



# Growing Up North

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Consultation with children and young people

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## Forward: The Children's Commissioner, Anne Longfield



3 million children grow up in the north of England and every one of them has the potential for a bright future ahead of them.

I want all children in the North to have the best possible opportunities, to look forward to happy, healthy and prosperous lives. Yet the statistics tell us that for far too many of them, this will only ever be a dream. For reasons which are not fully understood, early promise - as evidenced for instance in great primary schools

results- doesn't translate into lifetime success. The North East has the best primary schools in the country, yet the region has the lowest adult employment rate. A higher proportion of children in the North West go to Russell Group universities than anywhere else in the country, yet household disposable income in the North West is lower than anywhere south for the M4.

This is an issue which demands to be at the heart of the devolution agenda, embedded in plans for new city regions and the 'Northern Powerhouse'. But too often, the things that really affect children's life chances – the complex interplay of education, wealth, health, labour markets, family aspiration, even transport links – are considered in isolation. This is without a thorough understanding of how they interact to create opportunity, or how they affect children's expectations and goals.

Growing up North is a project which seeks to understand what happens in the gap between childhood and adulthood – and what we can do to help bridge it. To find out we asked children.

Our research shows that the North offers a lot to young people growing up, but also that much more needs to be done to banish old stereotypes.

Overwhelmingly, the children that we spoke to were proud of where they were from, and most wanted to stay in their local area as adults. There were many reasons for this, not least a strong sense of community and a desire to stay close to family. Young people we spoke to often considered these factors as important as career aspirations. However our research also suggests young people do believe in the promise of the North's regeneration with most believing that their local area would be better in 5 years' time, particularly in terms of jobs and opportunities.

Indeed, most children we spoke to did believe that they would be able to pursue their chosen career in the North. We found a varied range of career aspirations, and the groups we spoke to were fairly split between wanting to go to university and wanting to pursue a vocational route, with a very strong desire for apprenticeships. However our research also shows that children's career ambitions were heavily influenced by their immediate environment, and this can lead to a narrow careers focus which perpetuates traditional stereotypes about jobs in the North.

The careers that young people identified tended to be either manual jobs in traditional trades or manufacturing, perhaps because the young people we spoke to knew people doing these jobs. Very rarely did young people discuss jobs in new or high-tech industries and there was very little discussion of jobs in the service industry. This suggests that young people's perceptions of their local economy

often don't match the statistics. While manufacturing and engineering are crucial industries for the North, the service sector still accounts for about 75% of jobs. Awareness of these jobs, and particularly the more high-skilled industries such as law, accounting and various high-tech industries appeared to be low.

As well as the jobs of people they knew, the young people we spoke to were heavily influenced by industries, or employers, they could see. So in Manchester young people told us about the Media City and Sports City; in Liverpool they talked about Jaguar Land-Rover and in Hull it was Siemens. But it also meant that young people's perceptions of regeneration were often of the new shops that it brought in, rather than new industries.

This research also suggests that careers' messaging is most likely to get through when it matches existing perceptions. When we asked about local careers events, we were often told about manufacturing and engineering. In several cases, young people were able to tell us about school careers events had introduced them to other industries (such as law or life-science) but this only came out after much probing, suggesting that we need to be doing far more to immerse young people in new industries, not just introduce them.

Our research also highlighted significant differences between boys and girls, both in how they perceive their local area, and in terms of what they want to do in the future. Overall, we found that boys were more positive about the opportunities available to them and were also more positive about the future. Girls were less optimistic, this may be because they didn't see regeneration as providing jobs for them. Our work suggested that girls' ambitions needs to be a particular focus, both to persuade them of the merits of jobs in engineering, and also to stress that regeneration means more than manufacturing.

The place we grow up influences every aspect of our lives – it informs our view of the world around us, it influences the relationships we have and ultimately, it impacts on our career choices and our wider life choices too.

That's why I want children to be at the heart of the regeneration debates and central to the plans of new City Mayors. I want every child to have the brightest future possible, wherever they live.

The Northern Powerhouse has put a spotlight on the economic regeneration of the north of England. It must now put the spotlight on children.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Anne Longfield". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style. Below the signature is a short, horizontal, slightly curved line.

**Anne Longfield OBE**  
**Children's Commissioner for England**

## Introduction

In November 2016 the Children's Commissioner launched the Growing Up North programme which aimed to better understand the lives and aspirations of young people growing up in the North of England. As part of this project the Commissioner met with policy-makers and practitioners in Hull, Manchester, Liverpool, Sheffield, Leeds and Newcastle, to hear directly from them about the types of projects and regional plans in place to improve the lives of children in the North.

To ensure that the young people's perspective was at the heart of the project, BritainThinks was commissioned to conduct focus groups with groups of young people.

Twelve focus groups were conducted in total, in Manchester, Liverpool, Sheffield, Leeds and Northumberland. Each session involved 8 young people aged 14-15 years old.

Overview: The majority of young people we spoke to enjoyed living in the North and many were optimistic about changes taking place in their area. Regeneration plans have re energized cities in the North and helped to develop a sense of pride and ambition for young people. However, the impact of redevelopment is not as powerful as it could be. As this report highlights, there is significant work to be done on translating change into tangible opportunities for young people.

- > Most of the young people in our focus groups enjoyed living in the North. They were proud of their Northern heritage and strong community values. Living close to friends and family was a particularly important factor in developing a sense of home and regional belonging. However, young people were concerned about the perception of the North as an undesirable place to live, complaining that whilst parts of their local areas were undergoing redevelopment, this did not translate into "things for young people to do". Some felt that the crime levels could be attributed to bored young people with nowhere to go and nothing to do.
- > For young people in our focus groups, change was characterized by the development of a shopping centre, or the building of new offices for a big local firm. Quite often change felt like something happening to their city, rather than to them.
- > Career aspirations for the young people in our focus groups were dominated by traditional choices and tended to be informed by friends and family rather than any knowledge of sectors of employment specifically available in the North. We found a strong gender bias too, with young people identifying gender stereotypical career options. While school career advice attempted to broaden children's ambitions, it did not result in the perception that broader careers are a choice 'for me'.
- > Children need to be at the heart of the Northern regeneration project. Civic leaders, along with local and national businesses need to actively support the development of young people.

*"There is lots of building work going on, you can see them building flats and things. They are building stuff but it probably won't be good for us because we'll be grown up then."*

## Growing up in the North

### Pride in the local community

Most of the young people in our focus groups felt positive about living in the North. They valued being close to family and friends, and enjoyed a strong sense of community belonging. The majority of young people we spoke to had lived in the same place all their lives, and were keen to identify specific aspects of their local area they considered special.

The nearby countryside in Northumbria, and football clubs in Liverpool and Manchester were spoken about with enthusiasm. In Sheffield, young people identified the many sport and leisure attractions available, and in Leeds the presence of the universities represented opportunity and ambition for young people. In fact, around three quarters of the young people in each area we visited expressed great pride about living in the North.

*"I do feel proud. My whole family have always lived in Liverpool, it's part of who they are and part of who I am."*

*"I like living here because of the people, it's like a small town but everyone knows each other."*

### Negative perception?

Alongside feelings of pride and positivity, some young people expressed a degree of concern about the environment in which they lived. Focus groups recognised problems with criminal activity, but displayed a nuanced understanding of how crime, lack of opportunity and undesirable public perception can combine to impact outcomes for young people.

A significant minority of young people we spoke to had been exposed to crime first-hand. This included exposure to violence and threats from gangs, or antisocial behaviour and illegal activity, such as drug-taking and prostitution. This led some to say that they felt unsafe in the places that they lived. However, others concluded that there were good and bad things in any location, and that there were some particularly 'bad' estates or dangerous areas, rather than the entire city or town being overrun with crime. Indeed, many young people were defensive about their home town's reputation. They highlighted 'bad press' and negative media reports as being responsible for amplifying problems in the North that were not 'that bad' in reality.

*"There's kind of a lot of rubbish around a lot of areas. When people walk past they just throw their rubbish on the floor... and no one cleans it up."*

*"You get gangs and things, but it's not everywhere. There's good and bad in all places, not just here. You just avoid the places with gangs and loads of crime, [I] don't walk on my own through there."*

*"There are some places in Leeds that are alright, that are well respected, but there are some places that aren't in Leeds too that have a bad reputation."*

*"There's this place called Holbeck, where women go and get paid for stuff."*

### A link between crime and boredom?

Many young people reported that their local areas lacked leisure opportunities; this was something they believed was getting worse, not better. As a consequence, most young people we spoke to relied on fast food restaurants and shopping centres to provide them with a place to socialise with friends. The lack of youth clubs and other activities for teenagers became a particular problem during the winter months. Many of the young people we spoke to observed that the lack of "things to do" or activities to get involved in, led their peers to commit crimes. Such activity might involve breaking into football pitches or abandoned houses for entertainment.

*"We were literally walking around for three hours yesterday in the cold because we didn't have anywhere to go."*

*"If you get abandoned houses people break in and just go and sit in there because there isn't anything else to do."*

*"There's nothing our way really, except Maccys and KFC."*

*"[The youth clubs] are not shut down, they're just for more younger kids, there's not much for our age at all."*

Concerns about the crime rate and lack of activities, led some young people to draw wider conclusions about neglect and poverty in the North compared to other parts of England, especially London. This report will go on to explore this difference, particularly young people's geographical conceptualisation of job opportunity.

## Re energised by redevelopment

All of the young people that we spoke to were aware of the changes taking place where they lived. This was most marked for those young people living in cities, who could see infrastructure developments in their surrounding areas.

Most young people we spoke to felt optimistic. They believed the changes were for the better, and that things would continue to get better in years to come. Young people were particularly aware of local regeneration projects linked to shopping areas, housing and office buildings. New buildings were frequently commented on as symbols of change, with many young people making the connection between new buildings and new jobs.

*"There will be more jobs, there's loads of building work going on, you can see the cranes."*

*"They're planning on building a cinema I think and restaurants and stuff in an area that was industrialised."*

## Noticeable change in their local communities

Although young people spoke positively of the redevelopment taking place on their streets and local highstreets, the development of MediaCityUK had particular impact for young people living in Manchester. Young people in our focus groups expressed huge pride in the growing media hub, it symbolized real opportunity and potential for their city as a whole. The development was conceived as recognition that Manchester was the place for a career in the media.

*"This is where the whole future of media is. It has the most opportunities I reckon. I think people would move here if they wanted to do media."*

Young people in Liverpool said that recent investment had improved the city, offering more shops, restaurants and activities.

*"It has definitely got better in the last five years. There's loads more to do than there was before and there are lots of new shops."*

Although young people in Sheffield were not as quick to pinpoint positive change, the Meadowhall shopping centre expansion made them feel that there were likely to be more opportunities in the future, as well as a general sense that building work was going on across the city.

*"They're making Meadowhall bigger, building a whole new bit. So there will be more jobs and shops I think."*

Young people in Northumberland had seen an increase in local authority provision in the area, such as new leisure activities, and had heard about upcoming developments such as a cinema and restaurants in a previously industrial area which they thought would benefit future generations. However, they struggled to name a range of businesses in the local area that could provide future careers.

*"They've just built a massive new leisure centre, so you can go there and there's a library and a gym and stuff."*

## Brexit and redevelopment

The young people in our focus groups were keen to raise the issue of Brexit in relation to the redevelopment of their local areas. Although young people expressed a wide range of opinions concerning the economic impact of Brexit, all were certain it would be the catalyst for change in some way. The current political environment contributed to a sense of flux for some young people; whilst some were concerned that Brexit will lead to further financial strain for areas in the North, others considered that it could lead to more money being kept in the UK.

*"Because obviously, we're going to be getting less money, so it means we're going to have to cut down on so much stuff, and we might even end up paying for school."*

*"Could have more money because we don't have to pay so much to Brussels, like every year or so we pay a lot of money, we could use that money on healthcare and stuff like that we actually need."*

## Are regeneration plans making a difference?

There was, at first sight, optimism that regenerated regions in the North were capable of providing young people with good jobs, in a place they wanted to live. The presence of good universities in the North also helped young people to think that there must be opportunities available to them.

*"There are good universities around here. If you're passionate about game design, just go for it, there must be jobs here."*

However, there was a perception that despite regeneration projects, the North still lacked some of the opportunities the South could offer young people. Although young people in our focus groups were unable to identify specifically what was 'missing' from the North, there was a general understanding that London had better paid jobs and "more things to do". Across the focus groups, young people were keen to see Southern opportunities migrate North. Moreover, it was clear from young people, that if opportunity was not equally spread between North and South, they would be forced to think differently about their future and what was possible to achieve in the North.

*"Leeds is a smaller city than London but there could be more attractions here."*

*"We're a lot more realistic. We know that some things aren't likely to happen."*

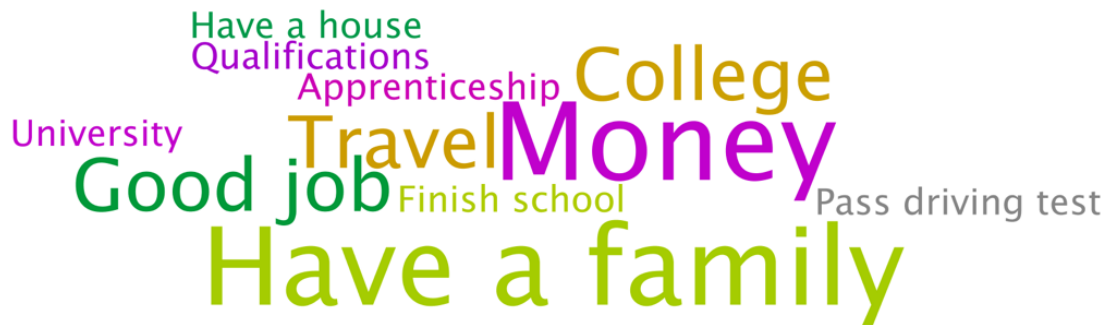
*"They've done up the main thing to make it look nice, rather than getting things done that will actually benefit us."*

In some cases, the young people we spoke to were struggling with their own perception of 'Northern identity'. It became clear throughout our focus group in Sheffield, for example, that young people were still dealing with the impact of a declining industrial sector. Young people felt that what they had been historically known for - mining and steel - had disappeared, forcing them to try and identify a new source of pride and positive reputation.

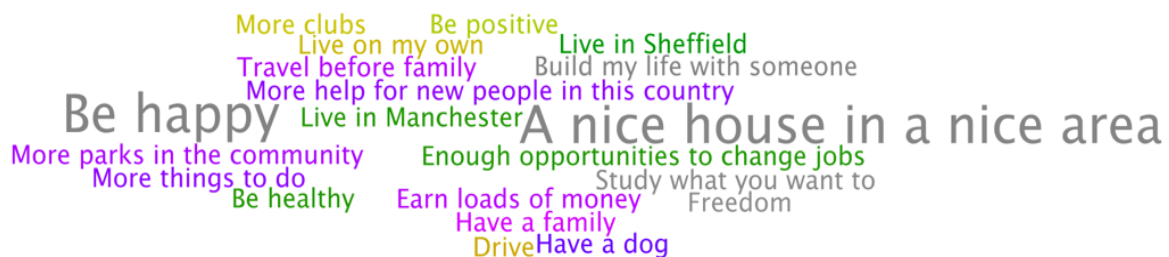
*"Since the mining's closed down because everyone was part of the mining community and since that's closed down it's took our personality away because we've got nothing to be known for anymore."*

## Ambitions for the future

All young people in our sample shared some aspirations: qualifications, a good job, the opportunity to travel, a house and a family.



There were, however, some difference in the ways in which boys and girls perceived their future and how it might unfold. The girls we spoke to in the focus groups generally had clear and specific future ambitions. Moreover, they had a strong sense of what was required of them in order to achieve their goals. Many of the girls we spoke to were concerned about the quality of their life in the future. Alongside a successful career, girls emphasized the importance of happiness, freedom, flexibility and the opportunity to change jobs.



The boys we talked to had a less structured understanding of their future. Although they were confident in mentioning apprenticeships and college as a pathway to a future career, they only had a vague understanding of what this might actually entail and what may lead from the scheme/qualification. In this sense, boys were as ambitious as girls in achieving a successful future, but the ambition was less targeted - not as focused on specific outcomes.



The younger age groups we spoke to had a less defined sense of their future plans than the older age groups, and acknowledged that their planning for the future would start in the coming year.

*"I'm still finding out about jobs and what I can do after school, so I don't know yet."*

*"I have started thinking about my future a bit, but not a lot. We get careers advice in school and stuff, but not until next year I think."*

## Planning future careers

When thinking about their future careers, young people were confident that their ambitions could be met locally. They generally had positive feelings about their local area and were keen to begin their professional lives where they had grown up in. However, whilst few young people questioned the ability to pursue a career in their current location, it is true to say that young people had a limited expectation of what these future careers might entail. The career goals and ambitions of young people were modelled on the experiences of close friends and family, rather than reflecting broad range of options in a service economy.

### Narrow Expectations

Young people's awareness of the breadth of available careers was generally poor, with the strongest influence being career choices they had had direct interaction with, careers they could clearly understand and visualise. This often meant young people following family members into skilled jobs or trades, or becoming interested in jobs such as teaching – a career they had been exposed to through their own experience in education.

Where children wanted to pursue more unusual careers, there was often a family link. For example, the young person who wished to pursue a career in fashion design and textiles had a creative aunt who owned her own shop; one individual who wanted to work abroad with children had a sibling currently following a similar path, and a number of boys wanted to follow family members into traditional trades.

*"Everybody says we're similar so I think I'd be good at the same things she is."*

*"[I'd] probably [follow] my sister because she left school not that long ago and she likes kids and now she's working with them."*

Below is a word map representing the jobs most frequently mentioned by young people. Careers that young people regularly come into contact with, such as teacher, doctor, nurse, childminder, feature heavily. Other jobs included in the word map such as air steward, taxi driver and hairdresser, represent careers that young people can clearly picture and envision a route into.



A significant minority of young people mentioned careers beyond those outlined above. However, often the understanding of what these careers entailed was limited:

- > Although some young people mentioned technology-based careers, these tended to have a narrow focus, such as game design, rather than a good understanding of the breadth of the sector.
- > Despite numerous jobs being available in the North in the service sector, these careers were rarely mentioned by young people.
- > Few young people mentioned senior level or highly paid professional roles, with a majority mentioning 'blue collar' careers such as manual labour or service provision. Where professional roles were mentioned, such as the small number who mentioned law, they were focused on entry-level or more junior roles.

### Traditional gender divide

Amongst the young people we spoke to, girls and boys had different ideas about the careers they might pursue, and these careers often fell along traditional, stereotypical gender lines, indicating that defined roles in the North were impacting young people's perceptions and aspirations.

As the word map below indicates, caring professions, teaching and beauty - traditionally gendered roles, were more popular among girls. This suggests that more needs to be done to demonstrate the roles available for women in other sectors beyond healthcare roles, such as STEM:



- > **Scientific careers** – in Northumberland, veterinary science was seen by one young person to be a career they would not be able to pursue in the area. This was mirrored in Leeds, with several young people unconvinced that senior scientific careers would be available in their city. Although young people we spoke to in Manchester were very much aware that graphene was discovered at Manchester University, and that Professor Brian Cox works at the University, they did not consider that a career in the sciences could be achieved locally.
- > **Investment banking** – in Manchester, investment banking was seen to be a career that could be better pursued in London. Young people were aware of Spinningfields, but were not aware of the financial and professional companies located there.
- > **Coastal careers** – Despite many young people in the North living in coastal areas, those interested in a career involving the coast (e.g. marine biology or career as a marine advisor) were convinced this was best had to be pursued elsewhere – often in Cornwall or Australia.

*“I think my job would be really far away because I’d have to be near a beach to be a marine biologist so I’m thinking of moving to Cornwall first.”*

Young people were not able to express why they thought specific careers were unavailable where they lived, but thought that they might have heard this from family and friends. Locations that young people considered moving to (in order to pursue a particular career) tended to be categorised by extremes; young people said that they would move to places very nearby in the North (e.g. moving from Sheffield to Rotherham), to London, or to foreign cities such as Dubai, New York or Sydney.

However, more striking than the perceived availability of careers was the lack of discussion of the wide range of job opportunities potentially available in the North. Significant sectors of employment were not brought up at all during our focus group sessions. These included financial services, professions in the public sector, along with planning and the built environment. Once again, this indicates the lack of awareness that many young people have of job roles that fall outside of their immediate experience. Whilst young people understood they could become a security guard, teacher or even lawyer, they had limited understanding of roles they had not learned about through family, friends or popular culture.

## Ambition fueled by experience and exposure

Talking to young people about their careers advice uncovered an interesting paradox in relation to these ‘unmentioned’ career options. Whilst it is true that young people expressed a limited understanding of the range of careers available, when probed they described a relatively broad and varied career programme delivered in their school. Whilst the quality of advice in different areas was disparate, young people generally accessed high quality experiences aimed at broadening their horizons. In this sense, we observed a breakdown between experience/information provided and the impact on young people. For example, although children in Manchester had regular visits from Manchester University outreach science team, including a visit from Professor Brian Cox, they failed to make the connection between their city and a possible scientific career. Young people we spoke to had attended careers days held by large firms like PWC, Deloitte and Accenture, but struggled in conversation to identify these organisations as the source of potential employment.

Quite simply, young people had a limited awareness of professional occupations that did not feature in their everyday interactions. Without the personal experience of family members, or exposure to the brand/company, young people struggled to identify employment opportunities.

## The impact of big brands

Although career days were not entirely successful in introducing young people to employment sectors of which they were previously unaware, young people were vocal about the ‘aspiration days’ held by their school. These were particularly powerful in encouraging young people to consider employment in the big companies and Universities established in their local areas. It was clear that organisations such as Liverpool FC, the BBC, Kellogg’s, Jaguar Land Rover and Arriva had positively impacted young people’s career aspirations. The awareness of such businesses in their local area had helped to guide some young people towards careers in that profession. These brands had an appeal or level of familiarity for young people, they represented everyday icons in young people’s lives. This may explain young people’s desire to pursue a career in the BBC at MediaCityUK, rather than in Spinningfields. Whilst Spinningfields is home to a range of professional careers in Manchester, these had not been explored by young people and, therefore, were not as widely understood or desired jobs working for Kellogg’s or Jaguar Land Rover.

*“There’s Jag, Land Rover – and that’s only ten minutes down the road.”*

*“Somewhere like Jag you can grow into your career.”*

It is interesting that young people’s knowledge of these big companies predominantly came from direct personal experience or general information from school/the local press, rather than widespread engagement from the business itself. On the whole, young people did not have access to role models, personal advice and engagement from employees at local firms. Therefore, whilst the majority of young people expressed interest in working for a large firm in their area, they had difficulty identifying tangible opportunities for themselves in the future.

There were three noticeable exceptions to this, highlighting what is possible when big companies actively engage with their local populations:

- > MediaCity had a huge impact on young people in Manchester, and a number of young people said that they would be interested in getting into a career in this area. Many had been to MediaCity, and were able to talk about what the offices were like. They were also able to detail the types of roles that they could do there. This had been informed by people they know who had worked at MediaCityUK or visited their school.
- > In Liverpool, the proximity of Liverpool FC and Everton meant that young people had a detailed understanding of the different roles available for jobs beyond being a footballer, such as being a groundsman or working in sales or marketing.

- > Also in Liverpool, Jaguar Land Rover's Halewood factory had a positive impact on the boys we spoke to; many said they were interested in pursuing a career at Jaguar Land Rover, and therefore were considering studying STEM subjects. The proximity between the factory and the school we visited, likely had an impact on awareness levels, as the factory was in sight of the school. Members of staff had also visited the school to give talks about the opportunities available.

*"It gives you a starting point so you know after GCSEs there's something to look forward to."*

*"If they've done it, they can help to steer us in the right direction."*

## How big businesses can intervene

There are clear opportunities for greater collaboration between schools and local/national employers. Despite young people being positive about career days at schools, these tended to raise awareness of professions in a general sense (or those there were already aware of), rather than giving young people specific career paths they could follow, role models in their local community, or a sense of personal engagement. Those who had been influenced by people in their local business community had more detailed career plans, indicating a missed opportunity for engagement between business and young people more broadly.

Direct engagement with a business, such as encouraging young people to visit businesses and talk to people who are following the career paths open to them would help young people see that this could be a 'career for them' in the future.

*"There's a media college in MediaCity. I'd consider going there really. I know people who've been there who say it's good and from there they've gone on to do media as their job."*

*"There's lots of media jobs in MediaCity – it's so nice, it's all modern and so clean and it's got nice lights everywhere and there are nice restaurants and stuff."*

## Conclusions

Ambitious regeneration programmes in the North will only succeed in the future if they fully engage with children and young people. Our research highlights much cause for optimism but also suggests that more must be done to empower young people to seize the opportunity, specifically:

- > Better leisure facilities and improved local environments for young people to help reduce crime and to help them channel their pride in their local area in a positive way.
- > Better careers advice to broaden young peoples' understanding of careers they might pursue. This is partly the responsibility of schools and colleges but there is also a central role for local and national businesses. Increased engagement, particularly via firsthand experience of the workplace and meeting employees, may help them to boost familiarity with different industries and career paths.
- > Regeneration is reaching young people, and they are keen to engage with developments taking place which will help the North to be a place where they can put down roots for their adult lives. However, at present their awareness of change is limited. Many feel that the North is being short-changed in comparison with the South.

*"There just isn't loads to do here. I'd like some of the shops and places they have in London and other places like Chipotle."*

*"Becoming a singer here would be hard because you can't get the right education. I've been to many colleges and unis but I don't think they have the right music education. So I don't think it would be the right city if I want to study that."*



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