

The Youth Ask

**A VISION FOR
CUMBRIA'S FUTURE,
FROM CUMBRIA'S
FUTURE
GENERATION.**



About Cumbria Future

Generation

Cumbria Future Generation (CFG) supports young people aged 16–35 to explore opportunities in education, employment and community life. It is led by a steering group of young people and delivered by the Centre for Leadership Performance (CforLP), which currently funds CFG by reinvesting its surplus revenue. Through its steering group, CFG provides a voice for young people in Cumbria in decisions that affect them, creating opportunities to lead and influence positive change.

About Cumbria Youth Alliance

Cumbria Youth Alliance (CYA) has been supporting young people and strengthening the youth sector for 25 years. As the lead youth infrastructure support service, CYA offers training, governance and funding support to over 300 VCSE organisations and works closely with the local authorities and a wide range of funders. CYA also offers targeted youth programmes along with data management and evaluation tools for youth programmes.

About Centre for Leadership Performance

The Centre for Leadership Performance collaborates with educators, businesses and young people to create and deliver programs that raise ambitions and enhance leadership skills across all ages from primary school through to those in retirement.

Authorship

This report has been produced by Cumbria Future Generation in collaboration with Cumbria Youth Alliance.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank:

- Cumbria Future Generation Steering Group for their help with developing the survey questions and this report.
- Cumbria Youth Alliance for their support with the development and analysis of the Youth Ask survey.
- All of the young people who took the time to complete the Youth Ask survey.
- Anyone who supported this report by sharing the Youth Ask survey with their networks.

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The State of Youth in Cumbria

A lower than average youth population

20.9%

Of Cumbria's population are aged 15-34 years, compared to 25.3% of England and Wales. This is particularly pronounced for 20-24 years olds where 4.72% of the population are in this age category compared to 6.04% for England and Wales.

High apprenticeship rates, but a higher-level skills gap

11.4%

Of 16-18 year olds are apprentices, compared to 5.07% nationally. However, just 40.2% of the population have a degree-level or equivalent qualification (vs. 48.6% for GB), while the proportion of Lvl 1 and Lvl 2 qualifications exceeds the national average.

Long journeys and poor transport links

48.8%

Of Cumberland residents and 26.5% of Westmorland & Furness residents live in areas with a high risk of transport-related social exclusion, ranking 2nd and 28th respectively out of all Combined Authorities in England for overall TRSE risk.

Wide variations in housing affordability

33.9%

Of Parishes have housing stock where the lower-quartile price is unaffordable for >66% of households. For housing in the Lake District National Park, the lower-quartile earning to house price affordability ratio is 13.2, compared to 9.2 for England as a whole.

A county of relative wealth and relative poverty

96%

Median earnings are 96% of the UK average with geographic variations (e.g., 103% in West Cumbria vs. 91-92% in East Cumbria). The number of 18-24yo universal credit claimants exceeds the national average in parts and 21% of 0-15yo live in relative low-income families.

A young population facing a mental health crisis

46%

Cumbria's self-harm hospital admission rate for 10-24yo is 46% higher than the national average. Rates for mental health condition-related admissions are 37% higher overall but Westmorland & Furness sits below the national average.

“Young people are not just the future of Cumbria they are part of its present. Give them a genuine voice in decision-making, remove the barriers they face, and they will help build stronger communities for everyone.” ”

~ Male from Whitehaven & Workington constituency

The Youth Ask

Across Cumbria, young people are asking to be **heard** and **represented** in key decisions about where they live.

That's why we launched the Youth Ask survey - a county-wide consultation of **14-35 year olds** to understand what it is like to live here, and what needs to change.

A total of **360 young people** from across the county responded.

Across various policy areas, young people have identified their **key priorities for change**.

However, young people filled in the Youth Ask not just because they had things to say, but because they wanted to be **active participants in their own futures, and the future of this county**.

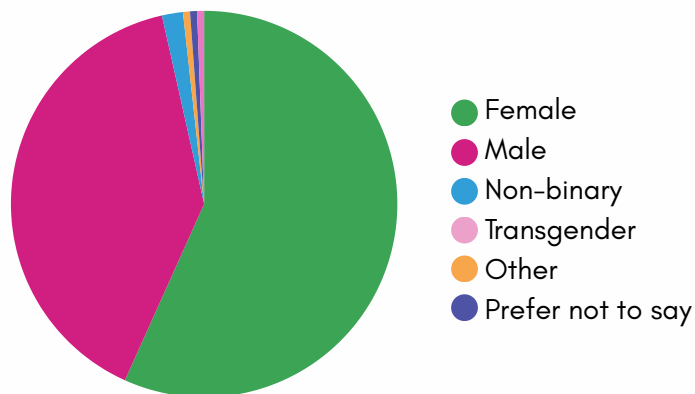
The Youth Ask is just that - **an ask of Mayoral candidates, MPs, decision-makers, and authorities** to listen to and work with young people.

The future of this county is nothing without the future generation, so let's shape Cumbria's future, together.

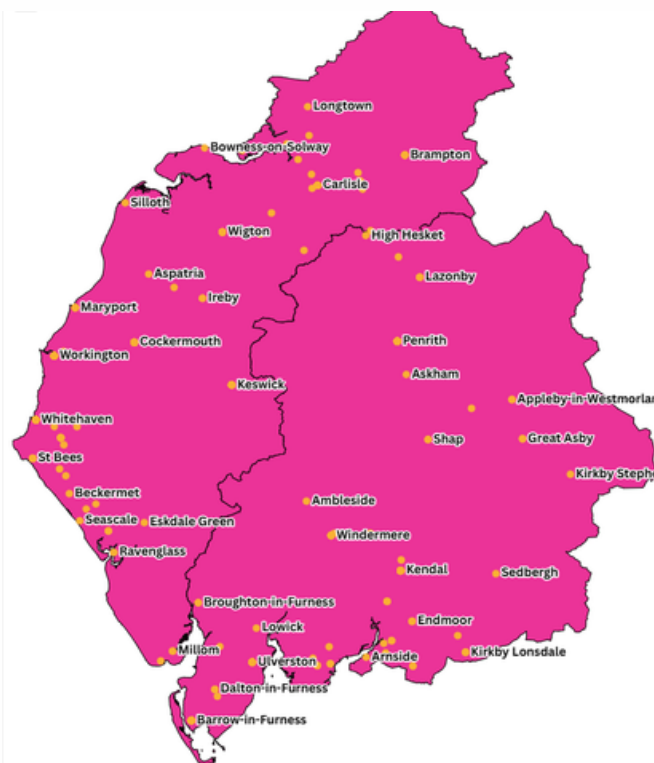


Overview

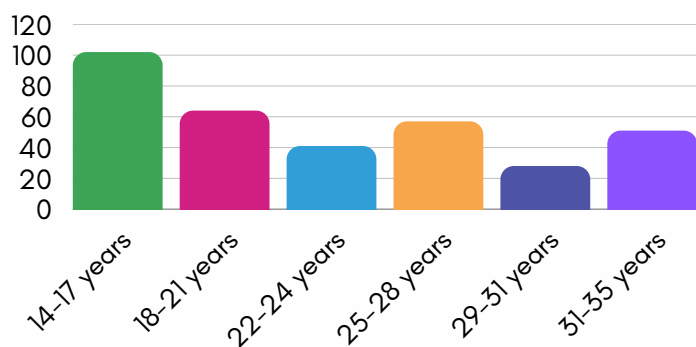
Gender identity of respondents



Location of respondents



Age of respondents



How positive Cumbria's young people feel about:



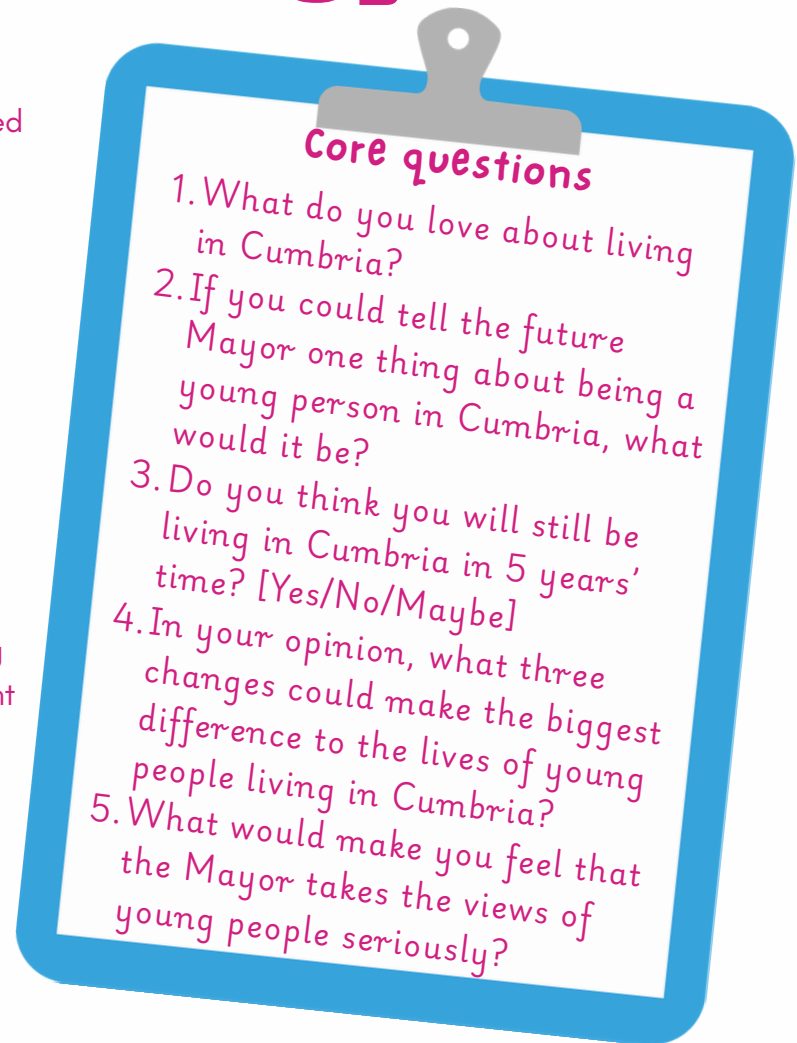
Changes young people said would make the biggest difference to their lives:

- 1 Transport**
A better connected, more reliable, and affordable transport system.
- 2 Leisure**
More places to meet and things to do for young people.
- 3 Job opportunities**
More job opportunities across a wider range of sectors.

Methodology

Survey design:

- The Youth Ask survey consisted of **5 'core' questions** and **26 additional questions** designed by young people. Respondents could opt to complete the 26 additional questions, or end the survey after the core question set.
- Overall **261/360 people (72.5%)** went on to complete the full survey*.
- Additional questions asked respondents about their experience of **transport, housing, leisure, employment, and skills & training** in Cumbria.
- Given the age range, not all respondents were expected to have experience of all issues discussed. Therefore, respondents who indicated that they are not currently employed or searching for a job were not presented with the employment questions. For housing questions, respondents were able to select N/A for questions which they did not feel applied to their experience.
- A mix of **multiple choice** and **qualitative response** options were employed. The full set of survey questions can be made available upon request.
- The survey was available to complete online from **14/06/26 to 07/08/26**.



Analysis:

- For quantitative questions, the frequency with which an answer option was counted and converted to a percentage of total responses. Where participants could select more than one option, the percentage reflects the number of respondents who chose a particular option, rather than the total number of responses. This means percentages sometimes exceed 100%.
- As not all respondents answered the additional questions, the percentages for the issue-based sections are a proportion of the total number of respondents to these questions, not the survey overall.
- Qualitative questions were analysed by conducting a thematic analysis to group responses. Once grouped, the frequency with which respondents referenced a particular theme was counted and converted into a percentage of total responses.
- Where a qualitative response contained multiple themes, the response was counted within each theme grouping. The final percentage represented the total number of respondents referencing a particular theme, rather than the total number of theme references overall.
- Thematic analysis was conducted by two independent uses of an AI agent and checked for corroboration. The agent analyses were then checked by human coders for accuracy.

“If you want to future-proof the county, you need to spend as much time listening to those who leave as those who remain. Too often the conversation becomes defensive, with assumptions that people leave for superficial reasons like nightlife. In reality, many leave because they want broader career opportunities, greater ambition, more diverse communities, stronger professional networks and access to experiences that simply aren't available locally. If Cumbria only seeks validation from people who already love living here, it risks creating an echo chamber rather than understanding why so much talent leaves. **The challenge isn't convincing everyone to stay - it's making Cumbria somewhere that ambitious young people would genuinely choose to build their future.**”

~ Female respondent from Penrith & Solway constituency

Futureproofing Cumbria: Why do young people leave?

Of the 360 young people who responded to the survey, **just 43.9%** said they will still be living in Cumbria in 5 years time. For those born here, this figure falls to 29.7% (just under 1 in 3), compared to 46.0% of those who have moved here.

For many respondents, leaving isn't a choice. Young people feel **forced out** by **poor career opportunities** and a **lack of affordable housing**. Others feel **isolated** due to **poor transport** and a **lack of things to do**. Some are leaving to attend university, but many did not feel they would return due to the reasons highlighted.

Critically, **1 in 3 respondents** answered 'maybe' or 'not sure', compared to **1 in 6** who answered 'no'. This suggests that **many people would stay, if they could**.

“There are almost no career opportunities for young people in Cumbria, the closest career opportunity I could get is in Newcastle so I will be moving soon. Would love to stay local but it's impossible without the opportunities there.”

“I would like to stay in Cumbria, however I feel that there is a limit on how far my career and salary prospects can go here and housing prices will likely put pressure on my ability to have a family home here.”

Paradoxically, young people see Cumbria as **a desirable place to raise a family, but not to be a young person**. Living here was often described as **a trade-off** between a better quality of life overall, and worse transport, higher housing costs, and fewer job opportunities.

Throughout this report, young people are clear that widening **career opportunities, building affordable housing, promoting leisure activities, and improving transport connections** would help to break down the barriers they face, supporting our future generation to be able to **live, work, and play** in Cumbria and **keeping talented young people** in the county.



Transport is integral to our lives, whether getting to school/college/work, seeing friends, or gaining independence.

~ Male respondent from Westmorland & Lonsdale constituency

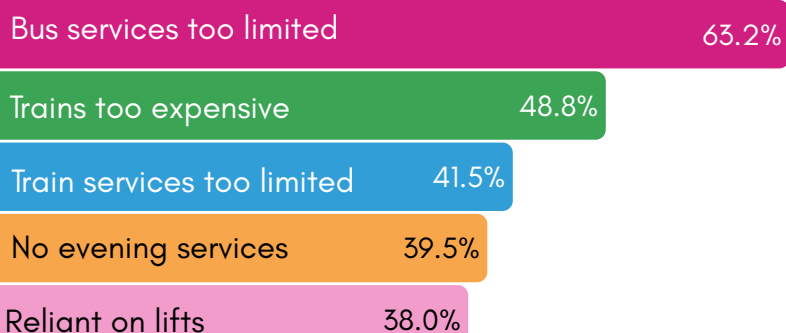


Transport

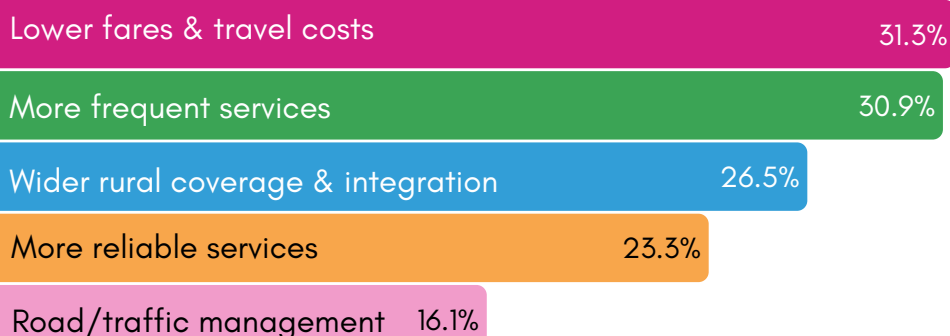
44%

Of respondents said transport issues had forced them to turn down a job or training opportunity.

Biggest transport challenges affecting young people



If you could change one thing about travel in Cumbria...



63%

Said they feel Very Safe or Safe on public transport, while just 9.1% responded Unsafe or Very Unsafe

The current transport system was described as:

A barrier to accessing opportunities

"Transport is creating very limited opportunities, this needs to improve to allow young people from challenging backgrounds to be able to 'break the cycle'"

Unaffordable, even for working people

"When I had a summer job at Brockhole in 2017 to get there I had to get the bus from Endmoor to Kendal and then from Kendal to Brockhole, it took 2 hours and cost more than 20% of my daily salary."

Unreliable, sometimes with serious consequences

"I was on the bus three times in the last 10 days where the driver said we all had to get off as the bus had gone into limp mode so he couldn't drive it. I was late for work twice which means I'm on a warning now"

“Transport links are not well supported for small communities outside of major bus and train routes, which relies heavily on cars as the primary means for transport. Setting up a Cumbria transport pass subsidised at a low fee for young people to enable them to travel to education and work would significantly help with costs of living entering the job/labour market”

~ Female from Penrith & Solway constituency

Transport

Carlisle

- 1 Lower fares/travel costs
- 2 More frequent services

Westmorland & Lonsdale

- 1 More frequent services
- 2 Lower fares/travel costs

Barrow & Furness

- 1 More frequent services
- 2 Lower fares/travel costs

Penrith & Solway

- 1 More frequent services
- 2 Lower fares/travel costs

Whitehaven & Workington

- 1 Reliability
- 2 Lower fares/travel costs

When asked what three things would make the biggest difference to the lives of young people, **transport was mentioned the most by respondents**. Transport was also **rated the least positively** of all policy areas.

- For some, **public transport is unaffordable**, particularly train travel. The bus fare cap has helped young people, but those with multiple changes on a single route still face high travel costs which affect their decisions around education, training, employment, and even socialising.
- For others, **public transport cannot be relied upon** to turn up on time and get them to where they need to be. This was particularly felt by those from the Whitehaven & Workington constituency where improved reliability was their number one priority for change. Young people who have no alternative are rolling a dice everyday as to whether they will get to work on time and, ultimately, whether their job will then become at risk if they don't.
- Many young people simply have **no transport options available** to them. Others **lack evening or morning services** that would enable them to get to and from their workplace. In turn, employers are missing out on being able to recruit talented young people. **44%** of respondents overall said **transport issues had prevented them from accessing employment/training** with this percentage being as high as **64% for 29-31 year olds**.

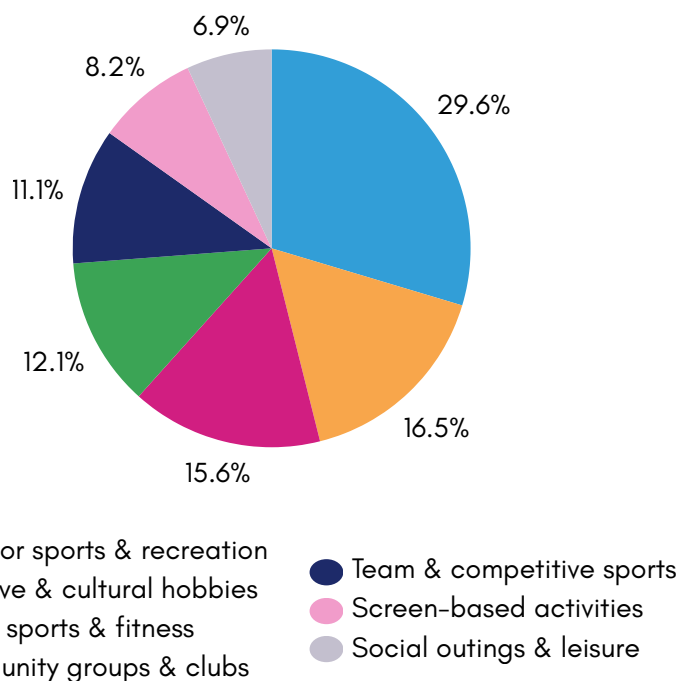
The priorities for change were very similar across the five constituencies, indicating that transport issues are felt universally across the county for young people.

“ There needs to be investment into more activities and opportunities for young people locally so we don't have to consider moving away from the area ”

~Female from Westmorland & Lonsdale constituency

Social Activities

How Cumbria's young people spend their time



What is felt to be good

- 1 Variety of outdoor activities
- 2 Range of sporting activities
- 3 Number of free things to do

Priorities for improvement

- 1 No. of places to meet up with other young people
- 2 Variety of indoor activities
- 3 Number of free things to do

Improving the provision of social activities is a key priority for young people. Across respondents there was a general feeling of **boredom** and **frustration** at a **lack of variety** in the leisure activities available across the county and a **shortage of places for young people to meet**. Some felt that a lack of activities and meeting places is a **driver of anti-social behaviour** in some areas.

While young people describe feeling **lucky** to have access to a large natural playground and all of the free outdoor activities that come with it, many feel that there are **not enough non-sporting or indoor activities**. Where these activities are available, young people feel these are often **too expensive**. The number of free things to do was identified as both a positive aspect of leisure in Cumbria and a priority area for improvement. This may reflect differences in preferences for indoor or outdoor activities.

Transport was seen as a key barrier to accessing activities. Some young people noted that transport barriers have engendered feelings of loneliness and isolation as they are unable to meet up with their friends or meet new people. Others said they often travel outside the county on weekends to access a wider range of activities more easily.

“ I feel like a lot of younger people feel very secluded and not part of anything their age due to a lack of activities to do. ”

~ Male from Penrith & Solway constituency

While the number of free things to do was the greatest area for improvement among those **under 21 years**, for those **aged 21+**, the most popular areas for improvement were a need for more places to meet young people and more clubs/groups for young people. The number of free activities, indoor activities, and places to meet other young people were featured as top areas for improvement for nearly all age groups.

Responses also varied across constituencies (see right) though similar issues were present in the top three areas of improvement for each. Young people from **Barrow & Furness** appear to particularly favour a general increase in the number of activities and clubs, suggesting there is a general paucity of things for young people in this area.

What clubs, activities or facilities young people feel are missing:

1. More youth groups and social spaces

- The most popular suggestion was for more places for young people to socialise with friends and meet new people.
- A need for more places to meet new people was particularly felt by those in their 20s and 30s.

2. More varied sports provision

- A large proportion of responses called for a more varied range of sports clubs outside of football and rugby.
- Many suggestions centred around racquet sports including tennis, squash, and padel.

3. More affordable activities

- Many activities currently available were noted as being too expensive and therefore inaccessible for many.
- Some noted that providing more free activities would help to discourage anti-social behaviour and provide safe places for young people to meet.

4. Indoor entertainment and attractions

- Respondents called for more indoor entertainment options such as bowling, laser tag, escape rooms, or mini golf.
- Young people commented on the general lack of provision of indoor entertainment in Cumbria and the travel time required for many to be able to get to these facilities.

5. Specific interest clubs

- A desire for clubs centred around a specific interest was evident, including clubs for gaming, board games, reading, cooking, and political interests.
- Some suggested more varied opportunities to meet young people with similar interests or backgrounds, such as cultural exchanges or discussions.

Carlisle

- 1 Number of free things to do
- 2 No. of places to meet up with other young people
- 3 Number of things to do nearby

Westmorland & Lonsdale

- 1 Number of free things to do
- 2 Affordability of activities
- 3 No. of places to meet up with other young people

Barrow & Furness

- 1 Number of things to do nearby
- 2 Number of youth clubs/groups
- 3 Number of free things to do

Penrith & Solway

- 1 No. of places to meet up with other young people
- 2 Number of free things to do
- 3 Variety of indoor activities

Whitehaven & Workington

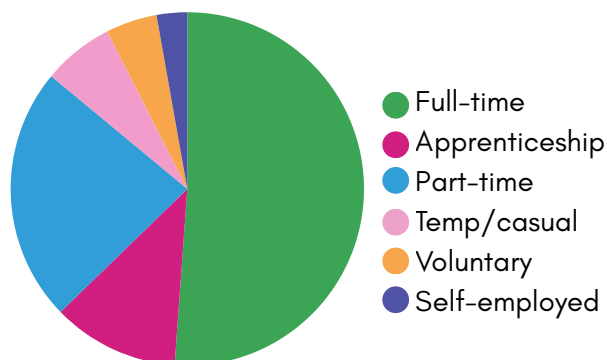
- 1 Variety of indoor activities
- 2 No. of places to meet up with other young people
- 3 Number of youth clubs/groups

“I'm concerned about future career opportunities. I've had the opportunity to work outside of nuclear which has only improved my career prospects, exposure and personal development, but for these opportunities I had to work in Carlisle (1hr drive each way everyday), and remotely, travelling to Surrey every few weeks. We need more opportunities in West Cumbria to retain people interested in working towards Senior and Executive level roles”

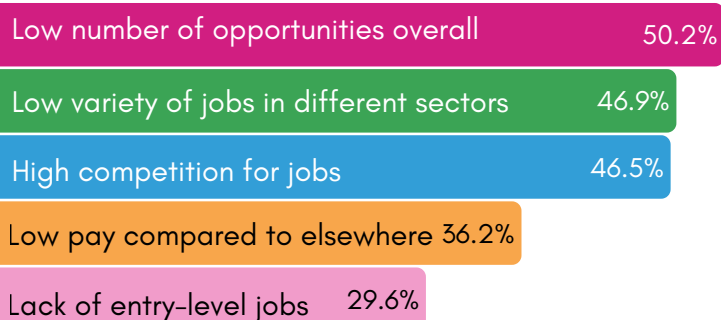
~ Male respondent from Whitehaven & Workington constituency

Employment

Contract type of those in employment



Most common challenges encountered when looking for a job



216 respondents said they were currently employed, or actively looking for employment.

Overall, young people feel that jobs are hard to come by in Cumbria. Many acknowledge a thriving energy sector, but describe feeling **limited and restricted** by a lack of jobs outside of it. Where there are jobs available, young people report experiencing a **high level of competition** for roles.

“The lack of industry restricts career opportunities to either Nuclear/Engineering/Industrial sectors (Sellafield/BAE and its contractors, or a biscuit factory) and local training that caters exclusively to these sectors because they are the only things that provide money in our area, making it less likely for other forms of businesses to create bases in Cumbria due to its prioritisation of these sectors and its isolation/remote location making attracting talent difficult.”

The most significant challenge faced seem to vary by contract type.

- For **apprentices and temporary/casual workers**, **high competition** was the biggest challenge they reported facing. Apprentices also identified **a lack of CV writing/interview experience** and **difficulties obtaining relevant experience** as key challenges (ranked 3rd and 5th respectively).
- In contrast, for those in **full-time employment**, a **low variety of jobs** in different sectors was one of the biggest challenges faced, followed by a low number of opportunities overall.
- For **part-time** and **voluntary workers**, a **low number of opportunities** was selected most often, followed by high competition for roles.
- While the number of **self-employed** respondents was low (6 people). The biggest challenge faced by this group was a **lack of support for young business owners**.

“ There are also very few full time work opportunities, particularly in the heritage and culture sector which is a massive industry for the area with tourism but most jobs are part time so we need to work multiple jobs to work in the field we want to. ”

~ Female respondent from Westmorland & Lonsdale constituency

Responses also varied by constituency.

- **High competition** for jobs was the biggest challenge faced by those in the **Whitehaven & Workington constituency**. This is perhaps unsurprising given that a large proportion of those in/seeking apprenticeships were from this constituency.
- In the **Barrow-in-Furness constituency**, the dominance of BAE was evident with the greatest challenge being a **lack of variety**. This constituency also highlighted a **lack of transport** to get to employment sites (ranked 4th so not shown here), indicating that it is difficult to get to work outside of the area.
- **Low pay** was the greatest challenge faced for **Penrith & Solway**. This may reflect the predominance of typically lower-paid industries such as agriculture and tourism/hospitality in this area.
- In both **Carlisle** and **Westmorland & Lonsdale**, a **low number of opportunities** overall was the greatest challenge faced. However, low pay was the second highest challenge faced in Carlisle, whereas Westmorland & Lonsdale constituents reported a low variety of jobs in different sectors.

Do young people feel they can achieve their career goals in Cumbria?

Young people rated how confident they are that they can achieve their career goals in Cumbria. An overall rating of **3.14/5** was given, though only those currently seeking or in employment were asked this question.

For those who gave lower ratings, reasons given centred around a lack of roles in their chosen career being available locally, or a lack of progression opportunities. For others, reasons included transport barriers and a lack of education/training opportunities for their chosen career.

Some described there being a better range of higher-paid jobs elsewhere.

Those who gave ratings of 4 or 5 tended to feel that their skills matched the dominant sectors in the area and that their employers provided good support through training and apprenticeships.

Carlisle

- 1 Low number of opportunities overall
- 2 Low pay compared to elsewhere
- 3 Low variety of jobs in different sectors

Westmorland & Lonsdale

- 1 Low number of opportunities overall
- 2 Low variety of jobs in different sectors
- 3 High competition for jobs

Barrow & Furness

- 1 Low variety of jobs in different sectors
- 2 High competition for jobs
- 3 Low number of opportunities overall

Penrith & Solway

- 1 Low pay compared to elsewhere
- 2 Low number of opportunities overall
- 3 Low variety of jobs in different sectors

Whitehaven & Workington

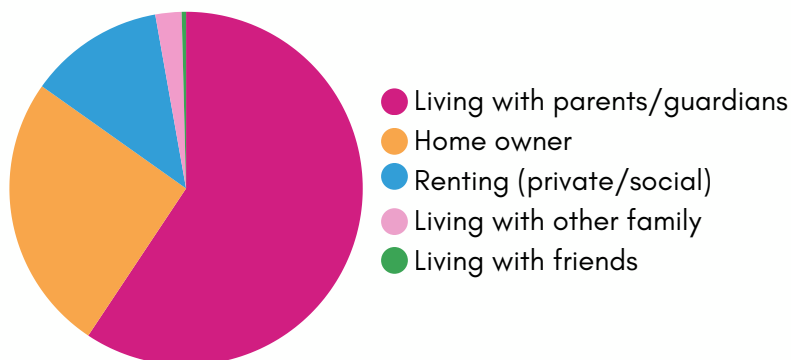
- 1 High competition for jobs
- 2 Low number of opportunities overall
- 3 Low variety of jobs in diff. sectors

“ There is a lack of affordable housing, particularly in the South East Lakes, both renting and buying. Even Kendal has gone up steeply in price. It might push me out of Cumbria despite having a permanent job. There aren't many options for young people like myself. Places like Windermere lack a community feel because it's mostly guest houses and hotels. ”

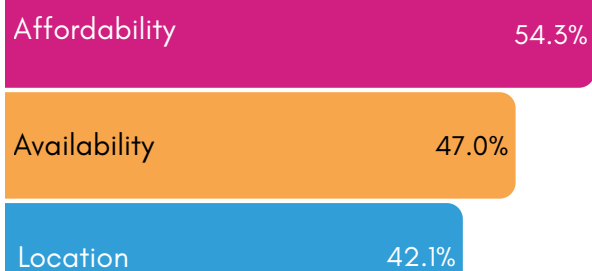
~ Male respondent from Westmorland & Lonsdale constituency

Housing

Housing situation of respondents



Top three challenges encountered when looking for housing



Concerns surrounding affordability of housing were felt almost unanimously across respondents.

Affordability was the biggest challenge faced by almost **all constituencies**, excluding **Whitehaven & Workington** where affordability was second after **availability**. For most constituencies, **affordability**, overall **availability**, and the **location** of housing were the top three challenges experienced. The only exception was **Westmorland & Lonsdale** where the impact of **2nd homes/holiday lets** on housing availability ranked 3rd above location.

"I love living here, but I am worried about how I will ever buy my first home"

"Many young people leave the area for uni and are not able to return due to the lack of housing (too many short term rentals), the price of housing, and few professional job opportunities. More needs to be done to make sure young people are able to move back home or develop professional skills in the area. A example of a policy that actively works against this is the local occupancy housing where you need to return to the area within 3 years to qualify (less than the length of an undergrad degree)."

For many, issues surrounding the affordability of housing were compounded by a **lack of job opportunities and poor transport links**. Many young people expressed concern that they would need to **move out of the county** in order to find affordable accommodation and/or a job with sufficient salary to afford a house.

The **number of 2nd homes and holiday lets** were also said to make finding housing more difficult through restricting availability and raising the price of the remaining housing stock. Some also commented that **local occupancy laws felt too strict** and were preventing young people from being able to buy houses in certain areas.

“Affordable rents (less than 1000 a month), and homes for first time buyers are limited, with individuals having to stay living at home for years longer as they cannot afford to move out. But this is seen as a luxury. Some are applying for homelessness, living in poor quality housing, or staying in unhealthy relationships to keep a roof over their heads.”

~ Female respondent from Barrow & Furness constituency

114

Respondents said they were thinking of buying a house in the next 5 years

£210,805

The average house price prospective buyers said they could realistically afford. Estimates ranged from £60,000 to £500,000.

What are the three main things young people look for in a house?



Bedrooms/size

The number of bedrooms was a key feature for young buyers with many noting a desire for 2-3 bedroom properties.

Many noted a disconnect between their desired number of bedrooms and what they felt they could realistically afford.



Location

Being near to a town and amenities/services was important for many young buyers. The attractiveness of the area and its proximity to a workplace were also important. Many young people also felt safety of an area was important and the sense of community in a place.



Transport links

Having public transport connections was a priority for a large number of respondents. Others also mentioned wanting to live near to major road networks to facilitate easy car travel.

“Whilst I have completed A levels at a well respected school and completed a degree (through an apprenticeship) all within Cumbria, it suited what I wanted to do. However noticing other fellow Cumbrians they have really struggled, either having to move away to pursue what they want to do or had to travel far for what they need such as rural skills (with the closure of Newton Rigg)”

~ Female respondent from Penrith & Solway constituency

Education & Training

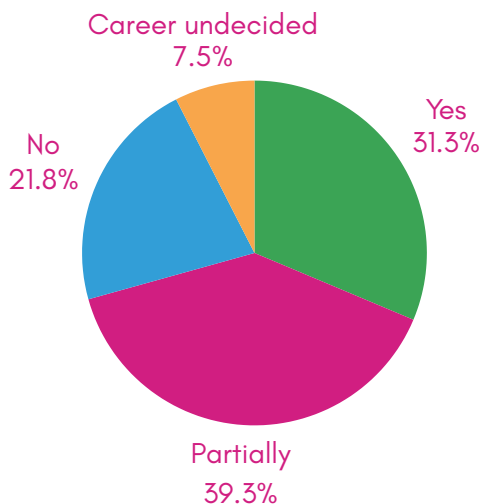
What is working well

Range of skill/qualification levels available	38.9%
Number of centres nearby	38.1%
Quality of education/training	36.0%
Variety of options	30.6%
Number of courses available	29.7%

What could be improved

Variety of education/training opportunities	51.3%
Number of centres nearby	43.2%
Range of skill/qualification levels	40.3%
No. of training/education courses	39.8%
Quality of education/training	38.6%

Are the training opportunities available for the career/job you would like to do?



When asked about the education and training available in Cumbria, responses varied. **31.3%** said the county has the education/training opportunities available for their chosen job or career while **39.3%** answered 'partially' and **21.8%** said 'no'. The majority of those who said yes are already on an apprenticeship or in full-time employment.

Across responses, there was an acknowledgement or even frustration that there are a **limited range of training options in different sectors** outside of nuclear or engineering. Many observed the need to move away in order to pursue training and careers for subjects outside of these sectors. Respondents also highlighted a **shortage of graduate and entry-level roles**. Those who said yes tended to feel that they had been **fortunate that their career choice aligned with the training available** in the area but noted that they may have struggled if they had chosen a different route.

For those who responded no, many commented on the lack of training degree courses they would want to do, **particularly in creative and cyber subjects**. Others called for more training opportunities in outdoor and adventure roles.



Having a wider range of industries and opportunities would make me feel more confident about pursuing my career goals in Cumbria.

~ Female respondent from Whitehaven & Workington constituency



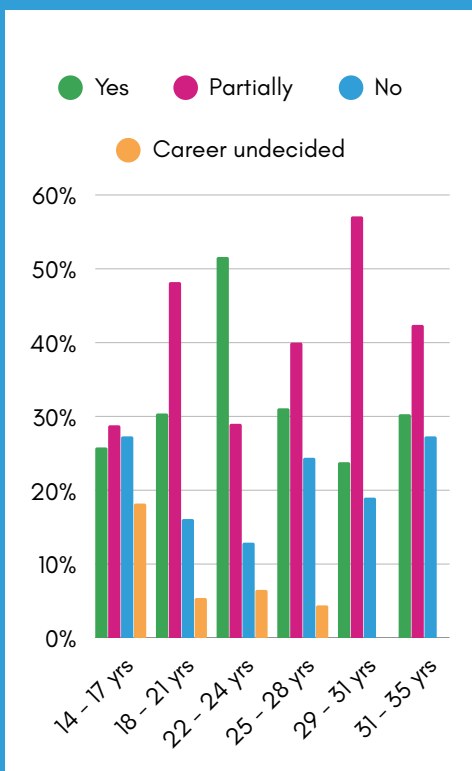
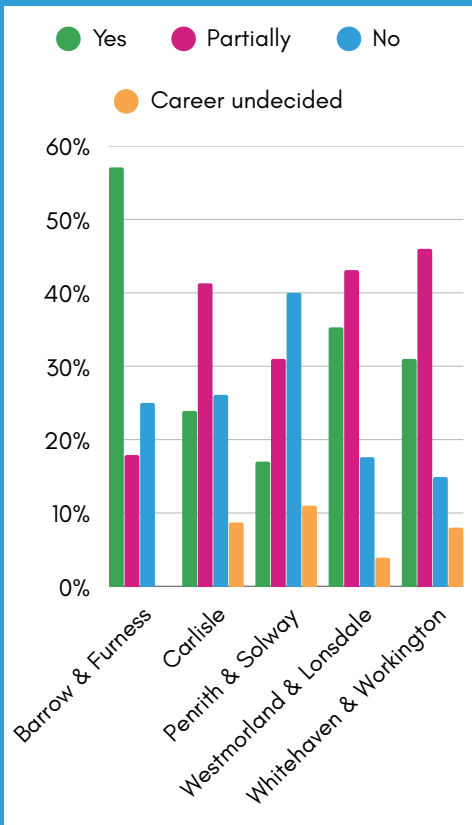
Variations in responses

Whether young people feel there is the education and training available in the county for their chosen career varied across both ages and constituencies. Most notably, young people from **Barrow & Furness** had the highest proportion of yes responses overall, while **Penrith & Solway** had the lowest proportion of yes responses and the greatest proportion of respondents saying no. This may reflect differences in the availability of higher education centres and apprenticeship opportunities in these two constituencies. The majority of **22-24 year olds (51.7%)** answered yes while no rates were highest amongst **14-17 year olds** and **31-35 year olds (27.3% each)**.

Areas for improvement also varied across constituencies and ages. For **Barrow & Furness, Penrith & Solway, and Whitehaven & Workington** the variety of education & training opportunities was the biggest priority which again may reflect the dominance of energy sector opportunities in these areas. In contrast, for **Carlisle** the number of training/education centres nearby was the biggest priority. While possibly surprising, given the presence of both a university and a college in this area, this could link to the absence of degree courses in specific areas discussed above. The range of qualification levels available was the greatest priority for **Westmorland & Lonsdale**. This may reflect the range of post-16 opportunities available through centres such as Kendal College, but the absence of further education in this area.

For **14-17 year olds**, the number of education/training centres nearby was the greatest priority, perhaps due to this age group being unable to drive. Whereas, quality of provision was most important for **18-21 year olds**. For those **aged over 21**, variety of education/training opportunities was the biggest priority for most age groups. **29-31 year olds** also selected "none of the above" as the most frequent positive aspect of education and training, indicating a negative attitude towards the education and training offer overall among this age group.

Furthermore, some young people said the quality of education and training in Cumbria is good, others commented that the **quality could be improved**. This was particularly evident for those who are currently completing an apprenticeship where quality was the second highest area for improvement.



“ *“I’m concerned about the future of the environment and nature and living so close to it all the time I see the effects of climate change and want more to be done about it”* **”**
~ Female respondent from Carlisle constituency

A note on Climate & Nature

When we asked young people what they love about Cumbria, the majority commented on its natural beauty and green spaces. Many commented on how lucky they feel to live in such a beautiful place and there were calls for the landscape to be preserved and protected.

Despite no direct questions being asked around climate and nature, a number of young people asked for more to be done to protect the natural environment, tackle climate change, and improve climate resilience. Further work is needed to understand the prominence of this issue for young people and their priorities for change, however the sentiment observed is that there are many young people in Cumbria who are keen to see more action around climate and nature.

“Coordinated action on climate change mitigation and adaption including for both new and existing buildings to make them healthy, low cost and resilient places to live.”

“I love the countryside and the natural environment. I think we are very lucky to live in such a beautiful place. This should be protected. ”

“Ensure the preservation of the green spaces. Yes we want homes but not at the expense of farms and fields and lakes and wildlife.”

“ I also feel that it is so desperately important for us to care about climate change and the beautiful landscape that is around us. I believe that there needs to be further preventative measures for damaging nature and our ecosystem, which many of my peers agree with. [...] We are so fortunate to live in such a beautiful area, we must protect it!”

“Strong and clear commitment to climate action as this is a key issue of intergenerational equity.”

“More opportunities for youth led initiatives and youth voices within spaces of leadership - eg town councils and any progress to do with climate change.”

“ I don't think it's about making young people feel they are being taken seriously. It's about demonstrating that our views have influenced decisions.

Too often, engagement with young people feels like a consultation exercise rather than a genuine willingness to challenge existing thinking. If the Mayor wants young people to believe their views matter, they should be transparent about what they heard, what they agreed with, what they disagreed with, and, most importantly, what they are going to do differently as a result.

How we feel isn't the outcome - change is.

~ Female respondent from Penrith & Solway constituency

”

What young people said would make them feel their issues were being taken seriously



Consultation

Going to where young people are and actively seeking their views on key issues. Ensuring all young voices are heard, not just those who are easiest to reach.

“Actively engaging with young people, talking to them and holding meeting with groups of young people. Seeing this active engagement would help young people to feel seen by a mayor rather than talked about by older people who do not fully understand the lives of youth today.”



Co-production

Give young people the ability to influence key decisions through specific youth places on key decision-making boards and forming youth panels.

“Whilst boards made up of young people are a great vehicle to lobby change among those with influence, including young people in main boards and groups making actual decisions would demonstrate the Mayor is not just listening to young peoples opinions but trusting them to make decisions.”



Communication

Clear, regular communication of actions that are being taken via platforms used by young people. Transparent updates and responses to feedback received from young people.

“Direct interaction, more of a presence, I feel unless you make the effort to see what the Mayor is up to, you won't know, it should be easier to see and more visible. Even on social media, by way of sponsored ads it could become more visible”



Commitment

Commit to addressing the issues which affect young people (i.e., those raised in this report). Publication of action plans and regular, accessible reporting on progress.

“The Mayor Should have a Cumbria Young People Strategy and SMART action plan with clear Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and a dashboard on mayor website to publish annual progress report what Mayor delivered for young people in Cumbria.”

“ Please remember that where we live can sometimes make it harder to access opportunities. Good transport, affordable activities, mental health support, and local jobs can make a huge difference in helping young people feel connected, valued, and hopeful about their future in Cumbria.”

~ Male, Morecambe & Lunesdale constituency (within Cumbria boundaries)

Closing remarks

We asked young people what they wanted the future Mayor to know about being a young person in Cumbria.

Young people described Cumbria as beautiful, but that **it is hard to live and build a future** here due to limited activities, weak transport links and a narrow employment market. These issues are further compounded by a lack of affordable housing in places and high living costs. Life here was described as **particularly challenging for those with lower incomes and no access to a car.**

However, young people also told us that they **don't want to have to leave.** Instead, they called for investment that will support them to **thrive** and a genuine commitment from decision makers **to listen to, and involve young people** in decision making.

"I love living in Cumbria and The Lake District, finding sufficient job opportunities to survive is hard and means that so many people are struggling, please make Cumbria a respected, protective and flourishing area with sufficient pay and jobs to support it's residents. All that we all would like to do is live a happy, fulfilled life surrounded by nature and not have to struggle to get by."

"I would say its hard being a young person in Cumbria there are not a huge amount of opportunities career wise and those we do have are very competitive, this leaves us feeling left deflated and uncertain about our futures forcing many to move from the communities and the family/support networks they grew up around. [...] Many of the young people my age struggle to save to buy homes or even get on the property ladder. There also seems to be a lack of provision for children and safe social areas in which they can engage with each other outside of schools."

Young people chose to fill in the Youth Ask because they want **to be heard.** This report outlines the key challenges young people face in Cumbria and the changes they need to see in order to flourish and prosper here. We are now calling on decision makers not only to listen to these asks, but **to act on them.** The responses to this survey show that young people, even those as young as 14, are **articulate, clear,** and **united** in what they feel needs to change. Young people are not misguided or naive, but **thoughtful and aware.** They deserve to be heard and **involved in decisions** which will impact their lives now, and into the future.

“Cumbria is beautiful and magical, but it can be hard to see a future here as opportunities are so limited.”

~ Female, Penrith & Solway constituency

“Opportunity is difficult to come by, but not impossible, it's given through schools, community groups and most importantly youth organisations. Invest in them they are our best asset to grow a positive and welcoming community.”

“Cumbria is a great place to be a young person but only if you or your family have sufficient resources to access services and opportunities, I am very lucky that this is the case for me but if it wasn't I would really struggle.”

“We have many talented young people that don't have the money or facilities to progress, jobs aren't for life they are short term until we can escape. Tourists are prioritised, businesses that are young, fun and trendy need to be prioritised.”

“It's incredibly difficult, we feel forgotten about, jobs are hard to find, driving tests are impossible to get, there are very little facilities or clubs for young people over 16 and it feels very isolating.”

“It's really tough. It's beautiful here but it's hard to access it without a car. It's so busy, it's hard to stay here as you grow up. I grew up central lakes and have slowly been forced to move out due to costs and jobs.”

“The best thing a young Cumbrian can do is leave Cumbria; it's important that we make Cumbria a vibrant and welcoming place that young people will want to live in.”

“Please listen to young people and take our views seriously. Many of us want to stay in Cumbria, but we need better job opportunities, mental health support and more investment in young people's futures to make that possible.”

“Until there is a willingness to challenge the culture, broaden perspectives and accept that Cumbria needs to compete for talent rather than assume people should want to stay, I don't think meaningful change will happen. That's why, for people who want something fundamentally different from what Cumbria offers today, the biggest opportunity is often to leave.”

“It's hard. It's isolating. Friendships take a lot of effort to keep, especially when you live rurally but your school friends live in a town. Work is good to come by as a young person as hospitality is so big, therefore lots of jobs as a school kid. But getting older and being a young professional is hard and trying to stay in the county and progress your career and find a home is a tricky combination to find.”

“It's not easy. My village doesn't have any public transport, until I could drive I was heavily reliant on parents. I chose to go to the University of Cumbria because I didn't want to move away from family and friends. When I finished uni I struggled to get a local job, everything I applied to I was underexperienced for, I now work in Carlisle, which is an hour away.
Even after saving and working full time for a number of years, my partner and I can't afford a house in my village.”

“The challenge of making a life here as a young person. Houses are unaffordable, whilst salaries are lagging behind the national average. It is imperative that locals are able to remain here, contributing to their local economy, living in the towns and villages even in the tourist hotspots and thriving in their workplace.”