop' and 'somewhere to get Monster' (an energy drink) locally. Our sense was that young people in Brora wanted to feel more connected to mainstream teenage experiences and saw eating fast food and hanging out in fast food centres as typical of what teenagers elsewhere are doing.

In all other areas, young people felt there was already too much fast food and that they would prefer to have new cafes and restaurants with healthier options. However, young people also recognised fast food restaurants as easy places to meet up with friends, citing, for example, Burger King as 'a safe place to just sit, have a conversation' (Kirkcaldy).

'The amount of times that me and my friends have sat in a Burger King' (Kirkcaldy)

Young people dreamt of safe and affordable food outlets where they could spend time with their friends. In Hull and Brora some of the older young people in the groups mentioned pubs as good places to meet up. In Brora they lamented that their local pub had recently been renovated, becoming more of a cafe for tourists than a casual meet up place they felt welcome in. For younger teenagers who couldn't access pubs, the dream was for a '24 hour Starbucks', providing a 'place to go when it's cold and dark' (Kirkcaldy) or a cafe where you can 'really converse' rather than the rushed environment of McDonald's (Swansea). But in the absence of healthy food venues that are affordable and welcoming for young people, fast food centres were a default space to spend time with friends. Chains like McDonalds and Burger King provide spaces where young people can afford to eat

something and can also hang out more comfortably, without worrying about the adult behavioural norms imposed in more upmarket venues (such as the renovated pub young people in Brora were complaining about).

In relation to food, then, young people experienced a conflict between recognising what was good for their health but also recognising that, without fast food centres, it would be difficult to find somewhere affordable and appropriate to spend time. Interestingly, some of the locations where young people wished there were 'cafes and restaurants that aren't fast food', such as Swansea, definitely do have non fast food options. In our London phase of work we found that young people wished that many things existed that actually do exist, such as discounts for young people or activities in art galleries. Similarly, in this phase of work, young people felt that there were no healthy places to eat, even in large cities like Swansea, Leeds and Brighton where most adults would be able to list at least a handful of healthy cafes and restaurants they frequent. The problem then is likely not the unavailability of such places but the fact that young people don't feel that they are for them. This could be partly because stigma towards teenagers means they can be met with suspicion or hostility when visiting traditionally adult spaces (such as healthy cafes or restaurants) en masse. Equally, these places aren't as affordable as fast food, making them off limits to many teenagers.

Another area where idealism and pragmatism caused tension for young people was around social media. Young people were very vocal about experiencing social media as problematic for their mental health.

"I wish I'd never looked at social media in my life" (Brighton)

"Put the gardens [card] back in but then delete social media off the face of the earth" (Brighton)

"We need a guard on social media, it's really bad" (Hull)

Young people worried about whether people they spoke to online were who they said they were and felt that dating apps were unsafe.

However, young people also recognised social media as necessary for communicating with known peers.

"Yeah keep like things that have groups like WhatsApp and Snapchat so you can still like communicate with People" (Brighton)

Interestingly, they also saw social media as a key way in which they keep up with current affairs, explaining that it's necessary 'for education' (Brighton).

"I'll put money on none of you would know who Boris Johnson is without social media" (Brighton)

Some of young people's commentary on technology and its dangers may have been a reflection of the views and fears of their parents and other adults. For example in Banbury they spoke about how

'children nowadays are bored' so they 'turn to technology, like video games...so they're seeing violence as a normal thing..which is why there's such a rise in drugs and crime', an assessment that seems characteristically adult. But regardless there was a strong tension in all the focus groups between valuing digital technology for information sharing and communicating (and even wanting to extend access by having free and widely available wifi, and plug sockets everywhere for their devices) and between recognising social media content in particular as detrimental to their mental health.

Across these examples what seems clear is that young people are aware that the social and cultural infrastructure available to them does not support healthy and sustainable lives on a personal or collective level. They want to prioritise environmental sustainability, eat healthily, promote healthy eating for others and communicate and learn via digital media without encountering unsafe or problematic people or content. But the world is not set up that way for them. Sustainable transport options are infrequent, expensive or dangerous; healthy cafes and restaurants are expensive and/or not designed for teenagers and the devices they have to communicate with each other also feed them dangerous content.

The Influence of Place

Summary:

- There were many commonalities across place. Safety, affordability, and inclusion were the strongest shared concerns, alongside demand for youth-only and affordable hangout spaces. Young people valued healthier food options but often defaulted to fast food as accessible social hubs. Social media was viewed as both necessary and harmful.
- There were also significant differences by place. Levels of trust in institutions, concern for the environment, expectations of local provision, and cultural/political engagement varied significantly by location. Bigger cities fostered more cultural/political activity, while smaller towns like Brora rejected facilities seen as unnecessary. Perceptions of crime also differed, from fear in Hull to normalisation in London and even fascination in Brora.
- We saw variations within as well as across place. Access to wider cultural and social life was shaped by geography, class, and networks. Wealthier young people more often travelled to regional hubs, while others were limited to local provision. Within cities, centrality and awareness (often gained via schools, colleges, or youth workers) strongly influenced engagement.
- We found that identity, including intersectional identity, makes a difference. Religion mattered differently for individuals, sometimes seen as community support, other times divisive. Young people also recognised that class, family background, migration, education, and personal experiences (e.g. bullying) shaped how much peers could access local opportunities.

Having taken this research to places around the country we found that place does have a crucial role to play in young people's views, experiences and ambitions in relation to social and cultural infrastructure. While we found many similarities across locations, each local environment did very much shape the ways in which young people imagined and articulated their social and cultural lives and futures.

Commonalities Across Place

By far the most striking commonality across focus groups was the pervasive worry about safety, including safety on transport. Brora was a stark exception to this but in other locales safety was at the forefront of young people's minds though (as explained above) their fears had different dimensions in different places. Another prevalent concern was affordability, with most focus being on affordability of transport and of food. Also common was a passion for inclusive spaces. This normally centred on inclusion for people with neuro divergences and other disabilities but also extended to inclusion for older people and a desire for more LGBTQI youth spaces. Interestingly, there were few explicit conversations about inclusion from a race or gender perspective at any of our focus groups, although this was implicit in many conversations about safety, where we definitely saw more concern from young women and girls and from black participants.

In terms of the spaces they wanted more and less of, there was consensus on needing more healthy cafes as opposed to more fast food, with the exception of Brora where young people didn't have fast food locally and wished they did. There was also a generalised enthusiasm for youth clubs and youth focused spaces including in particular sports facilities and free or cheap places to hang out safely after dark. Also recurrent was a desire for teenagers to have their own dedicated spaces where they didn't have to mix with either younger children (Brighton) or adults (Kirkcaldy).

Social media was also a subject where young people had similar experiences across places, with most young people having some degree of worry about its safety and impact on their mental health, even though many also saw its benefits.

Differences by Place

One of the key differences we found was varying levels of trust in institutions including in schools and colleges. In Hull trust was at the lowest we saw, with young people actively planning escape routes from school and saying it felt like 'a prison', while in Banbury it was at its highest, with young people identifying schools as a good place to have more trusted adults like therapists and talking about the importance of social services. In Brighton young people thought 'the police are pretty useless' and in Hull the police made young people feel actively unsafe because 'if it was a safer area, they wouldn't need to do as much patrols and things like that.' In Swansea, on the other hand, young people had complaints about national and local governance but also had enough faith in governance processes to want to be actively involved in political parties.

Concern for the environment and climate change also varied, with some locations (Brighton, Swansea) bringing this up as a key issue while others (Brora, Hull) hardly mentioned it. In these instances age may be an important factor as Brighton and Swansea were the two locations where we worked only with 16-18 year olds. Potentially, environmental issues are not yet a central concern for younger teenagers. Equally though, this variation could be down to education, as the groups in Swansea and Brighton were both recruited at sixth forms, meaning the students there were pursuing higher education.

There were many differences apparent between rural and urban areas. We found that young people in cities tended to be more culturally engaged and more engaged in political issues, due to easier access to cultural activities and more proximity to political events such as protest marches. In Swansea, for example, young people valued having free access to museums (which they noted was

not the case in England) and local music venues and wished that political parties did more to include teenagers. Leeds also valued museums, cinemas and music venues. On the other hand young people in Brora said 'nah' to museums and to the idea of having a local cinema and in Kirkcaldy young people told us they hadn't been to enough museums to be able to pass judgement, although they were enthusiastic about more live music including Scottish dancing. In Banbury some of the older participants were keen on art history museums and local history exhibitions but museums were not as interesting to the younger members of the group. We also found that young people in more rural areas were likely to rely on youth groups for access to youth specific events and activities, whereas in cities it was easier to access spaces and activities for young people independently.

Another key difference was in what kind of things and how much of them young people thought was necessary in their area. We found that this was directly proportionate to how big a place the young people were living in. For example in our London research young people rarely discarded a card, whereas in Brora young people discarded cards including cafes and tennis courts because they already had one in their area. Young people in Brora also rejected the idea of a local cinema, explaining that there wasn't enough 'space' and in places including Fife, Brighton and Banbury young people rejected the idea of a local airport, saying they'd rather travel to existing airports. This suggests that young people's sense of what they should have access to locally is determined to a large extent by the existing character of the area. While young people might value activities (like cinema visits or international travel) they're willing to access these outside of their immediate settlement in order to preserve the character of that place.



Figure 24, A large group of young people attended our focus group in Brora, perhaps a testament to the rarity of such opportunities in the area.

Attitudes to crime also varied by place, in line with how used to it young people were. In Hull, as we've discussed, young people were concerned about having safe spaces to access since witnessing the riots in 2024. In London, one of our young researchers noted that her and her friends know that there's crime in their area but have been 'so acclimatised' as 'a product of our environment.' Conversely in Brora, which was seemingly the safest place we encountered (based on young people's perceptions), young people were positively excited by the prospect of riots. In one of the 'test your place' scenarios we asked a table in Brora to think about what they would need to be able to access new experiences, and one young person spoke about how interesting it would be to witness a school

shooting as a new experience. Although this seemed to be a provocative statement made by a younger male teenager intended to challenge researchers, it was said with a serious tone and expression – reflecting a heightened sense of boredom and a connection made by this boy between violence and excitement.

Variations Within Place

Also relevant to how young people imagined and accessed social and cultural infrastructure was how they imagined their settlement (or not) in relation to other, bigger, places. For example young people in Brora looked to Inverness as the regional hub where they would visit the cinema, see a concert or access fast food. In Kirkcaldy, most young people went to Edinburgh fairly frequently for events like concerns, festivals or shopping. This was not the case, however in Banbury, (which is the same distance (just over an hour) to Oxford by car as Kirkcaldy is to Edinburgh, or in Brighton, where you can easily and quickly get into London on the train. In Banbury nobody mentioned Oxford at all and in Brighton the only mention of going towards London was to use Gatwick airport. This variation may be as much about class and wealth as about the actual proximity of places to each other. In Brora and Fife a high proportion of our young participants lived in houses that were owned by their parents (15 out of 26 who answered something other than 'I don't know' or 'prefer not to say' in Brora, and 8 out of 11 who answered something conclusive in Fife). In comparison, in Brighton, all of those who answered something other than 'I don't know' or 'prefer not to say' were either living with families who were renting privately or from the local authority (apart from one who said 'Temporary Accommodation' but this may be an error as they also said they lived on a Farm) and in Banbury a majority (7/10 who answered conclusively) were renting from the local authority. If we infer wealth and class from tenure type - which is often an informal proxy - then we can say that young people from wealthier and potentially more middle-class backgrounds, make more use of regional hubs and therefore may have wider access to social and cultural infrastructure. At our online workshop with a smaller group of young people from across the different focus groups, young people corroborated this idea, suggesting that people with more money and/or privilege were able to travel more outside of their local area and that this was formative in their social and cultural lives.

In our London phase of work we'd found that young people's scales of access were, in general, very small, with few of our young participants regularly travelling outside of their local areas. In the national research, then, we found bigger scales of access for some young people, with this seeming to vary by class.

In Doreen Massey's influential writing on place she talks about places as 'extraverted', meaning they are defined by things that flow in and out of them rather than by boundaries or borders (Massey, 1991). For Massey, this is what makes places lively, stimulating and inspiring, enabling cultures to mix and widening experiences for all involved. Our findings however suggest that young people don't have equal access to the 'extraverted' nature of places. In bigger cities like London and Leeds where there are many flows *into* the city, young people experience wide diversity without travelling far. But in smaller places where opportunities for wider experiences tend to involve following flows *outward*, it may be that young people from less advantaged backgrounds miss out.

Although the size of a settlement influenced levels of cultural engagement, where people lived within a city also mattered. In Swansea, as we discussed earlier, how central young people were in the city

was very important to how engaged they were with activities and spaces within it. Equally in Leeds young people mentioned a lack of cultural spaces in more suburban areas like Seacroft. Equally, a key factor to how engaged young people were in local activities was how connected they were to institutions or people who could let them know what was happening. A big issue that came up in our London phase of work was that young people weren't aware of the activities available to them locally. In London, this was still mostly an unknown unknown, young people wished for things that were happening within a couple of miles of where they lived, unaware they existed locally. In Swansea, by contrast, it had become a known unknown, with young people newly aware of opportunities that had previously not been on their radar. One young person bemoaned that "I never knew there were youth groups. I never knew there was anything like this until this last year [at college]" while another explained that "There's always something you can do you, you need to know where to look but most of us don't know where to look." In Swansea, college had been a turning point for young people in widening their awareness of activities and services on offer, including to get involved in local politics and activism. In Banbury, young people told us that their youth worker was a key person in connecting them to opportunities and making sure their voice was heard.

Differences by Identity

The importance of religious spaces varied between young participants but more by individual than by location. Most young people reported that they had 'no religion' in our demographic survey but that didn't mean they didn't value places of worship, identifying them as part of building safe and trusting communities (Hull) and supporting people including via hosting foodbanks (Leeds). For other students who were religious, including a Christian student in Swansea, funding churches was a direct way to ensure better support for the local community. However other young people thought that places of worship could be divisive and referred to incidents such as attacks on mosques to reference this.

One thing we were curious to investigate at our online analysis workshop was how far young people felt experiences varied from person to person in their area. Because of how we recruited (via organisations) the young people attending were often from fairly similar backgrounds to each other (e.g. in Swansea they were all sixth form students so of comparable educational attainment even though race, gender and sexuality varied and in Kirkcaldy they had been recruited via two youth groups so represented young people already actively involved with youth services, while in Leeds they were recruited by a community organisation so all came from the neighbourhood of Seacroft). This meant our samples in each place didn't necessarily span the full diversity of an area.

When asked about differences between young people's experiences within their area, young people who attended our online analysis workshop felt that they did indeed have different experiences to other people their age.

"most of the time when you see. People who are actually like. Enjoying the city or whatever is probably because they're not actually seeing a lot of the bad side of it, like they might have gone to a private school or something like that. Like they're not actually as exposed to things... Just to summarise, that's the main point. You know, like your area and your background can really be a big factor." (Young person from Leeds)

“you have to start looking into more factors, for example, did your family or whatever, just move you from abroad, for example, or are you, are your parents educated, you know, things like that.” (Young person from Leeds)

Our young participants at the workshop also highlighted that personal experiences, like being bullied, can prevent you from accessing what's available to others in your area.

The Method as a Tool for Decision Makers

“I just thought the card system was really good, the activation cards as well as really creative. It's a good way to like, discuss as a group” (Young person, Swansea)

One of the aims for our national phase of work was to refine our card deck method and test variations on the approach. We found that:

- The card deck method is popular with young people across the country, with many of them giving very positive feedback on the deck and the experience of working with it
- The scenario activity we tried at the national phase generally worked well, prompting young people to think more deeply about aspects of place that ensure resilience. The framing for this part of the activity was improved when we termed it as ‘test your place’, helping to gamify it
- The method seems to work better with older young people (16-18) who have a better grasp of how different places and services in their area support their social and cultural lives and are more able to extrapolate generalisable points from individual experiences
- With younger participants, the arts and crafts activities help to engage them and give them options to express more complex ideas non verbally
- Several young people mentioned to us that they have neuro-divergences such as ADHD and found the card deck engaging and easy to work with, suggesting it's a good method for engaging neurodiverse young people
- As reflected in our online analysis workshop, young people find the card deck helpful for articulating the interconnection of services and items in social and cultural infrastructure



Figure 25, *Young people in Kirkcaldy discuss their ideal place, using the cards as stimulus.*

We've been able to see from our research that young people find the card deck enjoyable and effective to work with. We also know that the card deck generates findings which help us to understand, on a conceptual level, young people's experiences and needs in relation to social and cultural infrastructure. The card deck proved to be a flexible and adaptable method, applicable in a range of locations and with a wide age group. We saw how it helps to uncover not only young people's priorities in relation to social and cultural infrastructure but also activation factors and barriers that enable and prohibit effective use of that infrastructure. The card deck provides concrete starting points based in contemporary research for young people to make sense of what social and cultural infrastructure is, as well as opportunities for them to add their own perspectives and knowledge. It also helps young people to think about how items and elements within social and cultural infrastructure work in combination to produce resilient and effective systems.

At the policy roundtable we held for policy professionals in the field, we discussed how the card deck method could be of value for assimilating young people's views into policy decisions. A key outcome of this discussion was that the card deck can support young people to practice the skills needed for decision making in relation to place and citizen participation. It could be a valuable primer activity for young people involved in policy co-design and/or could be used as part of consultations with young people regarding developments or place making strategies in their areas.

Thematic Policy Implications

“There are a lot of like groups and activities and different types of projects that actually focus on young people being heard. You know... they're all over the place, like this thing we're doing now... But they are just not being acted upon. So [young people] can be heard, they're definitely being heard but their [views] are just not being acted upon” – Arturs, Leeds Focus Group

This research highlights that young people across the UK can often feel excluded from social and cultural infrastructure, despite its importance for their wellbeing, belonging, opportunities and future outcomes. To support young people's participation in civil society and reduce disparities across places, policy action is needed at both national and local levels. Following the online roundtable event between policymakers, key stakeholders and young people, we have developed the following thematic policy implications based on our findings:

I. Safety, Transport & Access: Making Places Work for Young People

- Young people consistently cited safety fears, and ontological security needs to be addressed – as this limits their ability to build fulfilling social and cultural lives
- Young people particularly feel unsafe in parks, on public transport, and in public spaces after dark. Policy commitments such as the “Safer Streets” mission should address not just crime reduction but also lighting, surveillance, and gender-informed design of public space.
- Investment in safe and inclusive digital infrastructure is also increasingly vital, with safety concerns often intersecting physical and digital spaces and with many young people increasing time spent, and connections made and maintained, online.
- Therefore, safeguarding should be explicitly embedded in both digital and physical spaces, with organisational capacity supported to deliver sustainable youth agency with young people.
- Public transport is an important enabler and tool for supporting young people to access social and cultural infrastructure, but was a critical barrier across regions, especially in rural and suburban areas due to a lack of frequency, reliability and affordability, and in urban areas perceived safety on transport was often a real concern.
- National and local government should expand schemes such as free or subsidised bus travel for under-22s, alongside improvements to reliability, accessibility and safety, particularly considering young people's vulnerabilities and anxieties to external threats.
- Regional inequalities reflect differences in access and availability of social and cultural infrastructure for young people, with rural areas facing isolation and a lack of youth-specific services
- Time-based access also matters. Many spaces close too early or are inaccessible after school or work. Local authorities should support evening and 24-hour infrastructure where possible that provides safe places for young people to go.
- Trusted adults in the community (for example, youth and community workers and volunteers) that act as important social capital or ‘informal social infrastructure’ for young people can be better supported to help improve access to more formal social and cultural spaces and opportunities

2. Inclusion, Equity & Supportive Youth-Specific Infrastructure

- Social and cultural infrastructure must be accessible, inclusive, and affordable.
- Young people valued faith-based and community-run spaces as welcoming and supportive—but these cannot replace the need for dedicated secular youth provision staffed by trained professionals.
- Age-specific (e.g. youth centres) and youth inclusive social and cultural spaces are especially important across regions, having multiple direct and indirect benefits, including increasing a sense of belonging, engagement and confidence for young people in going into other spaces.
- Additionally, it is important to consider youth-friendly infrastructure within spaces that are often primarily designed for adults including in green spaces, providing opportunities for young people to interact with spaces in their own ways.
- Policymakers should prioritise subsidised access to sports, arts, and leisure spaces and activities for young people, especially for marginalised groups, and attention should be paid to more equitable distribution of cultural activities across different areas of cities and regions.
- Young people feel there is a significant gap in mental health, neurodiversity, LGBTQ+ and gender identity support across regions. Young people's basic wellbeing and belonging rely on stronger wraparound services embedded in schools, community hubs, and youth centres.
- More inclusive infrastructure should be designed with intersectional needs in mind, considering gender, race, disability, sexuality, class, and migration status.

3. Education and Aspiration

- Young people described the education system as inadequate, inflexible, and unresponsive to diverse needs. They want alternative education spaces, better teachers, and more engaging environments that support curiosity and creativity.
- Employment aspirations are shaped by context. In many areas, lack of access to experience or training undermines career hopes. National and regional policies must create accessible pathways to employment, particularly for those outside urban centres.
- A sense of being overlooked—by local councils, national government, and civil society—was common. Young people in smaller towns and lower-income areas felt particularly abandoned. The government should invest in youth-specific infrastructure, not just generalised public space.

4. Environmental Engagement & Green/Blue Infrastructure

- While not always top priority, young people valued both 'wilder' natures and well-maintained urban parks—but access is often compromised by pollution, poor maintenance, or safety concerns.
- Public parks are essential but precarious spaces for young people's mental health, social lives, and physical activity. National and local governments should invest in ongoing maintenance, safety features (e.g. lighting, CCTV), and inclusive design to ensure parks are welcoming, accessible, and usable year-round.
- Where possible, co-design and inclusion of youth in local decision making could help reduce vandalism and increase stewardship.
- Young people want to participate in climate-positive behaviours, but this requires infrastructure that enables green transport, environmental education, and biodiversity preservation—particularly in urban planning.

5. Meaningful Youth Participation in Decision Making

- Young people feel their voices can be heard, but rarely see this reflected in real-world change. Policymakers must strengthen feedback loops and embed youth involvement beyond consultation—into co-design and decision-making processes.
- Mechanisms to participate must be inclusive and address inequalities and barriers in access – helping a diverse range of young people to understand opportunities and foster a sense of responsibility and stewardship, empowering them to have their voices embedded effectively within planning processes and decision-making processes.
- More opportunities could be provided for young people to co-create creative policy solutions, particularly to nuanced challenges, for example, to varied safety concerns based on perceived threat.
- Tools like the card deck method used in this research can help councils, developers, and cultural institutions translate young people's insights into actionable plans, especially when used in iterative engagement processes.
- Feedback loop tools should be better utilised to help agencies and organisations feedback appropriately and in a timely manner, going beyond ingrained institutional and organisational timescales e.g. annual review cycles that many adults are used to in workplaces.

6. Long-Term, Stable Investment in Youth Infrastructure across Regions

- Social and cultural infrastructure cannot thrive without sustained investment. Echoing Hall (2020, p.92), this research underscores that "social infrastructure requires investment—and the work involved in it should not be unpaid."
- Rather than short-term project grants, stable, long-term funding is needed for:
 - ◆ o Youth centres and spaces with trained staff
 - ◆ o Free or low-cost access to cultural, sports and wellbeing infrastructure
 - ◆ o Community transport, safe public spaces, and digital inclusion
- Investment should also target activation—addressing the hidden costs, anxieties, and barriers that prevent young people from using what's already available.
- Social and cultural infrastructure can be seen as a form of 'place-based capital' and consequently, its provision can connect better to government devolution policies and covenants that support local social and cultural capital and heritage
- Regional and local spatial planning, therefore, should reflect the needs of younger demographics, including through 'Local Living' models, and resource and capacity to embed young people within community stewardship and governance vehicles including neighbourhood plans and regeneration masterplans should be increased.
- Legislation such as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) can be crucial in this process supporting calls for action and accountability in supporting young people's civil, political, social and cultural rights.

Overall, as The British Academy and Bennett Institute, (2025) argue those assets classed as social and cultural infrastructure demonstrate the same core characteristics as other types of infrastructure, while also making unique and important contributions to the social and cultural lives of communities.

Therefore social and cultural infrastructure needs to be thought about holistically and relationally by policymakers – taking into consideration how it is part of an ecosystem of infrastructure. This means recognising that young people's access to spaces, services, and support is shaped not only by what is provided, but by how it connects with other forms of infrastructure, when it's available, and whether it feels safe, welcoming, and meaningful in their everyday lives.

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Annex I: Full Methodology

A Co-Creative Approach

As mentioned above, our national phase research took a co-creative approach, involving young people in planning, conducting and analysing the research as well as in output production.

From the London phase of work we identified a need to work closely with young people during the national phase. As we analysed the findings from the London phase of work we saw where it would be valuable to have young people's continued input into the research. In some instances, we found it difficult to make decisions about how to categorise or interpret some contributions to the research and wished we could clarify with our young participants. For example, lots of young people had spoken about the importance of key figures in their community, like teachers, sports coaches and 'bossman' in the local corner shop, but this was not always reflected in the cards they made. We would have liked to ask whether the card deck should feature a 'people' category, reflecting the prevalent mention of people in the transcripts, or just highlight people as 'activating' elements of social and cultural infrastructure.

Accordingly, we recruited young researchers to work with us on the national phase of the project; three who would work closely with us for the duration and a further four who would attend a one-off workshop to refine the card deck method.

Our process for the recruitment was to:

- Send job adverts to each of the focus group sites from the first phase of work, mediated via our adult contacts at these locations
- Hold online interviews with the young people that applied
- Select candidates for the more in-depth role on the basis of ensuring, as far as possible, a spread of ages, genders, experience levels (in academic and vocational work) and representation from different parts of London, as well as consideration of how the group would work together

Luckily, we were able to offer all those not successful for the in-depth role the opportunity to be part of the initial workshop.

Our three main young researchers were paid £450 for their time over the duration of the project, which we estimated would be no more than 3 days work in total. The additional four young researchers received a £30 voucher for their attendance of the two-hour card deck refinement workshop.

It has been argued that 'effectively implemented co-production methodologies can deliver research which both advances intellectual insight and has wider public benefit' (Campbell & Vanderhoven, 2016). Certainly, involving our young researchers helped to ensure that the research did not just generate knowledge of interest to us but responded to the interests and concerns of young people themselves, crucial given the aim of the work was to improve understanding of young people's experiences of social and cultural infrastructure. Additionally, an aim of our research was to develop the card deck method into a tool that could be used by decision makers to think collectively with

young people. Having young people (who had themselves been participants in the London phase) involved in refining the method was, then, invaluable in ensuring it would work effectively.

Hiring young people as paid researchers was also a developmental opportunity for them, giving valuable experience of working on a professional research project, as well as financial remuneration. All the young researchers attended a workshop at The British Academy where they gained skills in reflecting on and designing research as well as in working as part of a group. Our three core young researchers also assisted in planning focus groups, running focus groups, analysing data and producing outputs. They also presented at and helped to run an online workshop. In these presentations, one of our young researchers described what he learned in the following way:

“I learned to work in a team, even with people very different from me.
I built confidence—I now speak up, share ideas, and even lead.
I developed research and communication skills that I'll carry forever.
But more than that, it helped me find direction. It showed me that my voice matters and that I can use it to help others...
It made me realise that I want to keep being a researcher, keep exploring stories, and keep travelling to learn and connect.
Research isn't just about data, it's about people. And being a young researcher helped me become who I am today.”

This extract from one young researcher's presentation shows the significant impact that co-creation can have on skill acquisition, confidence and intellectual development. One UKRI project notes that upskilling young people is a key aim and impact of co-creative work with young participants (McMellon, 2024). It also shows how co-production can alter research relationships, moving away from an 'extractive or transactional' (Campbell & Vanderhoven) interaction to one that is genuinely participatory and involves deepening learning and understanding on the part of both researchers and young people.

Indeed, working with the young researchers was a learning experience for us as much as for them. It prompted us to think about our research from new angles and generated different findings than would have been derived by us alone. This included tangible examples, as when they advised on questions for a survey we sent out, helping us to understand how young people might interpret or misinterpret certain questions we had drafted. It also included less tangible aspects, for example how their contributions to conversations following focus groups steered our interpretation of key takeaways from each location.

As well as working co-creatively with young people from the London phase of research we also involved young people from across our national focus group sites in the co-creative process via an online analysis workshop we held at the end of the focus group period. The aim of this virtual workshop was to present our emerging findings to the group and seek feedback to ensure our interpretation was informed by young people's input.

We invited 2-3 people from each site to join us for this workshop and an eventual 6 joined representing 5 of our focus group locations (we didn't have representation from Brighton or Brora). Two of our three young researchers also attended the event and presented on their experiences as

young researchers and on their perspectives on the findings so far. We hired engagement specialist Kheron Gilpin to co-facilitate this workshop to ensure young people felt engaged, valued and celebrated in the process. Kheron led ice breakers and 'brain breaks' that created a relaxed atmosphere and ensured active participation throughout.

The workshop consisted of questions from us to the young people (on points of deliberation that had emerged during our analysis), space for an open discussion (for the young people to bring questions and ideas) and an activity where young people sorted our findings according to what felt like a priority for them. This allowed us to refine our analysis in a way that reflected young people's actual priorities rather than our perception of them. Their input certainly changed the emphasis in our analysis. For example, we felt that 'pivotal people' were important to young people in helping them to access social and cultural infrastructure (e.g. teachers, social workers, sports coaches) but at our analysis workshop most young people listed this as one of their lowest priorities, leaving us to conclude that although pivotal people are important in young people's access to social and cultural infrastructure this is not an area that young people currently feel needs extra attention for these young people, e.g. they may already have access to these people and not see this as their priority.

The Card Deck Method

The methodology for this national phase of work built on the findings of the London Phase by taking forward successful elements of our card deck game method and working with young researchers to refine it to be even more effective at the national focus groups.

Our rationale for working with a game based method in the London phase of work was firstly that games can be valuable research tools because they encourage an attitude of 'serious play', enabling deep and explorative thinking (Thurley et al. 2024) and secondly that games can equalise the playing field of participant engagement as inhabiting a fictional or hypothetical scenario helps to overcome 'hierarchies and hegemonies' and encourage all views to be given 'equal consideration and legitimacy' (McCusker, 2020, 2).

From our London focus groups we found additional benefits of the game-based method including that games can bring overlooked aspects of an environment to the foreground (Barron, A et al. 2021). For example the 'activation' element of our game (described more later in the report) surfaced important activators of social and cultural infrastructure that might not otherwise have come into focus. We also found that the game provided a way into a complex and somewhat nebulous topic for young people, breaking down the idea of social and cultural infrastructure into a series of interconnected items and generating understanding by learning through doing as they sorted out and created cards. Other mechanics within our game, such as the arts and crafts dimension, encouraged participants to think in non verbal ways and to connect emotionally and affectively to the topic which Hiteva et al. argue can have 'long lasting effects' in terms of participants' views and understandings. Indeed this was reflected in the comments of one of our young researchers that "It helped me understand my own city—London—in a deeper way..." Another young person (from Leeds) who attended our analysis workshop also commented that while 'it's quite hard to get all the points down...because...it's a bit intertwined...but what has been done with the different cards actually helps people to see that connection...like if we want, let's say better politics and justice, we need better community as well.'

For our national phase of work we aimed to refine the game method so that it both enabled participants to identify what infrastructure in their areas would progress their social and cultural lives and prompted them to consider what would make these infrastructures resilient in the face of societal challenges. To do this we adapted the format of the method from the London stage.

In our London phase of work the methodology for card deck game had been;

- Split the young people into small groups on different tables
- Ask them to imagine and list their social and cultural goals (this was to encourage them to think concretely and personally about what they need and value, rather than approach the exercise from an abstract or generic perspective)
- Tell them that each group is going to be building their ideal city; a place that will support their social and cultural ambitions
- Deal 8-10 cards to each table (we limited the number of cards each table got because a) 32 would have been too many to look through and b) it introduced a competitive element as each table had different cards)
- Ask them to keep/discard cards from 'their city' depending on what they think is valuable for progressing their goals
- Ask them to add their own cards to make their city better, as well as to create items using arts and crafts materials (plasticine, pipe cleaners, card). The arts and crafts element enabled a different way of thinking to supplement the item-based approach of the cards, focusing attention on how elements of their cities were placed and connected in relation to each other
- Encourage them to 'spy' on other tables to see what cards they were missing and get ideas (this element was also to encourage a competitive spirit, as well as to make sure young people could take into account the full 32 cards from the literature review deck)
- Ask them, as a final step, to make 'activation cards' - cards that will improve/make useful/ make accessible the item cards they've already made. (This stage of the method was inspired by the Bennett Institute's inception report which explores the importance of not just what exists, in relation to social and cultural infrastructure, but how those places are run, how they are connected to other services, who works there, who they are inclusive to, etc. Based on this principle, we explained to young people that their activation cards might, for example, include street lighting to make streets safer, a plug socket to make Wi-Fi more useful in a cafe, or a young leader to work in an art gallery to ensure relevant programming)

By the end of the London phase of research, young people had added 81 cards to our card deck, making a total of 113 cards, many of which were 'activation' cards. We had added 7 categories of cards to our original 9 categories in order to accommodate themes emerging from young people's new cards.

At our card deck refinement workshop we worked with our 7 young researchers to discuss the following points:

1. Were the categories we had created accurate? Were there missing categories? How might they be changed?
2. Were any cards in the wrong categories?
3. Where there were similar cards, should they be conflated?
4. What kinds of prompts on the back of the cards are most helpful?

5. How valuable was the arts & crafts element of the original methodology (building elements of their places with plasticine and pipe cleaners) and should we keep it?
6. How might the method itself be adapted, including trialling a 'test your place' stage of the method (explained below)?

We also had a specific question about if a 'people' category should be added, something we had considered based on the prominence of people in young people's discussions at the London focus groups.

Based on the discussions had and decisions made by the group at this workshop we adapted the card deck in the following ways:

- Reduced the number of categories to make it more streamlined
- Grouped similar cards to reduce the overall number (e.g. conflating boxing, judo, karate etc. into one 'Martial Arts' card)
- Changed how 'activation' cards were presented. Whereas in the revised deck we produced at the end of the London phase we placed activation cards within the colour coded categories (for example putting 'plug sockets' into the Digital category and 'organised trips' into the institutions category), we now made Activation a category of its own, so that an activation card could be added to any other card. This made the cards a lot more versatile, especially as many list generic attributes like 'safe' or 'affordable'
- Adapted the question prompts on the back of the card to be more focused rather than exploratory - to make them easier to engage with for younger participants
- Decided to keep the arts and crafts elements for the next phase of focus groups
- Decided not to add a people category but to include pivotal people within the activation cards
- Decided to add the 'test your place' scenario activity to our methodology

The added 'Test your place' scenario activity was conceived through conversations with The British Academy while planning the national phase of work. We wanted to see if scenario based activities (e.g. what things would you need to get a job, get good at a sport, cope in a pandemic, etc) would be an effective way to get young people to think deeply about the infrastructures that are valuable to them in challenging circumstances and/or for particular goals.

We tried this at the card deck refinement workshop and the seven young researchers agreed it was a useful way to think about what's needed in an area with more specificity. We decided to incorporate it into the methodology for the national focus groups by giving tables 'scenario cards' once they had finished reviewing and adding cards to their place. The scenario cards would say things like 'start a band, during a cost of living crisis' or 'get a job you love, during strikes' and would invite young people to think about if they needed to add anything additional to the place they were building to achieve this goal despite this crisis. One of the scenarios we added was 'riots' as we were interested in whether young people's views would be impacted by the riots of summer 2024.

As the focus groups progressed, we iteratively adapted our card deck method into the following structure:

Table 1, Focus Group Structure

Activity	Details	Rationale
Ice Breaker	• Young people are asked to line up across the room in order of how far from the focus group location they were born Young people are asked to line up in order of if they think their area is a good place to live (yes on one side, no on the other) • Young people are asked to line up in order of if they think their area is a good place to live for young people specifically • Young people are asked to line up in order of if they think young people's voices are heard in their area	Start young people thinking about amenities and issues in their area Gives us a sense of who the group are
Plan Your Place	• Young people are divided into tables, making sure that 13-15 and 16-18 year olds are in distinct groups • Deal each table of young people a stack of cards • Ask them to sort through them and decide which they want and don't want in their area	Allows them to better understand what kinds of items and resources make up social and cultural infrastructure Allows them to start considering what they value and debating this as a group The activation cards help them to think about what features or additions make infrastructure more useful to them Separating 13-15 year olds and 16-18 year olds allows us to analyse these age groups independently

Build Your Place	• Ask them to add their own cards (including activation cards) and/or create items using plasticine and pipe cleaners	Enables them to think about what additional things they would like access to and what additional features would activate social and cultural infrastructure The arts and crafts materials provide a nonverbal way of thinking for those better suited to this learning style Creating things physically can also ease group dynamics by providing a playful and visual focal point
Test Your Place	• Come round with 'scenario cards' e.g. "get a job you love, in a pandemic", "start a band, during a cost of living crisis", "have new experiences, during riots" etc. • Ask young people to consider if they have everything they need for this scenario	Prompts young people to think about the relationship between social and cultural infrastructure and resilience and encourages deeper contemplation of how elements of social and cultural infrastructure work together to enable people to progress goals and withstand crises
Summative Discussion	• Young people are split into two groups (13-15 & 16-18) and we hold a reflective discussion on the card deck activity, both in relation to what they learned about what they value in a place and in relation to the method itself	Allows us to gauge differences in opinion between the two age groups Allows us to see what stood out to them as key concerns in their areas Allows us to see how well the method worked for the group Gives the young people a chance to reflect and ask questions

After completing all seven focus groups, we held an analysis session with our three core young researchers where we created a spreadsheet of all the cards made at focus groups and started to discuss themes emerging from the cards and from the focus group transcripts.

We then held the further online workshop (discussed above) to which we invited 2-3 young people from each focus group site.

After this workshop we created a final version of our card deck, assimilating the new cards made at our 7 national phase focus groups. In this version of the card deck we didn't change the categories or format, given the structure of the deck and the game had already been collaboratively agreed in our earlier co-creative work.

[The full card deck with all added cards can be found here.](#)

Recruitment

In order to recruit over 100 young people for 7 focus groups across three countries, we worked closely with partners including a variety of organisations, educational institutions and charities to organise the focus groups. These partners were able to access and recruit young people and youth workers (often through smaller youth groups they worked with), find an appropriate venue and support with assisting the young people to access the sessions. We simply would not have been able to conduct the research without the help of these organisations and their networks. We recruited 20 young people for each location with the expectation of a relatively high attrition rate for participants under the age of 18. We had an average mean of 15 participants per group in attendance, with two anomaly groups (Brora being overattended - 34, and Hull being underattended, 4).

Table 2 provides an overview of the different locations of the focus groups, the kind of partner organisation we worked with and the number of young people and youth/community/voluntary workers who attended and supported the sessions.

Table 2, Focus Group Locations Overview

Location	Type of Settlement	Recruitment Method/ Support Organisation	Focus Group Location	No. of young participants	No. of youth/ community workers present	Young researchers assisting
Banbury, Oxfordshire, England	Semi-rural - Town, pop. 54,335	Community development charity	Church Hall	12	2	N/A
Brighton, Sussex England	Urban/ suburban - city, pop. 277,965	FE College	Further Education College	13	2	1

Brora, Highlands, Scotland	Rural - village, pop. 1210	Youth charity	Community/ voluntary venue	34	6	N/A
Kingston upon Hull, Yorkshire, England	Urban/ suburban - city, pop. 268,852	Arts Organisation/ charity	Art Gallery	4	2	1
Kirkcaldy, Fife, Scotland	Semi-rural - town, pop. 50,370	Youth charity	Community/ voluntary venue	15	8	N/A
Leeds, Yorkshire, England	Urban - city, pop. 536,280	Community development charity	University	15	6	N/A
Swansea, Wales	Urban/ suburban- city, pop. 241,282	FE College	Further Education College	14	2	N/A

As mentioned in the introduction, we selected partner organisations where possible based on existing networks and connections, as much of their contributions were based on goodwill, solidarity and a shared interest in the research and the aims of improving youth inclusion. These organisations had in-depth local knowledge and, in many cases, chose the precise location for the focus group. For example, we worked with Youth Scotland, a national youth work organisation supporting a diverse membership network across Scotland, who were able to connect us to Youth Highland and Youth 1st based in Fife. Contacts at both these organisations were able to identify appropriate youth groups in the area to participate and a location that could work for multiple groups. For the majority of the focus groups, young people were recruited from multiple different youth groups and travelled some distance to the venue as they lived in the broader area and surrounding suburbs/settlements. For example, in Brora, young people came from six different postcode districts in the region to attend the focus group. A youth worker reported that at least 2 young people lived in a very rural location and travelled over an hour each way to the venue. This means that the young people in the focus groups did not necessarily already know each other (even in Brighton and Swansea where the young people all attended the same college, they were not necessarily in the same classes or even campus').

Our intention for recruitment was to recruit a 'cross-section' of young people - avoiding recruiting via specific interests e.g. sports clubs that may skew results. Where we did recruit via a cultural/arts organisation (Hull), they recruited in the same way as the youth /community organisations and used their outreach methods of contacting local youth groups. Notably, this was the one focus group where despite 20 young people signing up, only 4 young people ultimately attended, indicating the

challenge of reaching young people, particularly in locations where youth services have been cut or are in short supply, and bringing them to a location they are not familiar with. We found that our experiences running the focus groups (the kind of venue they happened in, the number of youth groups and workers who attended, if any) may also reflect the kind of youth provision an area has or lacks. For example, in Banbury the focus group had to be undertaken in a church hall as there is no dedicated youth space in the town, or in Hull the youth worker who attended was a voluntary member of a local 'friends of' a park group who had become a trusted adult for a local group of girls who wanted to use the park as there was no youth group or space in the area.

Inevitably though, these means of recruitment still have implications for our sample - primarily accessing young people who are already involved in youth groups (even if voluntary), or formal education. Therefore, while our results cannot be fully representative of the regions that they took place in, we hope they are nevertheless illustrative of the experiences and issues young people are experiencing in these areas.

Ethical Approach

An ethical research practice was integral to this research working with young people primarily under the age of 18 and it was of the utmost importance that participants were kept safe during the research process and put under no pressure to take part. Issues of informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity and safeguarding were central to our ethical approach, as well as ensuring that young people were supported to participate and reimbursed for their time.

Researchers gathered ongoing consent through use of regular checks with the participant on if they wish to continue. Young participants were given an information sheet, a written consent form and parental opt-out form in advance and verbal consent was also gained at the start of the session and at relevant intervals during the session. Participants were reminded they would face no consequences if they choose to withdraw and leave the session.

As an organisation working with children, young people and their families, LDT takes safeguarding seriously and takes all reasonable measures to ensure that the risks of harm to children's welfare are minimised⁷. Working with partner organisations enabled us to be able to raise safeguarding concerns, if and where appropriate, and take any appropriate actions.

Safeguarding measures in place for focus groups:

- Researchers delivering and facilitating the research had an enhanced DBS check.
- A trained member of staff from the partner organization must be physically present and/or available during the focus group in case of any issues arising
- Researchers familiarized themselves with the partner or host (school, college, youth club, community space etc.) local safeguarding policies and agreements, for example by reviewing a school's safeguarding policy in advance of a visit and making a note of escalation routes/the school's safeguarding lead
- Researchers and facilitators would flag any potential issue, no matter how small, to the relevant safeguarding lead

⁷ LDT has a specific Child Safeguarding Policy that has been updated in 2024.

- Researchers and facilitators would not ask follow up questions on any potentially sensitive comments from a child or young person, especially where they may be a safeguarding risk. Instead, the researcher should escalate their concern to the designated safeguarding lead
- Researchers and facilitators should check-in on participants' wellbeing, being especially cognisant of non-verbal cues and power dynamics
- Researchers and facilitators would stop the research if they have any doubts over the child/ young person's immediate safety or pause where appropriate if a young person needed a break
- Researchers and facilitators would share reflections points with each other at the end of each session to reflect on any concerns and share with safeguarding lead if necessary
- Participants were asked in advance of the session if they have a safe route to travel to the session and support was provided if they do not or are unsure (e.g. a taxi provided or accompaniment by a partner organization if possible/appropriate)

Demographic Survey

To better understand these differences in our sample in the national phase of work, we introduced a demographic survey to collect diversity/monitoring information from the young people. This provides some indication of how the young people's social identities and socio-economic and cultural background may affect our findings and help to explain differences in responses across the focus group locations.

98 young participants completed the survey out of 107 participants (92% response rate). The survey included questions on age, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, country of birth, languages spoken, religion, disability, level of education, employment and housing (tenure and dwelling type), as well as collecting contact details and postcodes. Questions on housing were added partly as a proxy for social class and socio-economic status as we are aware this is a complex and personal question for young people to answer more directly. This data is helpful to get both an overview of all our participants and different focus group dynamics. For example, the graphs below illustrate the range of ages we had across all the focus groups and how this was distributed in the different locations (**figure 26**).

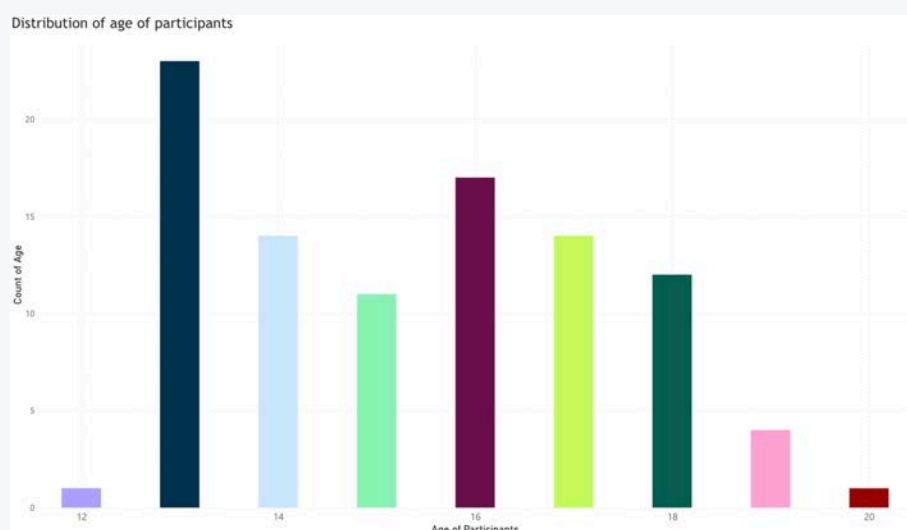


Figure 26, Age of Focus Group Participants across all locations

While we stipulated that young participants should be between the ages of 13–18 years, and intended for each group to represent a diverse mix of ages and identities, aiming to recruit 10 13–15-year-olds and 10 16–18-year-olds for each group, inevitably there were variations due to practical recruitment reasons (as discussed above). This was sometimes a reflection of the youth service provision or educational institution we were able to access or simply the young people who turned up on the day (therefore, we had a minority of young people under 13 and over 18 who also participated). **Figure 27** indicates that in Kirkcaldy, for example, we did not have any young participants above the age of 16, whereas in Swansea we did not have any young people below the age of 17.

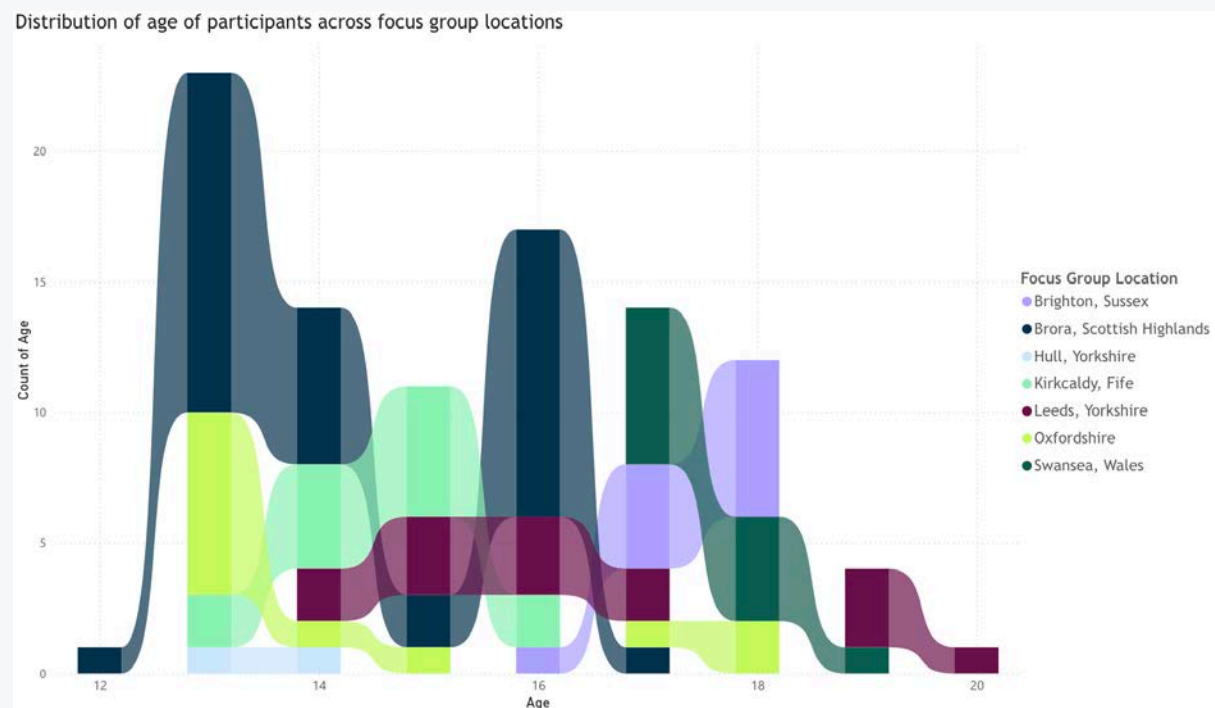
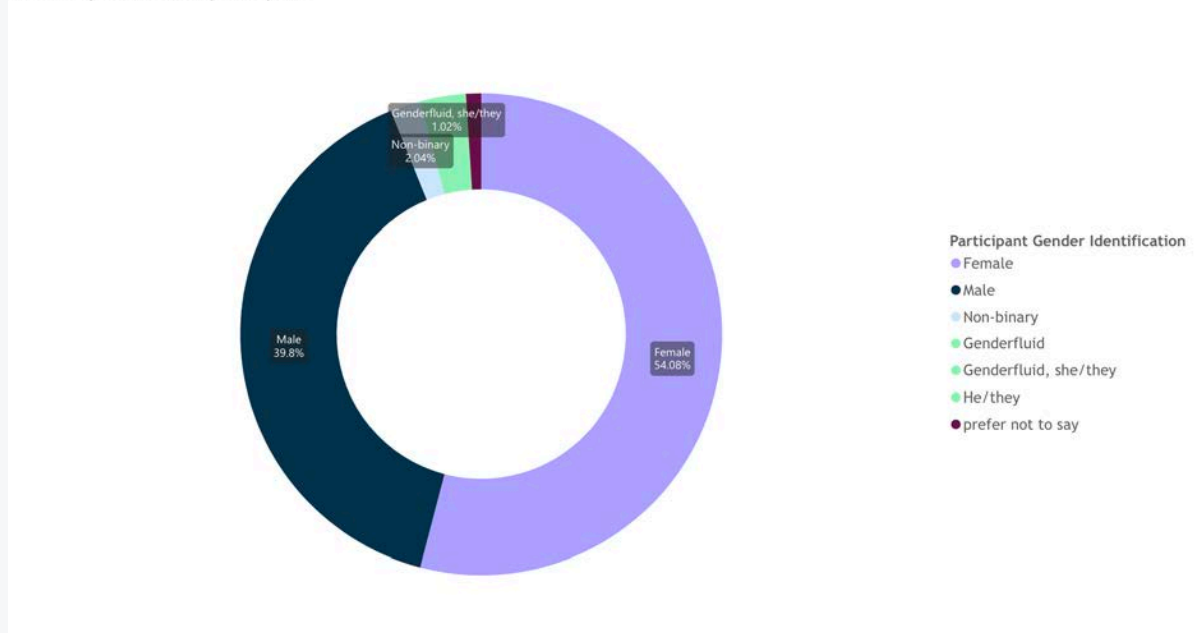


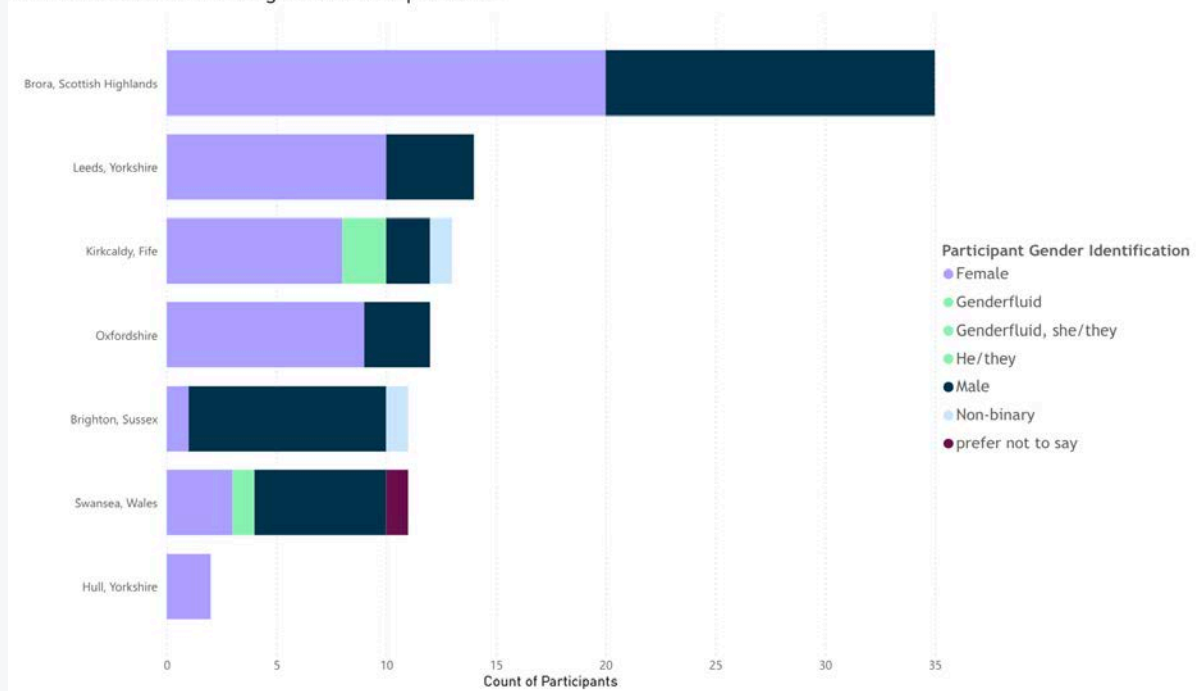
Figure 27 Ribbon chart indicating the distribution of age of participants across focus group locations

While we had a relatively even gender ratio across all participants (**figure 28**), this was less consistent in every focus group location (**figure 29**), highlighting some differences across groups.

Gender split across all participants

**Figure 28,** Gender split across all survey participants

Gender Breakdown According to Focus Group Location

**Figure 29,** Stacked bar chart indicating the distribution of gender identities across focus group locations

Interestingly, the two focus groups we conducted in educational institutions (colleges), had a higher percentage of male participants, while the 'community based' focus groups tended to be better attended by female participants.

We recognise there are various drawbacks to using a questionnaire method to collecting personal identity information from young people. Beyond relatively simple questions, like age and gender, young people may struggle to understand demographic questions or not know the answers. To combat this, we provided support to help young people fill out the survey at the end of the focus group and explained different terms to ensure they were understood. Our young researchers also advised on survey wording, helping to make sure we phrased questions in ways young people were most likely to understand. We also limited personal or invasive questions for ethical reasons and ensured there were 'prefer not to say' options. Nevertheless, we did note some confusion to questions such as sexual orientation - with some young people clearly not yet sure about their orientation or what terms like 'asexual' means. Therefore, these questions were included to get a general gauge rather than be completely accurate. A minority of young people, also, took the opportunity to joke with their friends while doing the survey, as seen in **figure 30** with the identification of their sexual orientation as 'shreksexual' referring to social media memes of the animated film character 'Shrek'. This jokey approach to the survey, however, was the case for only one or two participants. Overall, the survey provided a practical method of collecting additional information from a large sample of young people and provides some insights into focus group variations. For example, in Kirkcaldy Fife, 69% of participants identified as LGBTQ+ reflecting that one of the youth groups attending is aimed at LGBTQ+ youth.

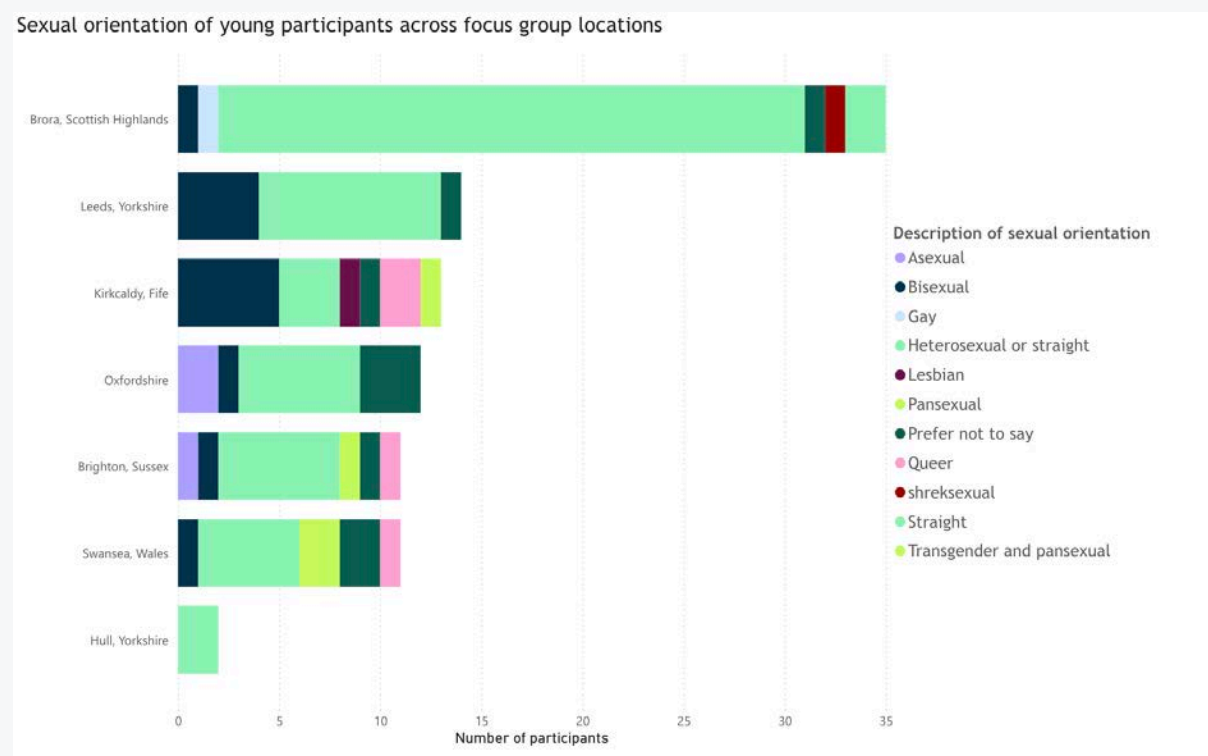


Figure 30, Stacked bar chart indicating the distribution of sexual orientation across focus group locations

Survey results indicate that a range of young people participated in the research with different social and cultural backgrounds as well as experiences of housing and education as we'll discuss in the sections that follow.

Annex 2: Detail on Findings

Over the series of the 7 national focus groups, the following cards were added to each category of our card deck (repeats have been conflated).

Category	Cards Added
Sports	Netball Courts Bike tracks Ice Rinks Disability Sports Centre 4G (Fourth Generation) Pitches Hybrid Pitches (grass plus synthetic) Shooting Range Skate parks
Cultural, Community and Educational Institutions and Services	Area Hubs YMCA Art Studios College Photography Classes Scottish Dancing Events Arts Activities Instrument Lessons Alternative Learning venues (not school)
Transport	Bridges Ubers Trams Cycle Lanes Driving Lessons Clear Directions Electric car chargers

Governance and Welfare	Emergency Services Food Bank Homeless Shelters Children's Home Dementia Spaces Youth Politics Spaces & Info Neurodivergence Services Mental Health Services Safe drug zones Emergency Services Queer youth spaces Nurseries
Nature	Pond Riverside areas Play parks Good weather Outdoor Education Animal Shelters Green Areas Walking Paths
Local Businesses	Vapes Food Halls Vets Chippy Arcades Rage Rooms Games Clubs Restaurants for young people
Digital	Phones Gaming Laptop
Homes & Community	Toilets Communal Spaces

Activation (cards that support/'activate' the other cards)	- Anti-bullying - Better education - Peaceful Places - Careers Advisor - For under 18s - Exploring new cultures - Extra transport (after school) - No potholes - Fridays (off school) - For under 12s - Healthy - Support Worker - Lifts - Trusted Adult - Pedestrianised - Energy efficient - More personalised - Accessible - System reform - Trust - Restrictions/Rules - Physical/IRL - Warm - Better Accommodation
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London Development Trust is a Company registered in England and Wales, Number: 11736891
and Registered as a Charity in England and Wales, Number: 1189281

Published November 2025.

DOI: doi.org/10.5871/infrastructure/9780856727108

ISBN: 978-0-85672-710-8

