

The
Big Ask

September 2021

Big answers



Children's
COMMISSIONER

England has new heroes!



Covid has been really hard for all of us. But children like you have done an amazing job of coping with all the changes in your lives. And now is the time for us to give something back to you.

As Children's Commissioner for England, it is my job to listen to you. I want to understand what life has been like for you during covid. And I want to know your dreams and plans for the future.

So we designed the **Big Ask survey** so you could tell us about your lives. It's an incredible opportunity to think big about how we make your lives better.

Over half a million of you answered our survey. It was amazing! That means you took part in the largest ever survey for children in the world!

So, the first thing I want to do is say, **"thank you"**.

Thank you for telling us your story. Thank you for being so honest. Thank you for inspiring us.

I am so proud of you. The Big Ask survey has shown us you are brave, ambitious, determined, resilient. And you have fantastic ideas about how we can help you have bright and exciting futures.

In this report I am going to show you what you told us in the survey. And I'm going to tell you what I think needs to be done to sort these problems out.

One thing that stands out to me is that no matter where you live, how old you are, whether you're a boy or a girl, children in England care about the same kind of things.

You want the world to be a fair place for everybody. You care about your friends. You care about the environment and want to make sure it's looked after now, and in the future too.

Some people were worried that you would be a "lost generation". This means that you wouldn't do well in life because you lived through covid.

But you have shown us this isn't true. You have no intention of being defeated by covid. Yes, you have challenges ahead, but you've told us you want to face those challenges head on. And we're going to help you do it. Like George slaying the dragon, or Emma Raducanu winning the US Open, our country has a long, proud history of heroes. And now that includes you.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "R. de Souza". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Dame Rachel de Souza DBE

Children's Commissioner for England

I've divided what you told us into six subjects.

They are:



Families



Children and community



Children's wellbeing



Schools



Work



Children in care

In each subject you will see what you have told us in your answers to the Big Ask survey. After that I will explain what I think needs to happen to make things better and help you achieve your goals.

As well as the online survey, we met with lots of you face-to-face or in groups online. We did this because sometimes certain groups of children aren't listened to as much, and we wanted to make sure everyone had the chance to be heard. Some examples of the people we met for group conversations include: children in care, children living in mental health settings, children who have special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). The full list is on our website.



**So let's do this! Here are the results of
THE BIG ASK SURVEY!**

childrenscommissioner.gov.uk

Families

What you told us:

Your families come in different shapes and sizes. It doesn't matter what your family looks like, you want a happy home life.

- > Most children 94% are happy or okay with their families.
- > A small number of children (6%) were unhappy with their family lives.
- > Children who are unhappy at home are more likely to be unhappy in general.

I just want my family to be healthy and have enough money.

Girl, aged 8

I have been very lucky to have grown up with a very supportive and stable family environment with fantastic role models in my parents.

Boy, aged 17



What needs to be done:

- Create **more 'Family Hubs.'** These are places where families can get help from lots of different people all in one place.
- Make sure there is **enough money to help families** as soon as they have problems and before things get too bad.



Children and community

What you told us:

You love being outside and away from your screens. You spoke about what you want to see and do when you open your front door. You painted a picture of parks, places to swim, games to play, open spaces and fun.

Your answers showed us “community” is more than having a place to go after school. It’s about how you feel and how you treat people. You told us it’s about fairness.

You want to live in a country where children are free to be themselves. You don’t want children to experience racism. You care about standing up for people who might experience prejudice or disadvantage.

You talked about when you feel safe and when you don’t. Girls are more worried about their personal safety than boys. Boys and girls worry about their safety more when they are aged 16–17.

And you told us how difficult you find the online world and that you want more support.

Youth clubs could help as it’s a place to go if we don’t want to go home.

Girl, aged 13

We want places for kids to play and have fun things to do.

Girl, aged 6

I don’t feel I was informed of my online safety from a young age and that it was considered a priority. Technology and social media are constantly developing so why aren’t our laws and protections for children on these platforms updating with it?

Girl, aged 14

It’s not a disability it’s just a different ability. Nobody is less capable than anyone and even if they have a different colour of skin, it still means that they should be treated fairly.

Boy, aged 10

What needs to be done:

- Improve **online safety** for children.
- Make sure children **feel safe** when they go outside.
- More youth clubs offering loads of **amazing activities**.



Children's wellbeing

What you told us:

You want to feel fit and healthy. And you understand the link between physical health and mental health.

- > 80% of you are happy or okay with your mental wellbeing.
- > Some children are worried about their mental wellbeing. The group who were most worried were teenage girls aged 16–17.
- > Social media affects how you feel about yourself.

Physical and mental health, there needs to be more of a push towards physical fitness as it's a real motivation booster.

Boy, aged 16

I think that we all spend so much time on social media, worrying about how many followers we have, that we don't get enough time to just stop and do nothing, or go outside or spend more time with our families.

Girl, aged 12



What needs to be done:

- Teach children about **healthy diets** and the importance of **staying active**.
- Better **mental health support** in schools.
- **Digital mental health support** - so children can get support wherever and whenever they need it.



Schools

What you told us:

You like school! 84% of you said you were happy or okay with your life at school and only 16% of you said you were unhappy with your life at school. It's good to be back!

- > Lockdown gave you a chance to think about school. When you weren't there, you missed your friends and teachers. And you missed real classroom learning.
- > You want high quality support to help you with the work you have missed.
- > Children with SEND (special educational needs and disabilities) said that education was important to their future plans.

Lockdown really stops children because they can't do that much stuff we love and it makes them go all shaky like they can't study the normal day...

Girl, aged 9

I really want to learn even if it's hard because education is important to me.

Girl, aged 11



What needs to be done:

- More **catch-up money** for schools.
- Opportunities to **help you catch up** with work after covid.
- Time after school for **sports, learning and arts**.
- Better **rewards for teachers**.



Work

What you told us:

You want to work hard and do well in life.

- > You are ambitious, and many of you want to do jobs that help other people.
- > 69% of you say that a good job is key to your future happiness.
- > You want more opportunities after school than just university.
- > Some of you are worried that where you are from will affect your chances in life.

I want to change my life into becoming a doctor when I grow up.

Girl, aged 8

I am going to have a good career because I have been determined of that from when I was 5 years old.

Girl, aged 13

I am very lucky at my school to have amazing opportunities and people motivating me to do the best I can.

Girl, aged 14

What needs to be done:

- **Apprenticeships.**
- High quality **career advice.**
- **More jobs** for 16-24 year olds.
- **Support children** to aim high in their careers.





"I want to be a midwife."
Middlesbrough

"I want to be an actress or a book writer."
Leicester

"I want to be a professional rugby player."
Coventry

"I want to be an engineer."
Cambridgeshire

"I want to be a chef."
Shropshire

"I want to be a zoologist."
Suffolk

"I want to be a teacher."
North Somerset

"I want to be a marine biologist."
Essex

"I want to be a police cadet."
Devon

"I want to be a nurse."
West Sussex

"I want to be a pilot."
Redbridge

"I am going to be a surgeon."
Somerset

"I want to become a movie producer."
Wandsworth

Children in care

What you told us:

Children in care share the same goals in life as children who aren't care experienced.

- > There were positive stories of the care system.
- > But children supported by children's social care (in care or with a social worker) were 90% more likely to be unhappy generally in their lives than other children.
- > The older children in care get the less they feel the care system can be relied upon.

My parents always said to me that I've got an opportunity to have a 20 times better future than they ever had and that's what's making them happy right now. They know that I've got a chance to achieve my potential as an engineer.

Boy, aged 17

I know where I want to be in life, I know what I want to do, I know my aims, I know my dreams. I think 'cos I've got that support around me, I am able to fulfil my dreams and what I want to achieve.

Female care leaver

I've been in the system for so long that getting let down has become normal.

Girl, aged 17

What needs to be done:

- More **money for children's homes**, so children don't have to move far from their families.
- Better **mental health support** for children in care, especially in school.
- Better **support** when you leave care.



A big 'thank you' for taking part in
THE BIG ASK SURVEY!



Children's COMMISSIONER



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