



# SYMBOL

SEFTON YOUTH MAKING BETTER  
OPPORTUNITIES WITH LEADERS

**3RD JUNE 2020**

A virtual meeting discussing the impact of the COVID-19  
pandemic on young people

# 02

## SEFTON YOUTH MAKING BETTER OPPORTUNITIES WITH LEADERS

SYMBOL meetings are an opportunity for young people to meet and work collaboratively with key decision makers in Sefton.

Young people are involved in the planning and delivery of SYMBOL activity and attendees vote on the topics that are important to them.

Being a member of SYMBOL means a young person can play an active role in their community, with a direct line of communication with key decision makers, such as councillors and senior managers at Sefton Council including representatives from Public Health, Merseyside Police and more. There are SYMBOL meetings three times a year at different locations across the borough.

SYMBOL meetings have covered topics including:

- Sex and Relationships education
- A Curriculum for Life
- Skills Development and Employment
- Economic Wellbeing
- Gun and Gang Crime

# 03

## WHO ATTENDED

63 individuals logged on to the virtual SYMBOL meeting. 58 of these stayed online for the duration of the meeting. Of this 58, 22 were over 25 years old.

**23 (39.7%)**

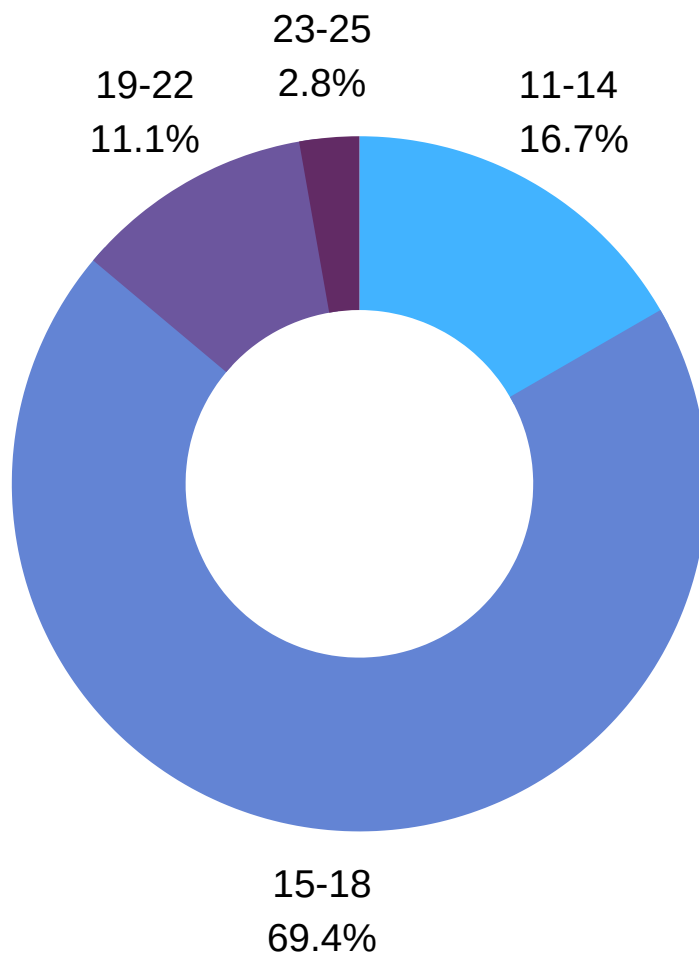
were  
**Male**

**35 (60.3%)**

were  
**Female**

For the purposes of this report when we say 'young people' we are referring to the under 25 cohort.

The break down of ages for young people are as follows;



## 04

# WHAT ARE SOME OF THE ISSUES THAT YOU HAVE FACED DURING THIS TIME?

Young people discussed in small groups some of the issues that they have faced as a result of the coronavirus pandemic. Young people told us that the issues were:

- Difficulty accessing the internet and online work
- Exam preparation without the library or proper resources is difficult
- Grief faced due to the loss of family members
- Not feeling supported with school/college/university work
- Loss of earnings
- Struggling without being able to see friends
- No or limited access to support for Mental Health
- LGBTQ+ community not feeling comfortable or safe to be themselves at home
- Lack of motivation
- Having distractions at home makes it difficult to focus
- Missing out on key events (proms, graduations, birthdays etc.)
- Money is tight
- Future plans for university have been changed and in some cases halted completely
- Struggling to access medical support for health/gender barriers
- CAMHS therapy has stopped
- Gender identify sessions at GIDS (NHS Gender Identity Development Service) have been made virtual but this has significantly slowed the whole process down

## 05

## WHAT WORRIES YOU?

*"A big worry at the moment for me is my GCSE results because I left mainstream school due to bullying so I have a disadvantage academically. I don't know how that would effect my grades and whether I get onto the college courses I have applied for."*

We asked young people what worried them during this time, they told us:

- The possibility of a second wave of the virus
- Young people having an even harder time finding employment
- The waiting times for mental health interventions increasing
- Worries about the loosening of lockdown measures from the Government has come too soon
- Whether or not they will catch up with their school/college/university work
- Making the transition to high school without being able to properly finish off their primary education
- Using public transport
- Families health is a worry
- The misinformation about COVID-19 that is so readily available
- Worrying about making decisions and putting future plans in place
- Not being able to check in on and support friends properly
- Family financial struggles
- Returning to education/work
- Not feeling as engaged due to lack of access to the internet
- Not knowing if they will be sitting exams or not
- Not being able to exercise in the same way as before
- Worry about going anywhere due to the fear of catching the virus
- Fear of losing people close to them

## 06

## WHAT ARE SOME OF THE POSITIVES?

*"I have loved having more time to learn about me. I have also been revisiting old hobbies and learning new ones."*

While we know that this period has been incredibly challenging for young people for a variety of reasons, we were keen to understand what, if any positives had come from it. Young people told us:

- Spending time with my family a lot more
- Have spent more time exercising
- Appreciating the weather and the open spaces we have in Sefton
- Have time to learn new hobbies
- Cooking more and cooking healthier
- The environment is healing
- Recognising resilience and self-reliance
- Have enjoyed walking and cycling
- Taking a break from social media
- Everyone seems kinder and more willing to help
- Seeing people volunteer their time and communities coming together
- We have all adapted to virtual learning
- Not having to travel around
- Learning new skills via online learning
- Revisiting old hobbies that were forgotten



## 07

## WHAT SUPPORT DO YOU NEED?

*"I need access to a computer and the internet."*

*"I will definitely need support with my mental health. I hope that this hasn't set my progress back."*

We asked young people what support they felt they would need moving forward. Young people said:

- Access to educational resources
- Virtual sessions with teachers that are regular
- Access to timely interventions for mental health
- Education on online safety
- Technological support such as the access to laptops and webcams
- Access to the internet
- Guidance on the plans for upcoming exams
- Job opportunities
- More frequent and reliable public transport services
- Time to recover and find 'normal' again
- Access to PPE if still needed while on public transport
- Careers advice and guidance
- More time in my youth club with people I trust
- Green travel options and support to access this - access to a bike and safe cycle routes

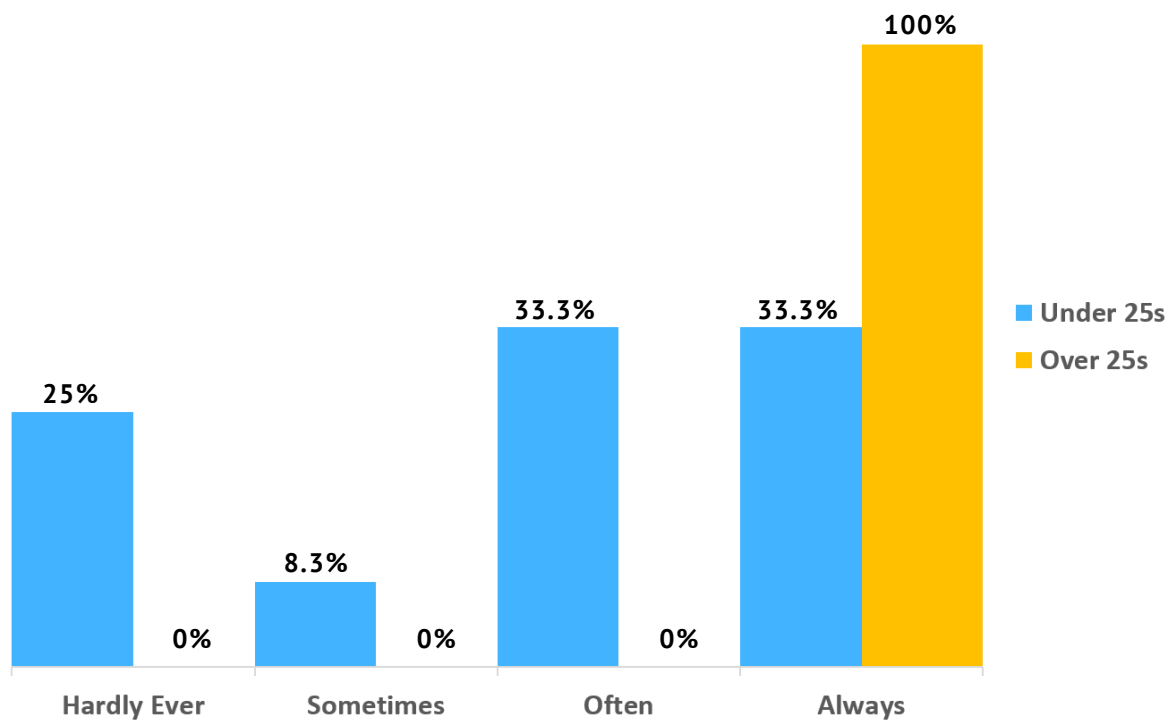
*"They say that cycling is a better way to travel, but I don't have a bike. Will there be any way to access one?"*

# 08

As well the discussion based questions, we also asked a number of poll questions.

100% of the over 25s present at SYMBOL told us that they were able to access the internet whenever they needed/wanted to compared to 33.3% of young people. 25% of young people report that they are able to access the internet 'hardly ever'.

## ARE YOU ABLE TO ACCESS THE INTERNET WHEN YOU WANT / NEED TO?



Access to technology and the internet was a very common topic of discussion. Some young people told us that they only have 1 or 2 devices at home and these are often being used by a parent who is required to work from home.

The group commented on how lack of internet is causing disruption to their continued learning and referenced how it is 'assumed that all young people have a laptop and access to internet at home, and this is not the case'.

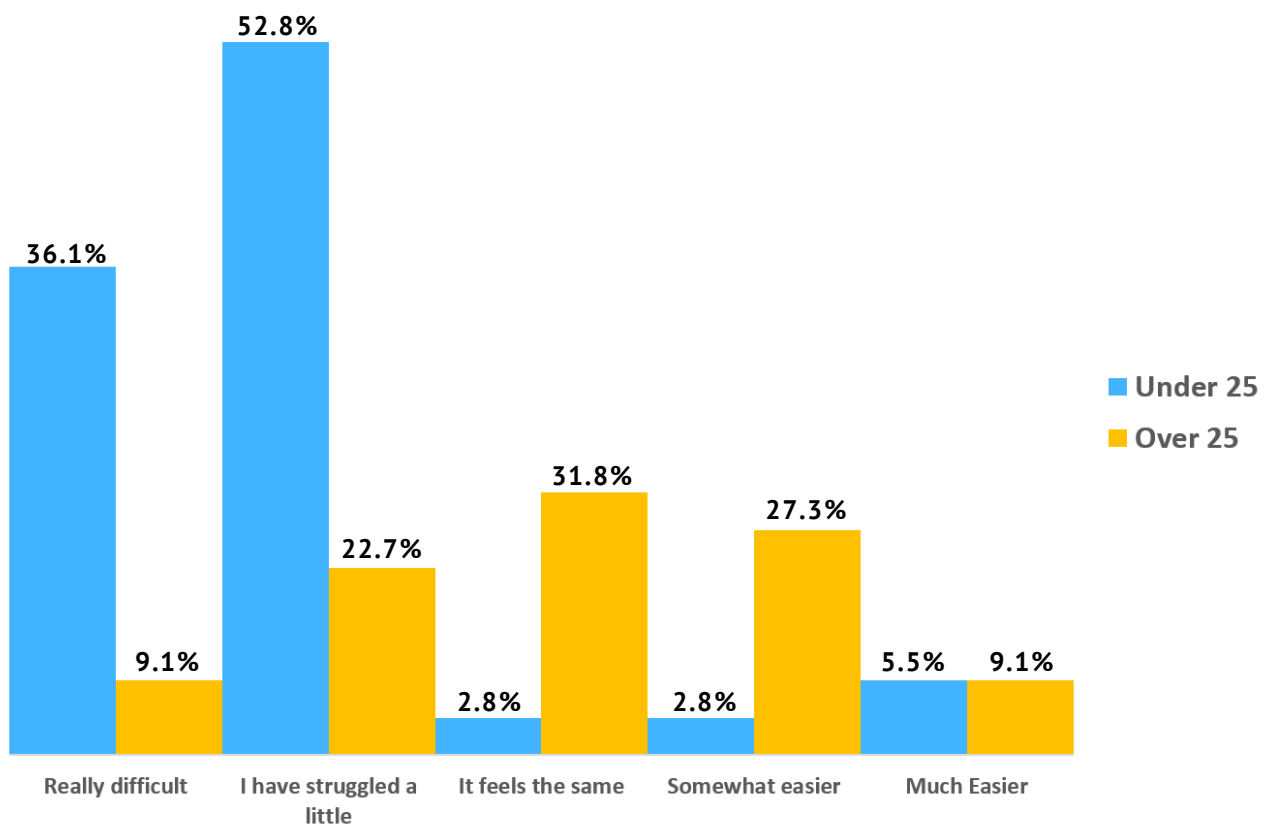


# 09

As the data below shows, young people generally have struggled with home learning and working more than the over 25 cohort.

52.8% of the young people said that they had 'struggled a little' with the remote learning/working set up. A further 36.1% told us that they had found it 'really difficult'.

## HOW HAVE YOU FOUND HOME LEARNING / WORKING?



8.3% of young people reported that the distance learning arrangements are easier than before the coronavirus outbreak. 5.5% of these young people said that it was in fact 'much easier'.

SYMBOL attendees told us that home learning and/or working can be difficult because:

- No or poor access to the internet
- Too much distraction/noise within the household
- It is lonely and the social element is missing
- Not having enough room or the correct environment to focus in
- It is difficult to have a good work-life balance

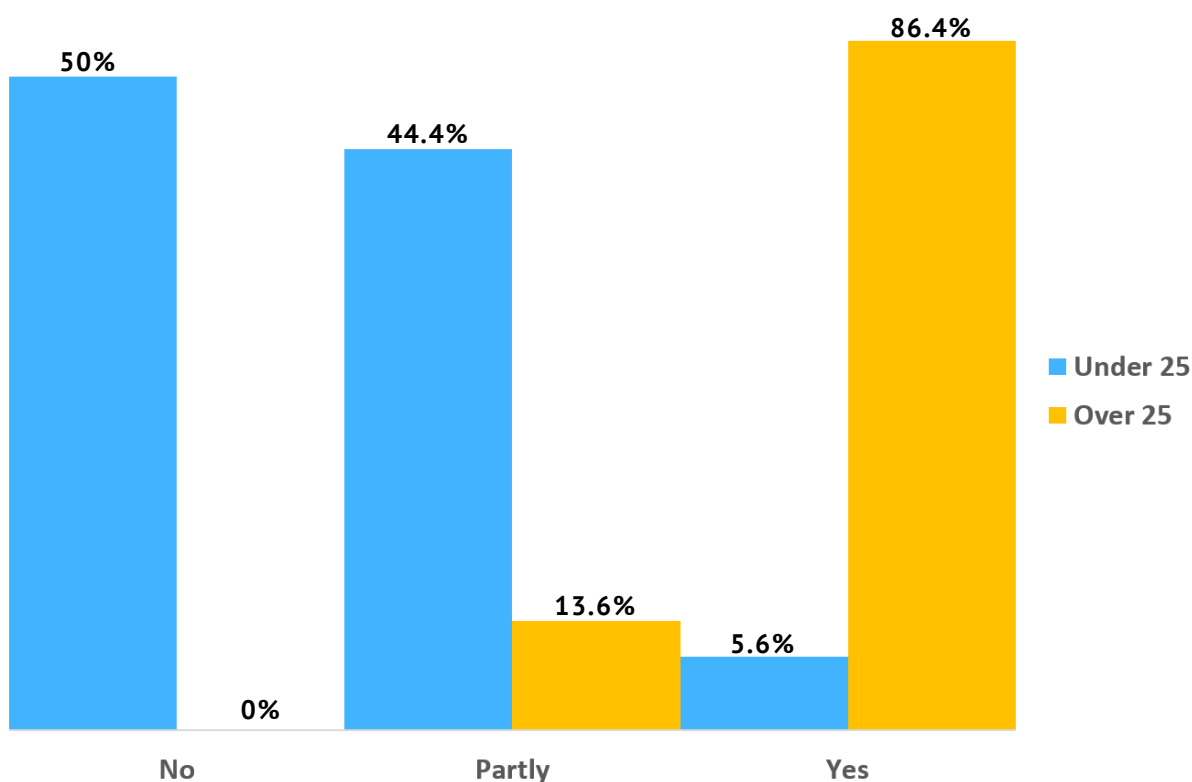
# 10

When asked "are you feeling positive about returning to education/work?", 50% of young people answered 'no'. We wanted to understand why. Some of the reasons were:

- I have fallen behind and I am worried that I will never catch up
- I am worried about travelling on the bus to get to school
- I am nervous about mixing in large groups
- I have enjoyed being able to learn things that aren't English and Maths

44.4% of young people answered 'partly' to this question.

## ARE YOU FEELING POSITIVE ABOUT RETURNING TO EDUCATION / WORK?



The reasons for choosing for partly included:

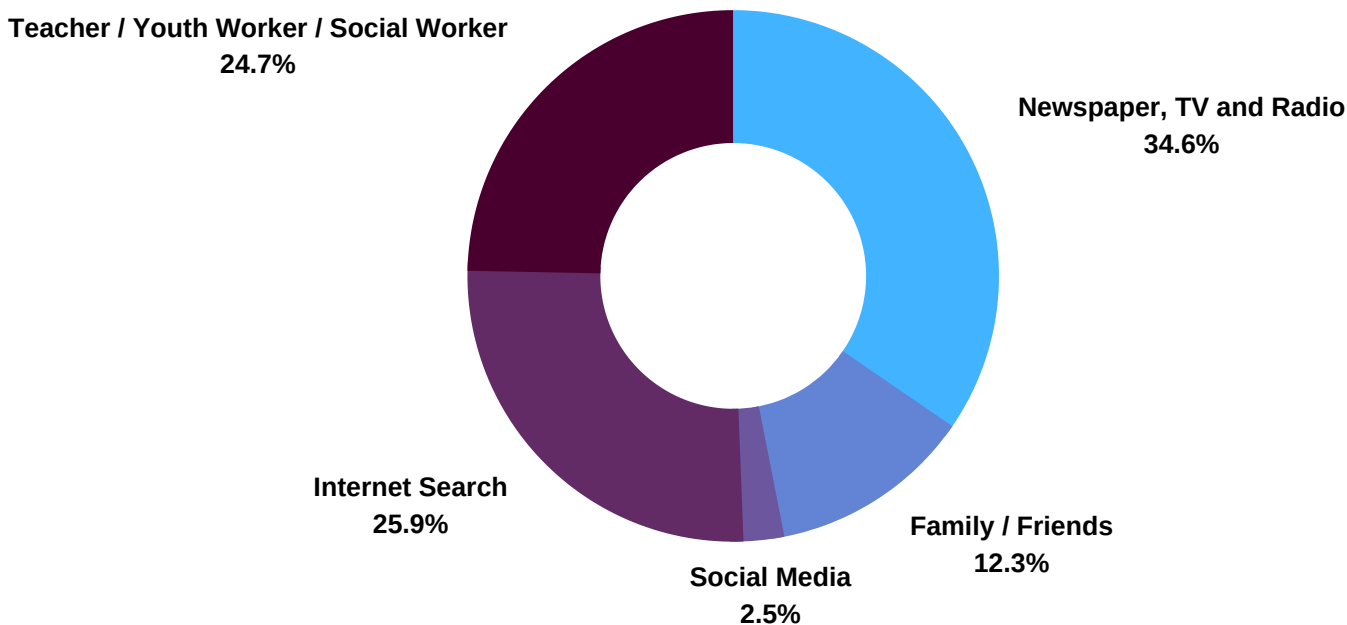
- There is an excitement about being back, but they are nervous about a second wave of the virus
- The information they are hearing about the return plan is unclear and confusing
- They are not confident that they can be kept safe in their work place

5.6% of young people said that they are feeling positive about returning to education/work settings. They told us that:

- They are excited to see their friends
- They are excited to see their teachers
- They want to get back on track with their educational progress

# 11

## IF YOU WANTED TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT CORONAVIRUS WHERE WOULD YOU GET INFORMATION THAT YOU WOULD TRUST?



The majority of young people said that if they wanted to find trustworthy information about the pandemic they would look for it in the newspapers, on TV or on radio. 25.9% of young people said that they would do research on the internet. 24.7% of the group said that they would trust the information given to them by a teacher, youth worker or social worker. Only 2.5% said that they would trust the information that they read on social media.

*"It's becoming harder and harder to know who and what information to trust. It's so scary."*

*"I am just so confused about what information is the correct information. It is making me super anxious not knowing what is next."*

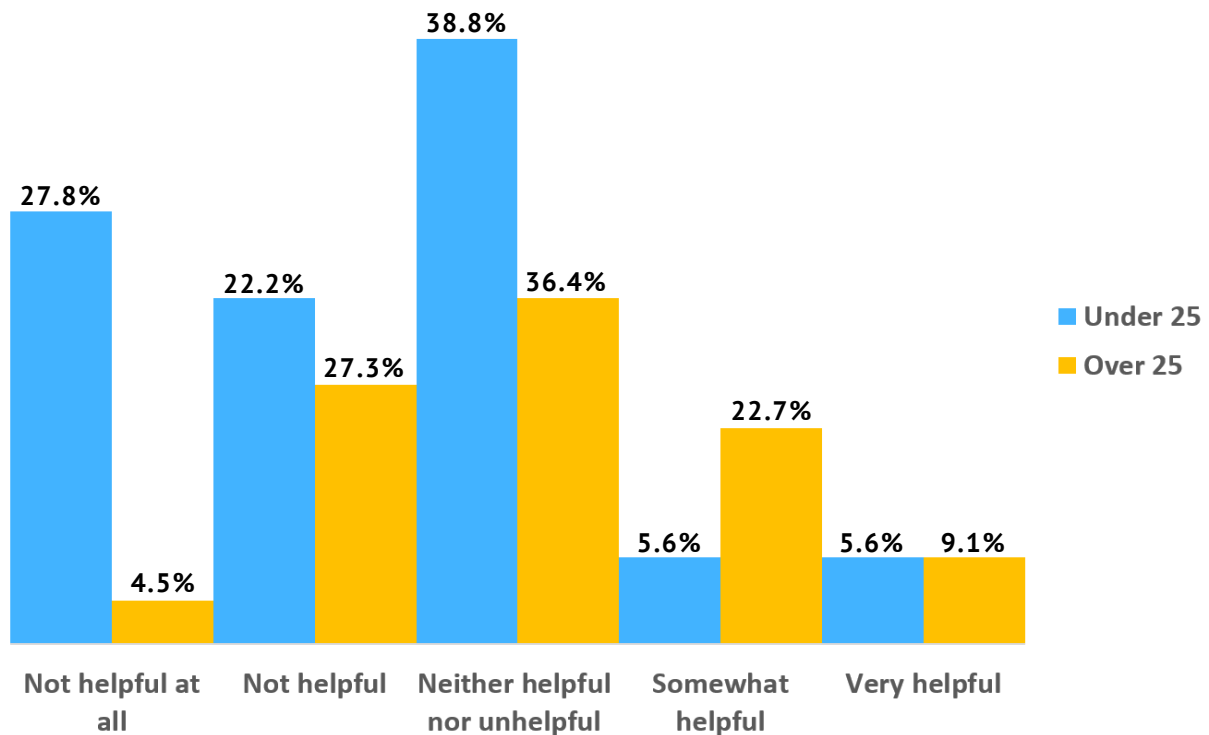
# 12

The majority of young people (38.8%) felt that the information that they had been given regarding COVID-19 was 'neither helpful nor unhelpful'.

Young people told us that:

- The information seems confusing surrounding education decisions
- The information is unclear in some areas
- The information doesn't include much about young people and youth services

## HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE THE INFORMATION YOU HAVE BEEN GIVEN REGARDING COVID-19?



27.8% of young people stated that they felt that the information around the pandemic was 'not helpful at all'.

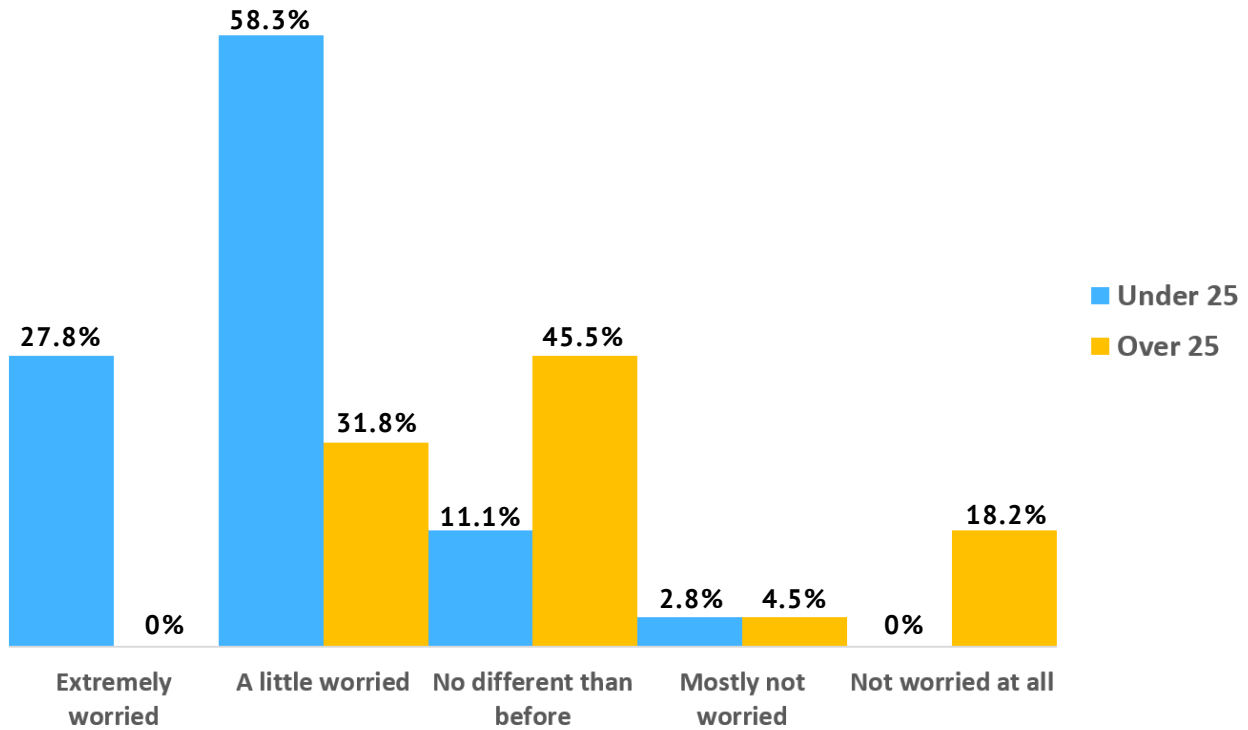
5.6% of young people chose 'somewhat helpful' for this question; the same number of young people chose 'very helpful'.

There was a general discussion regarding information. Young people felt that one of the biggest issues is that there is not enough accessible information for young people. The group discussed how the language used is confusing for young people.

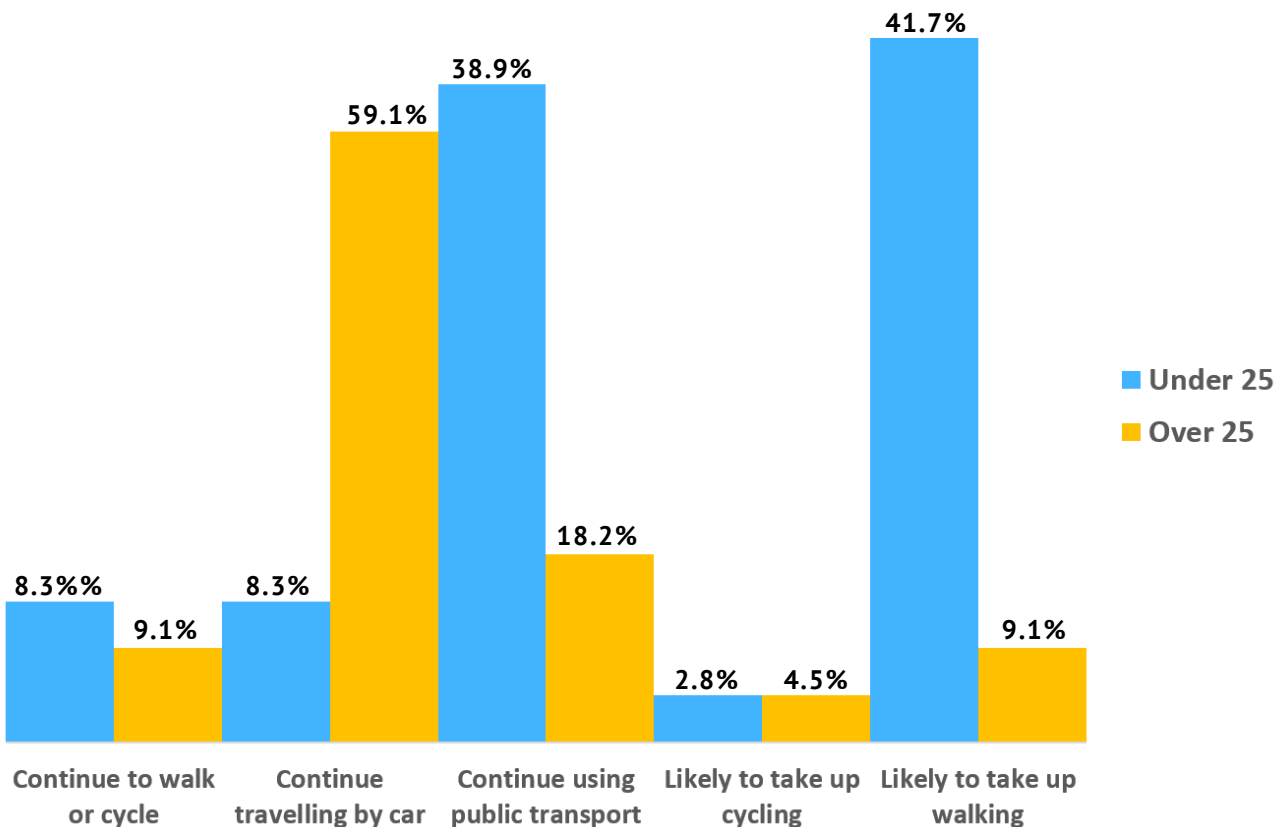
SYMBOL attendees reported to feel anxious because they were not 100% clear on current government guidance.

# 13

## HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT TRAVELLING ON PUBLIC TRANSPORT SINCE THE OUTBREAK OF THE PANDEMIC?



## ARE YOU MORE LIKELY TO WALK OR CYCLE TO YOUR SCHOOL, COLLEGE, UNIVERSITY OR YOUR WORKPLACE AFTER IT REOPENS?



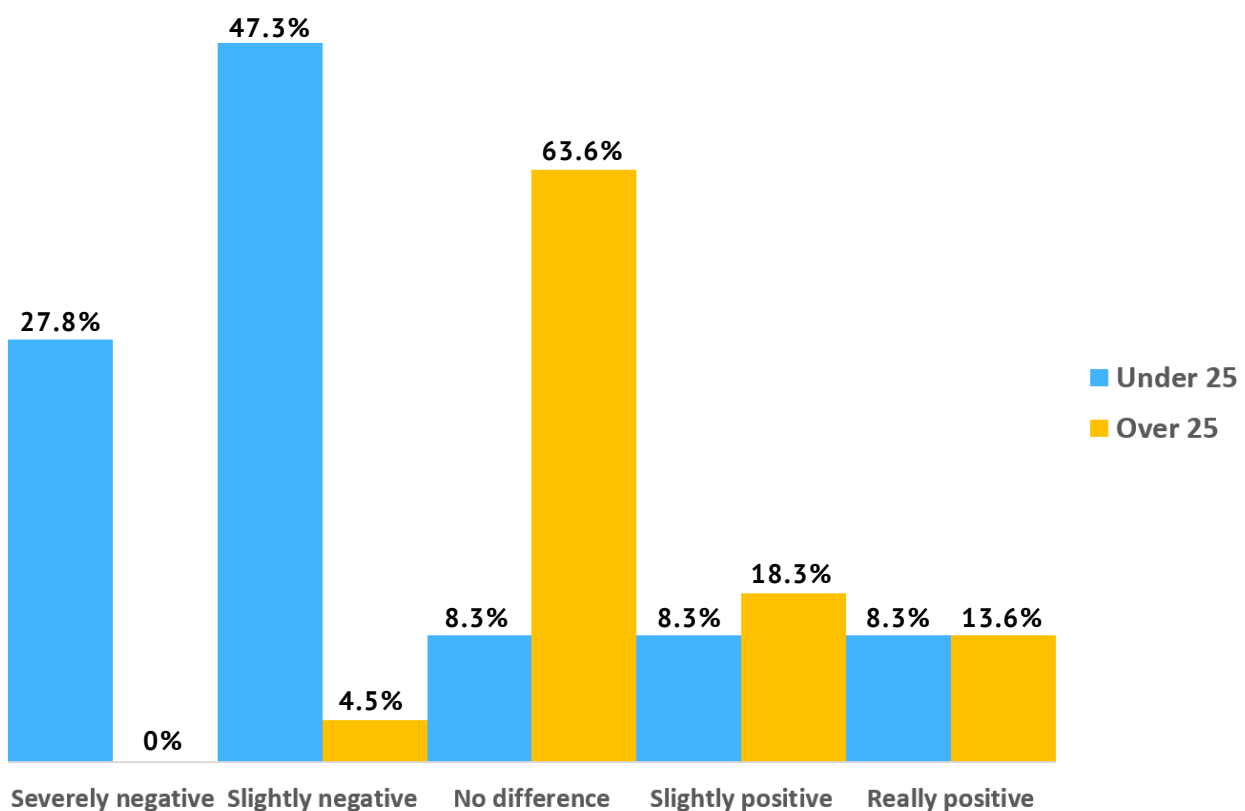
# 14

We wanted to understand the impact of the pandemic on people's mental health. As the data shows below, the majority of young people stated that the pandemic has had a slight negative impact on their mental health.

They told us that this was linked to:

- Missing friends and family
- Missing out on key events such as proms, graduations etc
- Feeling lonely

## WHAT IMPACT HAS THE PANDEMIC HAD ON YOUR MENTAL HEALTH?



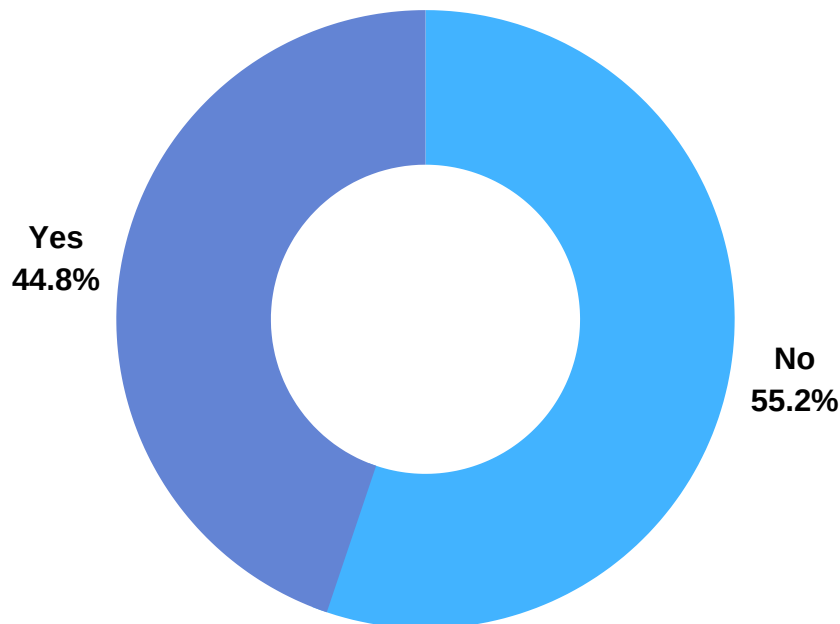
27.8% of young people stated that the pandemic has severely negatively impacted their mental health.

The data shows that young people's mental health has been affected negatively more than the adults. 63.6% of the over 25 cohort reported that the pandemic has had no impact on their mental health and 31.9% stated that it has in fact improved their general mental health with 13.6% of these saying the impact had been 'really positive'.

*"I haven't seen my CAMHS worker in over 4 months now. I don't feel that online support can match the face-to-face sessions I am used to."*

## 15

**DO YOU FEEL THAT YOU, YOUR FRIENDS AND FAMILY MEMBERS HAVE HAD ACCESS TO ADEQUATE SUPPORT FOR YOUR MENTAL HEALTH DURING THE PANDEMIC?**



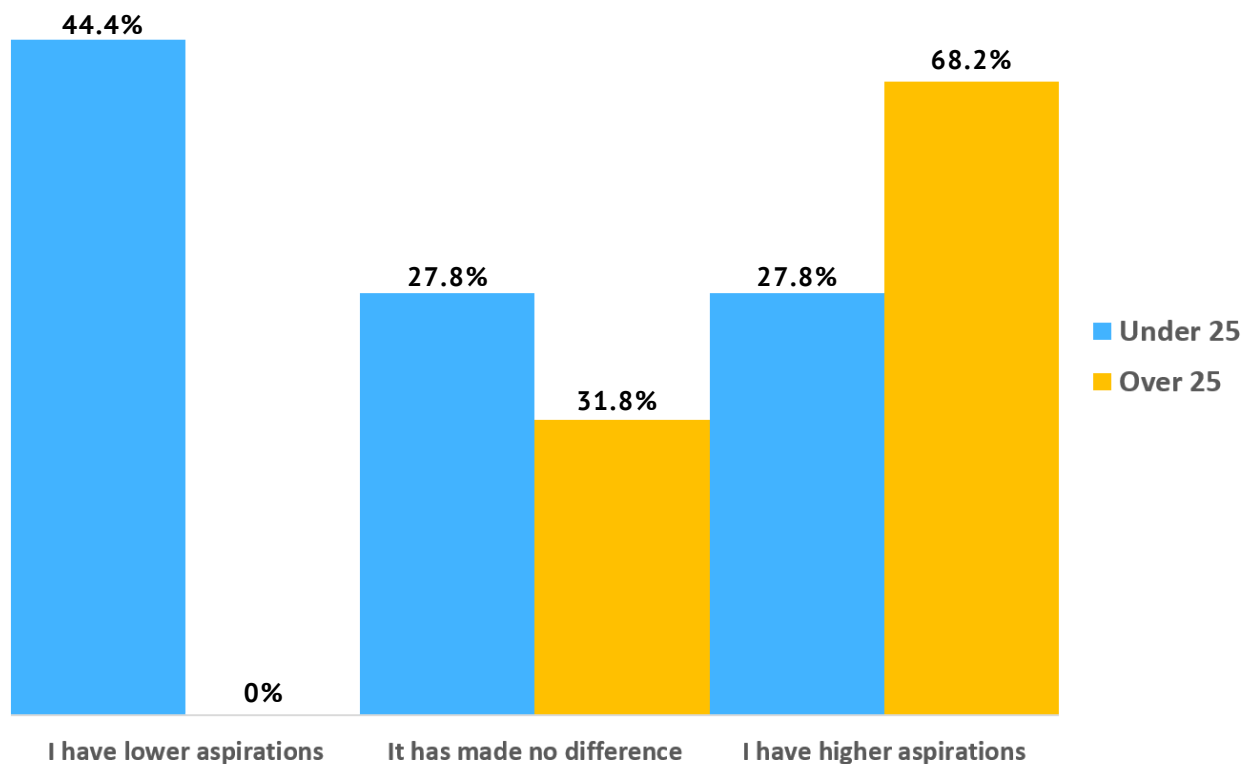
***“Waiting lists for support were already long before the world was turned upside down. What hope do we have now?”***

***“My gender identify sessions at GIDS have moved onto ‘Zoom’ but has significantly slowed the whole process down. It’s difficult enough having mental health issues but add a global pandemic, insecurity in academic results, isolation from socialisation and THEN to have no support from professionals. Not preferable.”***

# 16

Throughout the discussions, 'the future' came up often. Young people were evidently nervous about what the future held for them. Lots of the group were concerned about the job market and how this will affect them when they come to apply for roles.

## HAS COVID-19 MADE YOU RECONSIDER WHAT YOU'D LIKE TO DO IN THE FUTURE?



As you can see from the above data, the pandemic has impacted young people's plans for the future and their aspirations. 44.4% of young people stated that they now have lower aspirations. They told us:

- There is going to be no jobs for younger people following the pandemic
- The pandemic has made them 'second-guess' themselves
- Being behind in education is having a negative impact on aspirations

Positively, 27.8% of young people stated that experiencing the coronavirus pandemic has meant that they now have higher aspirations for the future.

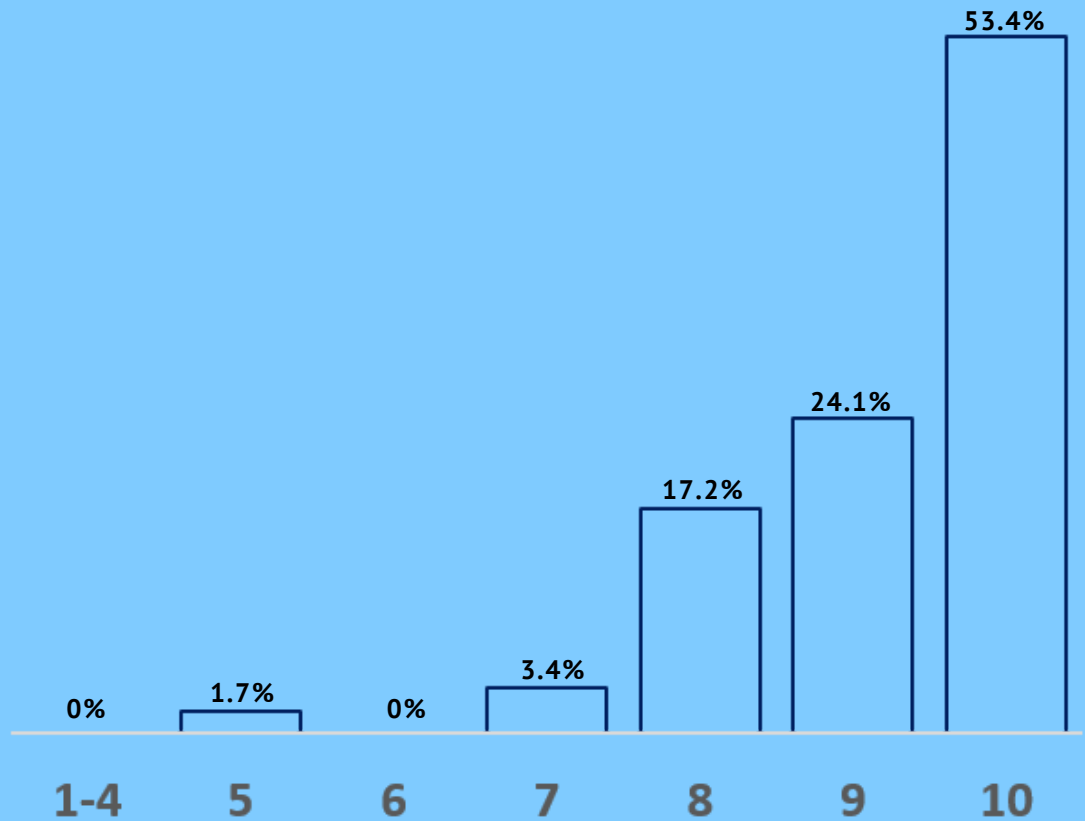
In comparison, all of the over 25 cohort stated that their aspirations for the future remain unchanged or are now higher than before.



## HOW DID WE DO?

This was our first ever virtual SYMBOL meeting. We were very keen to understand how young people felt it went and how easy it was for them to engage in discussions.

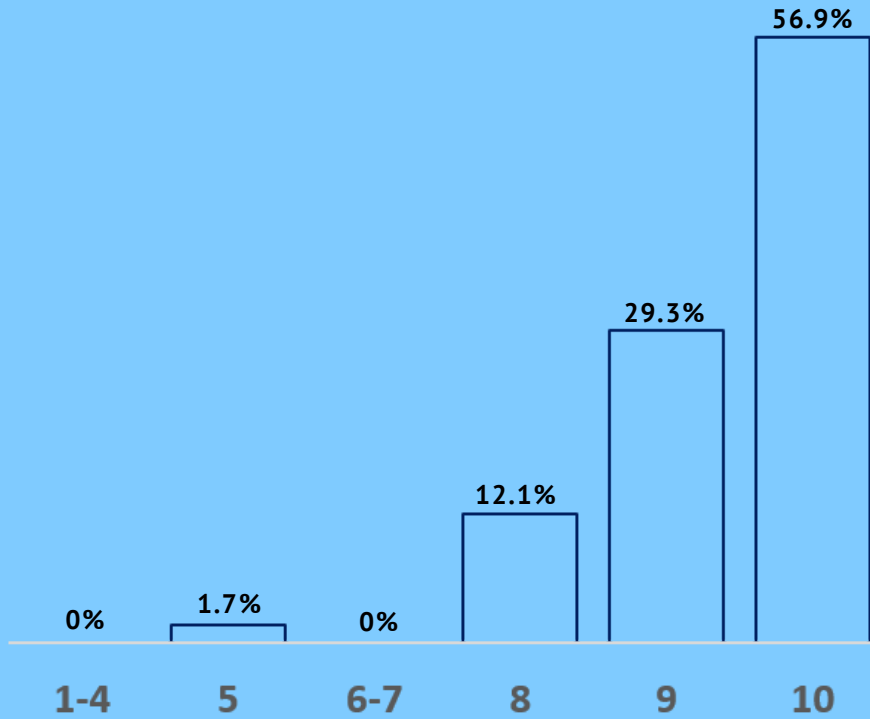
HOW MANY MARKS OUT OF 10 WOULD YOU GIVE TODAY'S SYMBOL EVENT?



*“Thank you for listening to me. I feel like the government don't pay any attention to what young people think and feel sometimes. See you at the next SYMBOL!”*

# 18

## HOW EASY ON A SCALE FROM 1 TO 10 WAS IT TO USE ZOOM?



## DID YOU FEEL AS IF YOU WERE ABLE TO HAVE A SAY ON THE THINGS WE DISCUSSED DURING THIS EVENT?

