NEXT STEPS

LEARNING FROM YOUR GENERATION

FROM EVIDENCE TO IMPACT

YOUR VOICE COUNTS

UPDATE 2026

MAKING A DIFFERENCE



NEXTSTEPSSTUDY.ORG.UK

YOUR VOICE ON AI AND CLIMATE CHANGE



A really big thank you to everyone who took part in our online survey earlier this year.

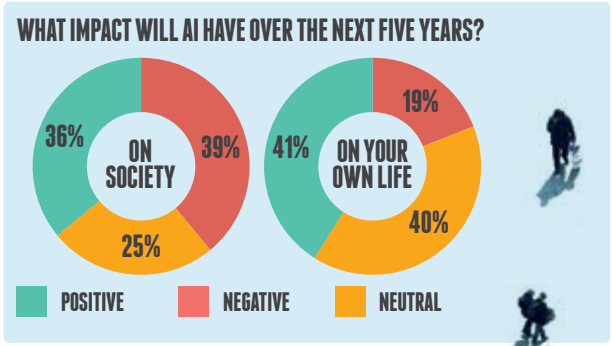
In this mini survey, we wanted to find out which aspects of your lives, like work, money, relationships, parenting, and health, you think are most important for us to ask you about in future surveys. Your responses will help us prioritise topics that matter most to you.

We also asked you about two big issues that are on many people's minds — climate change and artificial intelligence (AI). Our researchers have looked at your answers.

47%
USE AI SEVERAL TIMES A WEEK

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

AI is now part of everyday life for many Next Steps study members. Nearly half (47%) said they use AI frequently — at least several times a week. Only a minority reported rarely (17%) or never (15%) using it. Male study members are just a little more likely than female study members to be frequent users of AI (49% compared to 45%). There's a bigger difference in use of AI between graduates and non-graduates. Around three in five study members with a degree are using AI several times a week or more compared to just under two in five of those without a degree.



Is AI good or bad?

Study members were split on whether AI will have a positive or negative impact on society over the next five years. Females were less likely than males to expect a positive impact (33% compared to 39%).

Study members were generally more optimistic when thinking about the effects of AI on their own lives in future. Twice as many predicted a positive impact than negative impact.

In work, around seven in 10 study members who reported using AI tools said it had improved their productivity. But looking ahead, half of all study members said they expect AI to reduce jobs in their field over the next five years.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Almost all study members agree climate change is happening and the vast majority (four in five) believe humankind is at least partly responsible. Most study members (88%) said they are worried about the impact of climate change on future generations.



Taking action

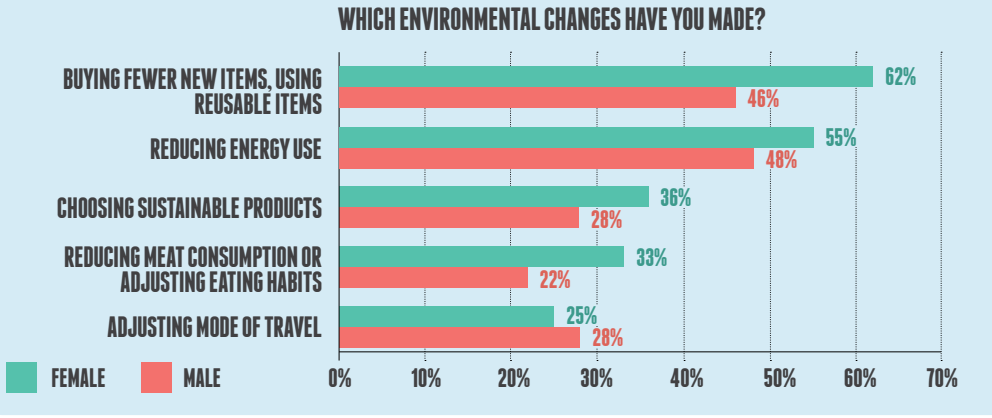
Four out of five study members said they have made at least one lifestyle change because they care about the environment.

Female study members were more likely than male study members to have made the lifestyle changes we asked about. This included using renewable items to reduce waste (62% compared to 46%) and changing eating habits (33% compared to 22%). However, it was a little less common for female study members to have switched their mode of transport than it was for male study members (25% compared to 28%).

Supporting policy changes

You also shared your thoughts on the different steps the government could take to address climate change. There was most support for working with other countries to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, with 70% saying we should do this. Around two thirds (68%) agreed with building more wind farms on land and a similar proportion (64%) said there should be stricter legal limits on emissions from industry.

Just over one in four (27%) were in favour of increasing tax on flights, and around one in five supported banning the sale of petrol and diesel cars (22%) and raising tax on petrol (19%).



PUTTING THE PIECES TOGETHER: LEARNING FROM LINKED DATA

Where you've given us your permissions, we're able to link some of the information held in external records about you to your Next Steps survey answers.

Government departments and agencies, like the NHS, Department for Education, Department for Work and Pensions and HM Revenue & Customs, routinely collect information about all of us, to help plan and provide public services.

Linking this data helps to build a fuller picture of your lives, making the study even more useful for research on important issues.

WHEN DID YOU ASK ME ABOUT LINKING MY DATA?

In the Age 25 and Age 32 Surveys, we asked you for your permission to add information from external records. You can check what permissions you've given us, and change them at any time. To do this, please contact the Next Steps team using the details on the back of this booklet.

WHAT RECORDS HAVE BEEN LINKED ALREADY?

If you've given us your permission, we've linked some health, economic and education records to your Next Steps information.



WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES THIS ACTUALLY MAKE?

The information in these records is often more detailed than the information we collect through surveys. Linking the different sets of information creates a more complete picture of your lives. It can also reduce the number of survey questions we need to ask you, saving you time and making it easier to take part in the study.

Linking information like this increases the potential of Next Steps to be used for impactful research. **Read two examples on the next page.**





MISSED OPPORTUNITIES FOR MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT

Combining information you've shared with us with the information available in NHS records, researchers can look at how your generation are using health services — and who might be missing out on care they need.

A research team from the University of Southampton, and mental health organisation YoungMinds, found a big gap between the number of young people with symptoms of poor mental health and those who had accessed NHS mental health services.

Over two thirds (67%) of Next Steps study members showed symptoms in at least one of the surveys at ages 14, 16 and 25. But according to the linked health records, by their mid-20s, only around one in 10 of those in this group had got help from NHS mental health services. And just 13% of study members with persistently poor mental health, from their teens to their mid-20s, had used these services.

NHS RECORDS

SHOW HOW YOUR GENERATION ARE USING MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES









RESEARCH USING LINKED DATA HAS CONTRIBUTED TO THE DEBATE ABOUT STUDENT LOANS





STUDENT LOAN CHANGES IMPACTING DISADVANTAGED GRADUATES

Researchers from UCL used records from the Student Loans Company, linked to Next Steps survey responses, to show that changes to the student loans system in England in 2024 would hit the pockets of people who are already disadvantaged the hardest.

The reforms included a significant reduction in the amount graduates need to be earning before they have to start making loan repayments, meaning they would need to repay their loans sooner. Researchers found it would lead to around 50% more graduates beginning to pay back their loans by the time they are 25.



THE CONSEQUENCES OF WORK INSTABILITY







People who experience spells of unemployment early in their careers are less likely to own a home at age 32.

Meanwhile, those with a successful start in the labour market further benefit from the "bank of mum and dad" when buying their first homes.

WHAT WE ASKED YOU

In the Age 25 Survey, you told us whether you were in education, employment or training from your mid-teens to mid-20s. Researchers from the University of Southampton also used information from the Age 32 Survey about your financial assets, such as whether you owned a home.

WHAT WERE THE FINDINGS?

Most study members (72%) experienced relatively stable early careers, entering employment by age 25 and then remaining in work. A further 12% were still in higher education and 4% were in extended training. However, around one in eight (12%) experienced unstable early career paths, characterised by prolonged or intermittent periods of being not in education, employment or training.

The researchers found that 60% of study members who experienced extended unemployment or irregular work between ages 16 and 25 had no savings or investments by their early 30s. In comparison, this was true for only 20-40% of those with more stable careers. This suggests that early career instability can have a lasting impact on people's financial security and savings.

FAMILY BACKGROUND



Among young adults with stable early careers, those with property-owning parents were more likely to receive financial support to buy a home than those with parents who rented.



However, this pattern was not seen among those with less stable careers, suggesting that parental support does not always act as a safety net.

The authors of the research said: "Recent cohorts of young adults are facing increasing difficulties in buying their first homes. By looking at people's full transition from school to work, as well as their parental background, our findings point to the drivers that widen these disparities within the same generation."



MAKING AN IMPACT!



By being part of Next Steps, you're making an important contribution to society, helping to provide vital evidence on issues that matter to families now.

Here are two ways that Next Steps has helped bring about important change.

IMPROVING ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION

Using information from Next Steps, the Nuffield Foundation's 'First in family' project looked at how being the first in a family to attend university affects education and career outcomes. The findings helped inform Universities UK's 100 Faces campaign, which called for fairer student maintenance support and highlighted the achievements of first-generation students. Working with more than 100 universities, the campaign shared real life stories to demonstrate the value of widening access to higher education, challenge negative perceptions of university study, and support policy change aimed at improving opportunities for future generations of students.

As a result of this work, three parliamentary questions were raised, asking the Department for Education to consider bringing back non-repayable maintenance grants for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Those involved in the campaign felt that the evidence from Next Steps helped raise awareness of the issue and encouraged discussion about better financial support for students who need it most.

HIGHLIGHTING INEQUALITIES IN THE WORKPLACE

Researchers used information from the Age 25 Survey to look at job security across ethnic groups. Working with Operation Black Vote and the Carnegie Trust, they found that people from some ethnic minority backgrounds were more likely to experience insecure work, like zero hours contracts, which could have a negative impact on their mental health.

The research was presented at the House of Lords and discussed by experts from a range of organisations.

The study was also used as evidence by the House of Commons Women and Equalities Committee in its inquiry into the unequal impact of covid-19 on Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities.



FIND OUT MORE

Discover more Next Steps research findings on our website:

nextstepsstudy.org.uk



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