

Skills Strategy

YOUNG PEOPLE'S REPORT

By young people, for young people.



FOREWORD

This report, produced by Swindon's Changemakers is a key part of the 'Let's Talk Skills' work, aimed at engaging a wide range of stakeholders and residents in the development of a Skills Strategy for Swindon.

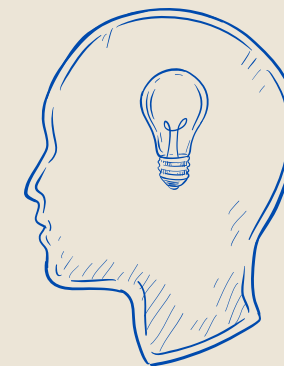
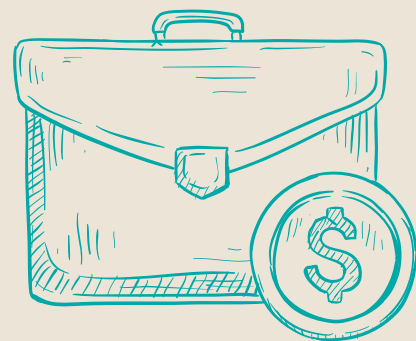
The workshops that we attended with young people and the wider work that the Changemakers undertook, represents the views of a diverse group of young people. We were delighted to hear first-hand the honest and insightful input from young people on their experiences of the current system to support their access to the right skills and pathways to further learning and employment. The report clearly outlines the areas that young people have indicated need to have a future focus and these are reflected in our strategy.

Thank you to WAY, the Changemakers and the young people involved for your contribution to developing a Skills Strategy for Swindon.

Sally Burnett, Head of Skills & Employment, Swindon Borough Council



Councillor Robbins and
Sally Burnett meeting with
Swindon's Young Changemakers.



INTRODUCTION

This report was put together by Swindon's Young Changemakers - a diverse group of young people aged 12-25 committed to driving lasting change in their communities.

The aim of this report was to gain feedback from children and young people around Swindon Borough Council's Skills Strategy and to ensure the strategy is informed by the lived experience and aspirations of local children and young people.

The research engaged 50 children and young people (aged 11-25) and included focus groups, young person led research and a young person led conversation with Councillor Jim Robbins and Sally Burnett (Head of Skills & Employment at Swindon Borough Council).

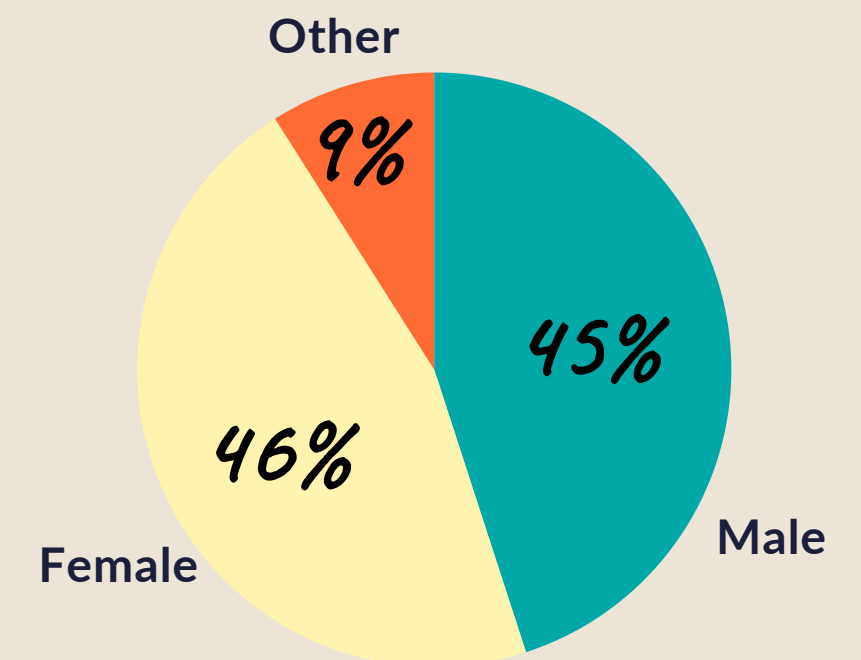
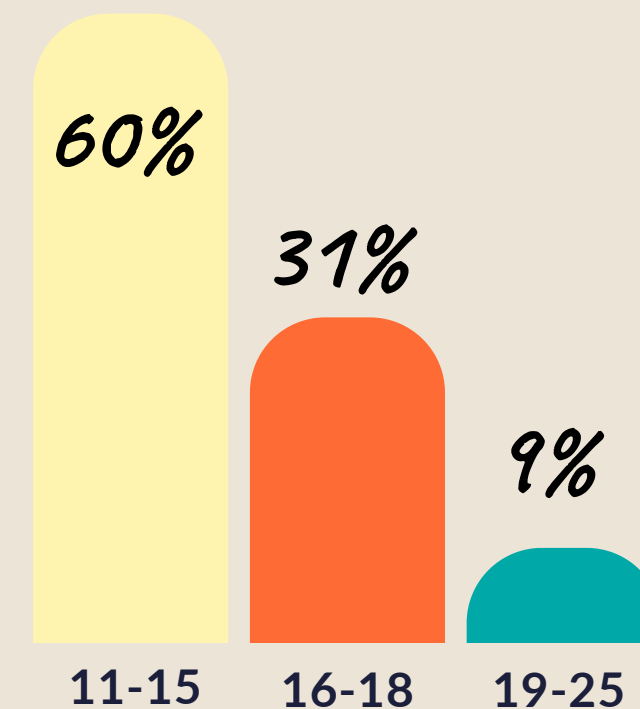
Wider research was also conducted by charity partners WAY, STEP and SMASH who have established trusted relationships with a diverse group of children and young people.

The report was designed by young designer Bella Schmidt (20), through WAY Studios.



Who did we speak to?

Total: **55** Children and Young People



18% Ethnic minority background

22% LGBTQ+

44% SEND/Neurodiversity

14% NEET

OUR ASPIRATIONS



*"We don't have to
leave swindon to
have hope."*

OUR ASPIRATIONS

Most of the children and young people we spoke to wanted a job that is creative, practical or involves helping people.

"I want to work with animals or with children"

"I want to open my own business one day"

"To be a teacher"

"I want to work in the fire service"

"I need someone I trust and who knows me to help me in my next steps"

"I'd like to work in tech or something with computers"

"I want to live a peaceful life and enjoy my hobbies."

"I want to go to university or do an apprenticeship"

"To be a chef"

"To get good grades and be a psychologist"

"To be a mechanic"

"I'm not sure, I'm still figuring it out"

"I want to be a graphic designer and work for a creative agency"


"I want to work with horses and be able to go to college"

"I want to be a YouTuber"

THE

BARRIERS

*"I feel overwhelmed
and don't know where
to start"*



BARRIERS

WE FACE

"I'm not sure where to start, where to look or who's advice to trust"

Lack of Information and Careers Advice

- It's hard to get clear information – things are rushed, confusing, or we're just told to look it up ourselves.
- Careers advice isn't always helpful – we want proper time, clear info, and real conversations about our options.
- Many of us don't know where to start or what steps to take.

Practical Barriers

- Money and transport can make it hard to get to the places we want to go – sometimes it's just too expensive or too far.
- We need more support with 'real-life' skills – like writing CVs, practising interviews, getting work experience, and feeling confident.

Mental Health and Emotional Barriers

- Mental health support isn't always there when we need it – schools don't always understand, but colleges seem to be better at this.
- The pressure to pass can be too much – it leaves us feeling stressed, burnt out, or like we're falling behind.
- There's a big worry about not fitting in or being rejected – especially for young people with extra needs or who feel different.
- Sometimes there's no trusted person to turn to – we need people who take the time to get to know us.

Transitions and New Environments

- New places and new people can feel really stressful and overwhelming.
- Starting something new without support can feel too scary.

OUR SUGGESTIONS



*"We've chosen
5 themes"*

ADVICE, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT



- Provide proper one-to-one advice with someone who listens and helps plan their next steps – not just quick chats that tick boxes.
- Long-term mentors would help – someone who sticks around through school, work, and life changes, not just a one-off.
- Advice for careers, university, and apprenticeship should be simple, clear, and explained in ways that all young people actually understand.
- Build mental health support into advice and guidance and future planning – it's not a separate issue.
- Let young people know early on about what happens when their EHCP or other support stops – the "cliff-edge" should never be a surprise.

"It would help having a mentor or someone I could talk to who's done it before."





CAREER OPTIONS AND PATHWAYS

- Provide clear step-by-step routes to their future careers, especially those under 18 who feel stuck.
- Providing taster sessions/activities, work experience, and supported placements would help young people explore different jobs. Make sure it's inclusive and meaningful.
- Run sessions which build confidence, communication, teamwork, and real-life skills - this would make a huge difference.
- Make sure employers offer proper support and reasonable adjustments, including quiet spaces and allowing things like headphones if needed - especially for neurodiverse young people.
- Funding options and the impact of things like Universal Credit need to be explained clearly so young people can plan properly.

"I'd like to try different jobs, so I can find out what they are really like."

"No one has ever sat down with me to talk about it."



INCLUSIVE WORKPLACES



"I need more time to understand instructions, I'm worried my boss won't understand my difficulties"

"I'm anxious about new places and new people"

- Encourage workplaces to offer buddy systems and step-by-step welcome guides to help young people settle in.
- Properly train managers on how to support young people, especially those with additional needs.
- Provide safe, quiet spaces in workplaces for when things get overwhelming.
- Assist employers to actively support young people with health issues or neurodivergence, not just meet the minimum legal requirements.
- More paid placements, apprenticeships, and real job opportunities that welcome young people and value their potential - especially for those who haven't passed their GCSE's.

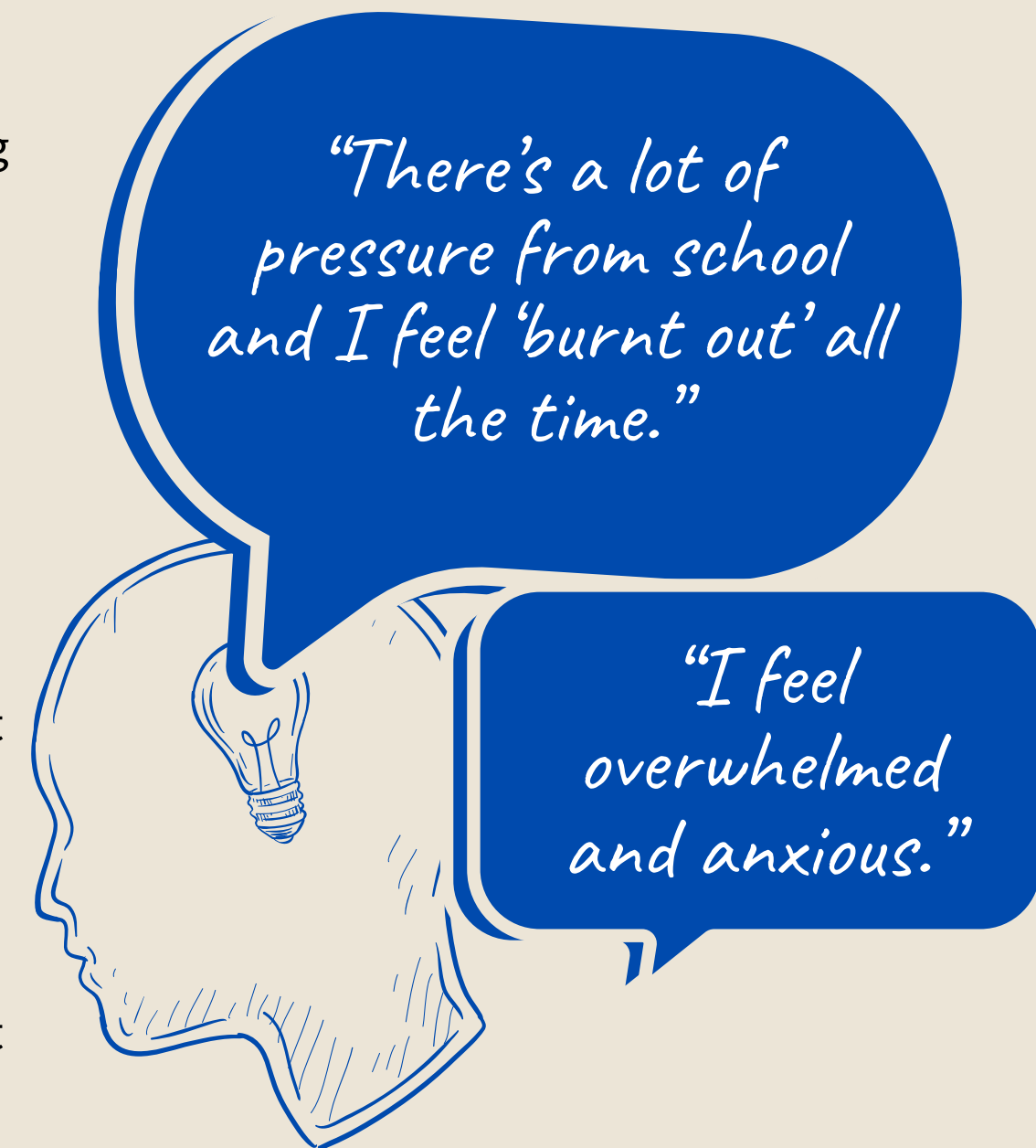


MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT

IN EDUCATION



- Mental health services need to be easier to access and should not suddenly stop when school or college ends – support should follow young people into adulthood.
- Schools should offer real mental health support that actually helps – not just focus on exam results while young people are struggling.
- Employers need to properly support mental health at work – including quiet spaces, flexible adjustments, and understanding managers.
- More activity and community-based mental health support would help young people feel less isolated and more confident to ask for help.
- Long-term support is essential – young people don't just need help for a few weeks; they need consistent support that sticks around.





IMPROVED TRANSPORT



- Public transport needs to be cheaper and more accessible – many young people can't afford to travel to college, work, or social opportunities.
- Bus and train spaces should be quieter and less overwhelming for neurodiverse young people or those with anxiety.
- Simple, clear travel information and training would help young people feel more confident using public transport on their own.
- There should be more local opportunities for college, universities and work – not everything should require long, expensive, or stressful journeys.
- More consistent and reliable transport options would give young people real independence and open up more choices for their future.

*"I don't know
what buses to
get to different
opportunities"*

*"Not having the
money for transport,
prevents and limits
what jobs I can get"*

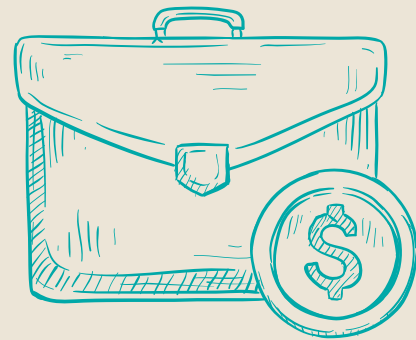
REPORT

Summary



Advice, Guidance and Support

We young people need **personalised, one-to-one advice** that truly listens and helps us plan for our futures. **Long-term mentors** would make a big difference by providing ongoing support through school, work, and life changes. Career advice should be **simple, accessible** and include mental health support.



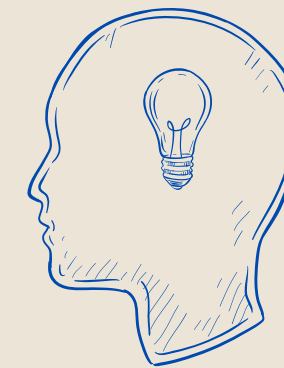
Career Options

Clear, **step-by-step career routes** are essential. We, young people want the chance to try different jobs through **taster sessions, work experience, and meaningful placements**. Confidence-building activities and **real-life skills training** should be widely available, especially for those with additional needs.



Inclusive Workplaces

Workplaces should actively welcome and support young people, particularly those with health issues or neurodivergence. **Buddy systems, step-by-step inductions, and trained managers** can help us settle in. More **paid placements and opportunities** for those without formal qualifications are needed.



Mental Health Support

Mental health services should be easily accessible and continue into adulthood, with **schools providing meaningful support** beyond just focusing on exam results. Employers should offer **mental health-friendly environments**. Community-based mental health options and **long-term, consistent support** is key.



Improved Transport

Affordable, accessible, and reliable public transport is crucial to help us reach education, work, and social opportunities. Transport systems should also be made **less overwhelming** for those with anxiety or neurodiverse needs. Better **local opportunities** would reduce the need for long and expensive travel.

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