

## Being a young person in the UK has become a full time job

By Annabel Bassong



In recent years, the United Kingdom has been confronted with several challenges which have become a central issue in their lives. Issues are persistently arising whether it be, the struggles of Brexit, the cost of living crisis, numerous strikes from underpaid workers, a global pandemic, an uncountable number of prime ministers and unfortunately, the list goes on. Young people have been massively affected from as young as secondary school to being at university. The pandemic affected their financial stability, their career prospects, and their overall well-being.

Starting from secondary school, young people are pressured to make decisions about their futures from a young age. There is talk about college admissions, career planning, parental and social expectations. At the young age of 14, they are being told that the subjects they choose will affect the careers they can pursue in the future. As a young person myself, I lived the struggle of not knowing what I wanted to do in the future for quite some time. There is only a small niche of young people who know what their future looks like, what their aspirations are. A young person needs freedom and flexibility to explore different fields of interest and make informed decisions about their academic careers. When you cannot partake in work experience before the age of 15-16, being too young to necessarily visit the city alone, makes it hard to find these opportunities to discover yourself as a person. The demand is almost too big to be fulfilled, not due to disinterest, but mainly due to the limitations of being so young. Parents and schools do not always have the time to help children discover new things. It is important to recognise that the pressures put on children can make for bad decisions and regrets in the future.



As they navigate the ever-increasing costs of living, university students find themselves consistently facing a new hurdle to overcome. When they should be focusing on learning and enjoying their “freedom” years, they are spending this time (and their parents too) struggling to survive. Now the word “survive” may seem extreme, but this is what living in the UK has come to. It has become a battlefield, a competition of circumstances. The word “survive” means to continue to live, exist, or endure, especially in the face of challenging or adverse circumstances. It perfectly describes what being a young person in this country is like today. An article from Sky News shows a report from the Higher Education Policy Institute which states

that “three-quarters of universities offered discounted food and drinks to students”. The situation in the UK has become so dire that families and their children are no longer able to succumb to their own needs and necessities. Food banks have also become essential in the lives of university students, FE News states that “Over 50% of students have used a foodbank whilst at university”. This kind of situation can lead to an increase in consumption of junk foods and unhealthy drinks which increase the risks of illnesses of many sorts and an overall stress. Renting is the biggest expense made by students, accounting for 45% of monthly living costs. There are not enough student accommodations to go around, and the cost of private living is rising every year.

In 2019, the world experienced a traumatic event that had been seen before, Covid-19. An illness so rapidly contagious, so life-threatening that we were locked up for months on end. An illness so perpetual, once we were allowed out, we were encouraged to go to extreme measures to keep each other safe. Imagine the feeling of being accepted into a top university, making your parents proud, your future looking promising, all to be locked up behind a computer screen for 2/3 of your university career. All these factors had a terrible impact on the mental health of a huge number of young people of Great Britain. People who struggled to learn alone, who experienced loneliness, who did not experience the best living conditions. Many students feel that they did not get to experience the ‘real university experience’, the words ‘wasted time’ and ‘wasted youth’ are echoed. A notable increase in cases of depression and anxiety were seen in young people as a consequence of the pandemic.

The struggles students from all levels face demand attention and action. Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive approach involving government policies, increased affordable housing options and more guidance from a young age. By acknowledging and tackling these issues, we can create a more obtainable, prosperous future for the young people of the United Kingdom.