

# Youth Unemployment: A gender divide

A report by Young Enterprise



June 2016



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## Foreword

In our last report published in March, Young Enterprise highlighted the increasing problem of youth unemployment and the economic and social consequences it has for the UK.

This report goes further to provide fresh insights into the systemic challenges which prevent school leavers from securing employment and the shortfall of skills training and development within the national curriculum.

The findings revealed that young people strongly feel that they are not given enough opportunities for work experience and lack confidence to secure a job in an increasingly competitive market.

Whilst our previous report highlighted problems and challenges facing young people, this report is designed to provide solutions and practical recommendations to tackle the growing gender divide in both education and employment in the UK.

Currently, women make up just 14.4 per cent of the UK's science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) workforce<sup>1</sup>. The research findings in this report provide fresh insights into exactly why so many women feel they cannot enter a career in these vital industries and identifies the barriers that prevent them from doing so.

Failure to improve the proportion of women entering these important industries will starve businesses of the skills they need, having a serious impact on our economy.

Unless we empower the next generation of women through education and training, Britain will continue to oversee a divided society.

**Michael Mercieca, Chief Executive, Young Enterprise**

## Methodology

Young Enterprise commissioned the survey among 1,000 16-18 year olds in full time education, split equally between boys and girls from across the UK. The research was conducted online by polling company Morar, an international research organisation, in December 2015. The research polling methodology included multiple-choice questions, meaning questions with several answers do not total 100%.

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<sup>1</sup> WISE research <https://www.wisecampaign.org.uk/resources/2015/09/women-in-the-stem-workforce>

## Chapter One: A gender divide

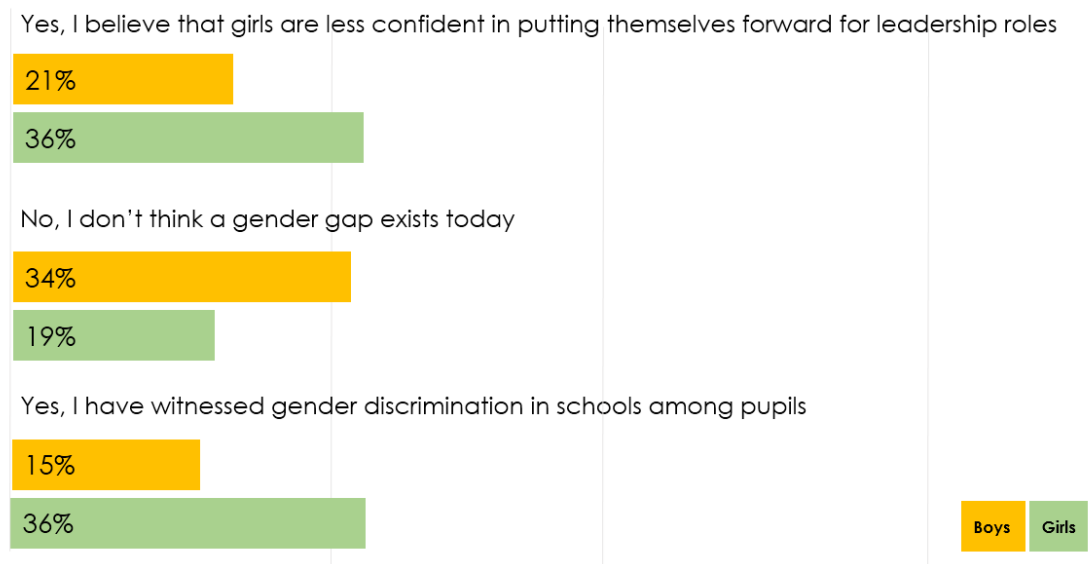
Our research revealed a worrying gender divide around expectations between girls and boys regarding salary prospects and becoming financially successful. Girls are less confident than boys (47 per cent versus 57 per cent) that they'll be more financially successful than their parents.

In terms of salary expectations, girls expect to earn significantly less than boys in their first job, with 71 per cent of girls saying they expect to earn less than £20,000 with boys at 52 per cent. In contrast 28 per cent of boys think they will earn over £25,000 in their first job, with just 13 per cent of girls thinking they will earn over this amount.

Worse still, 36 per cent of girls say they have witnessed gender discrimination in school among pupils, whereas 34 per cent of boys say they don't believe that a gender gap exists today.

There is also a worrying divide in terms of the gender gap and interest in the core subjects of science, technology engineering and mathematics (STEM), as 40 per cent of young people surveyed think boys are more interested in STEM subjects. Furthermore, 24 per cent of girls surveyed believe that boys dominate classroom discussions.

### Do you believe there is evidence of a gender gap (a difference between male and female performance) in the classroom?



These findings paint a worrying picture of how gender is determining levels of confidence in the classroom and beyond. It must be addressed if we wish to have a new generation of confident female business leaders and entrepreneurs in the workplace.

## Chapter Two: Character building

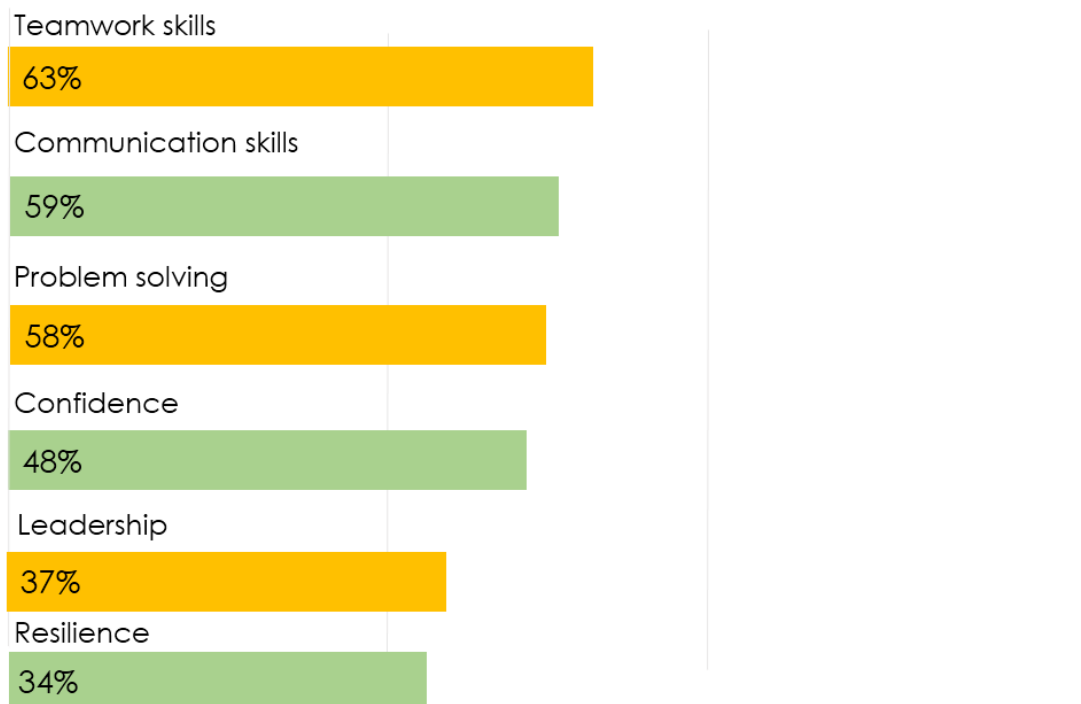
So why do girls have less confidence and lower expectations than boys? The answer lies in the levels of development of key character qualities in schools, of which our research found troubling inconsistencies.

### Lack of character training at school

It is clear that Britain's schools deliver on many areas of character development. 63 per cent of young people told us they felt their school had successfully helped them develop team work skills. Another area of positive development was communication skills, cited as a successful area by 59 per cent of pupils.

Problem solving abilities also ranked highly, cited by 58 per cent of respondents saying they had developed successfully in this area.

### Do you feel that your school has helped you successfully develop the following attributes?



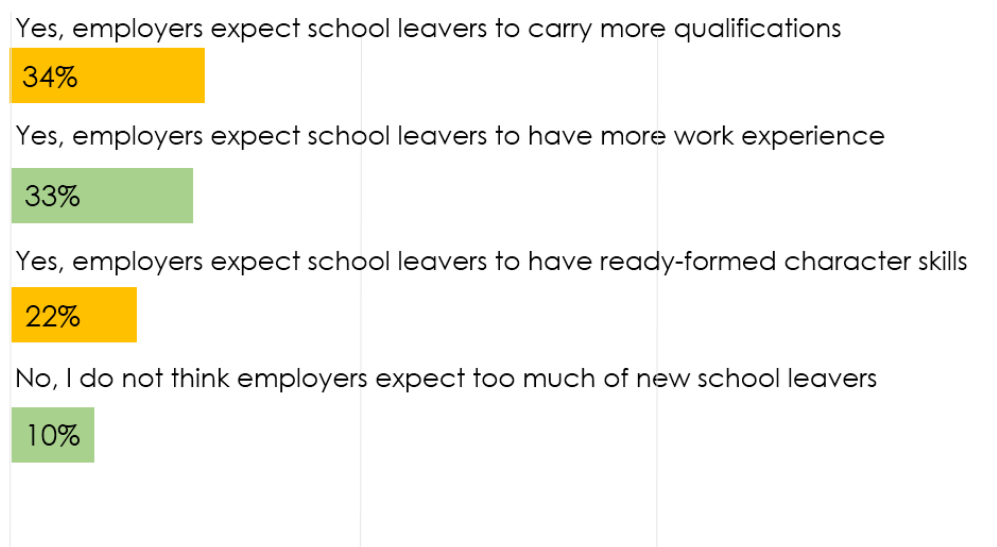
However, there was a notable drop in confidence from respondents on other important character-based skills. Only 48 per cent felt their confidence had improved at school and 37 per cent said their leadership skills had been developed. The lowest ranked factor was resilience at just 34 per cent.

These findings reveal that, whilst schools are currently doing a good job at enabling students to think logically and laterally about problem solving, they are failing to deliver the wider leadership skills and confidence needed in a tough job market.

### **Unachievable and inconsistent demands from employers**

Respondents to the survey also felt that employers placed an unnecessary emphasis on qualifications whilst at the same time demanding more experience and character skills.

#### **Do you think employers expect too much of new school leavers?**



33 per cent said employers increasingly expect prospective employees to have more work experience, something often not affordable for students as it is usually unpaid.

In an age when work experience in any form can be beneficial to securing long-term employment, only 44 per cent of young people in this group said they had a part time job, compared with 56 per cent who did not.

### **Young people's views on what schools should do**

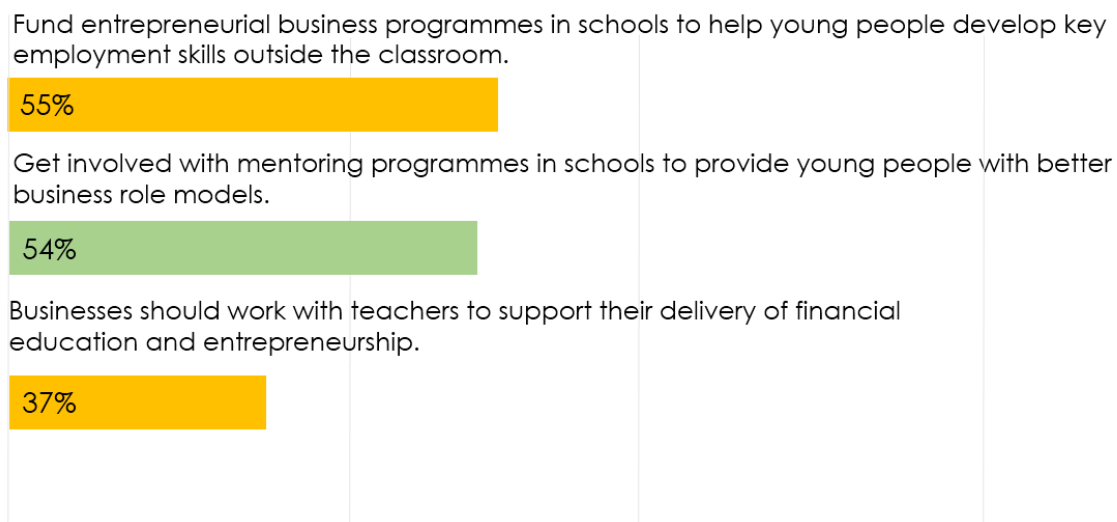
65 per cent of respondents told us that schools should be offering more teaching in work-related and key employment skills to prepare students for the world of work. 53 per cent said that they felt the school curriculum focuses too heavily on preparing students for exams instead of the world of work.

In addition 40 per cent said they felt that the school curriculum does not go far enough to teach key employment skills such as teamwork and resilience. 40 per cent also said that they agreed that students should have more freedom to pursue extra-curricular activities such as business programmes and vocational training.

## Young people's views on what employers should do

There were also strong opinions from young people around the role businesses can play in improving education and employment standards. 55 per cent said they felt that companies should fund entrepreneurial business programmes in schools to help young people develop key employment skills outside of the classroom.

### What could businesses do to resolve the key employment skills gap among young people



54 per cent said they felt businesses should be more involved with mentoring programmes in schools to provide young people with better business role models. 37 per cent also said that businesses should work more closely with teachers to support the delivery of better financial education and entrepreneurship in the classroom.

The findings of this research show that young people have clear ideas about how to improve the education process and have practical suggestions about how to improve the system for the better.

## **Conclusions and recommendations**

The gender divide has long afflicted British businesses and industries, but for the first time this report has revealed that the divide runs through schools as well as the world of work.

The fact is that girls in our education system are less confident about starting their own businesses and earning higher salaries, and a shocking 36 per cent of them feel that they have experienced gender discrimination at school.

This problem appears to run deep within our education and business institutions, but that does not mean it cannot be rectified quickly.

We need stronger character development, more engagement with female role models and business leaders. We also need schools and entrepreneurs to send a clear message that the wonders of science, technology, education and mathematics can be explored and enjoyed by girls and boys, leading to exciting new careers and opportunities.

### **1) Schools should provide access to character development**

- a. All children from primary school-age onwards should have access to character development and there should be a planned programme of study for how schools will develop students' character over the course of their 14 years in education.

### **2) Schools should provide access to female business leaders and entrepreneurial role models**

- a. Schools should team up with local businesses run by women and development organisations which give access to female leaders to train and teach girls about the importance of competitive enterprise
- b. Schools and businesses must work together to ensure more girls have the skills and resilience to start their own businesses, aim for equal pay and recognise that STEM subjects have no set gender

### **3) Schools must work to close the gender gap**

- a. Schools and education professionals should actively encourage and support more girls to study STEM subjects