

# KEY ISSUES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE TODAY

## 1 Introduction

In preparation for the Labour and Conservative party conferences 2024 Marine Society and Sea Cadets (MSSC), reached out to its cadets asking them what issues they thought were important through a survey (sent to all cadets aged 13+), and via a series of workshops conducted by members of the cadet voice team (themselves cadets).

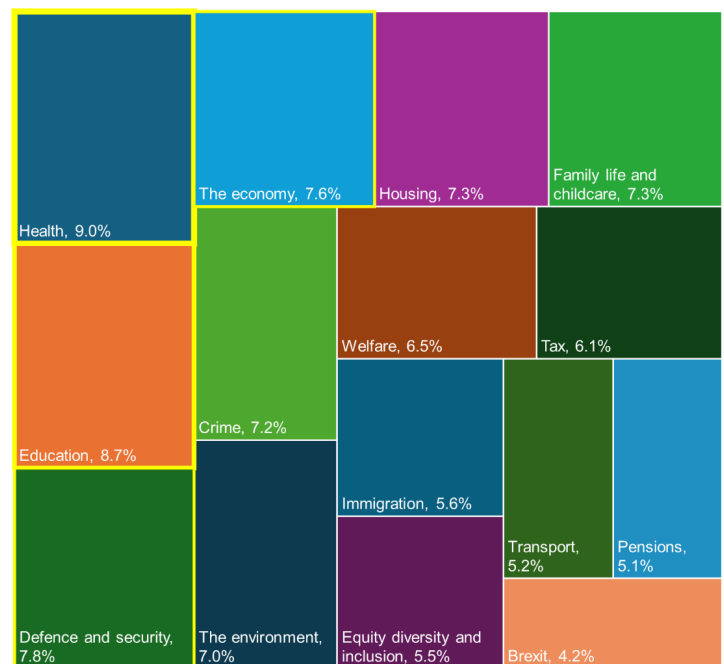
The questions examined were based on a mixture of prior examples from large-scale polling, plus consultation with the cadet voice team.

We heard back from 1,053 young people (aged 13 to 17), with responses from 441 constituencies across the country.

This brief report outlines the highlights/interesting findings from the research, in particular their views on public policy issues most important to them, what changes they propose, together with the views on the ability of politicians to respond to their needs.

## 2 What issues matters most?

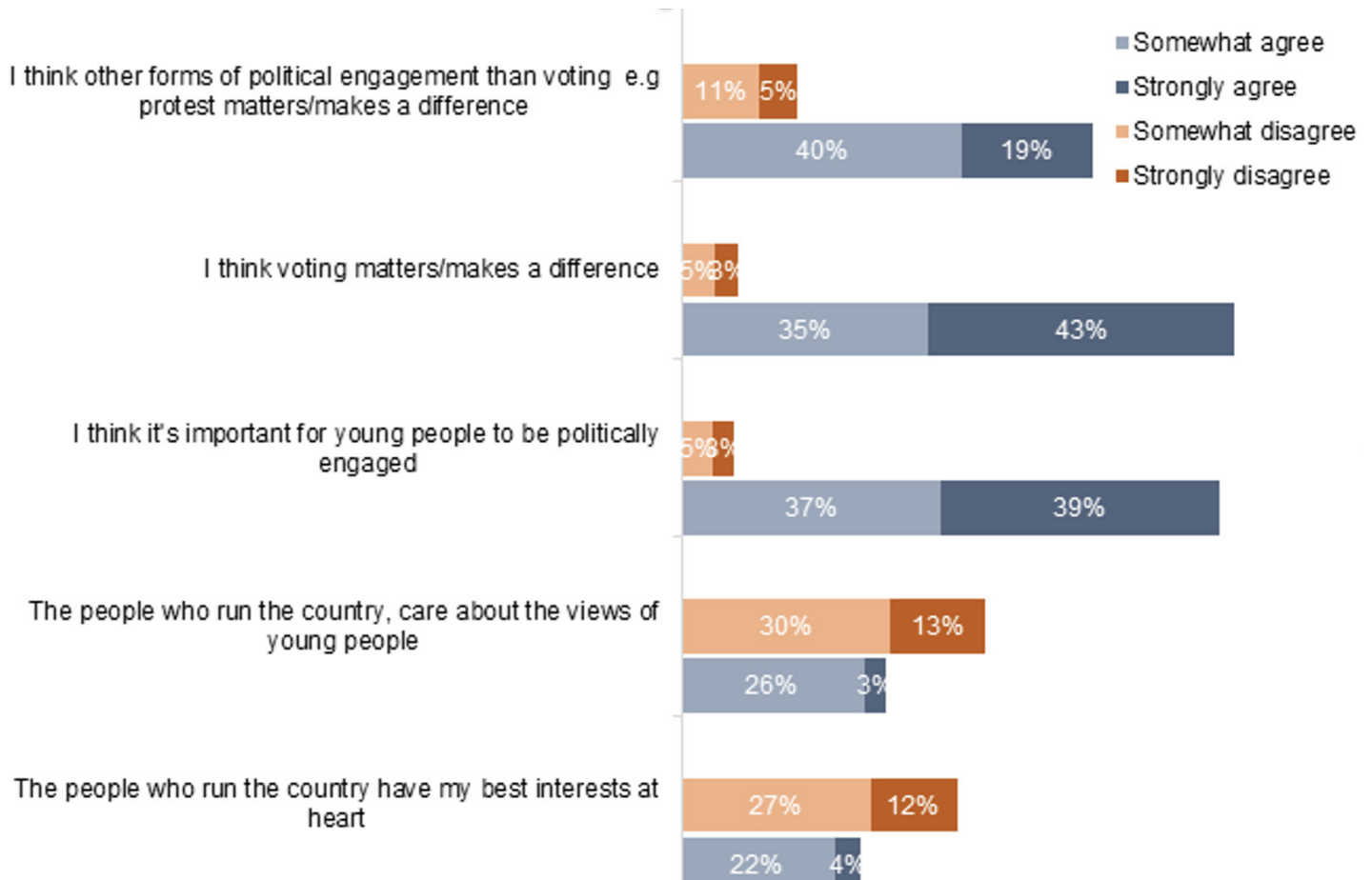
We gave young people a chance to rank 15 different categories of policy issue<sup>1</sup> with the share of the overall weighted score shown below:



The areas highlighted in yellow (health, education, defence and security and the economy) are the four topics young people showed the most interest in, and which have been treated as the focus of this report.

This largely reflects the types of issues that you would expect to see with an adult population. Of note is the high focus of responses to concerns over the economy and the health system, areas which are not necessarily significantly focused on the day-to-day experience of young people. This suggests a relatively wide perspective of what areas matter instead of just focusing on topics of immediate interest to them.

### 3 Political engagement

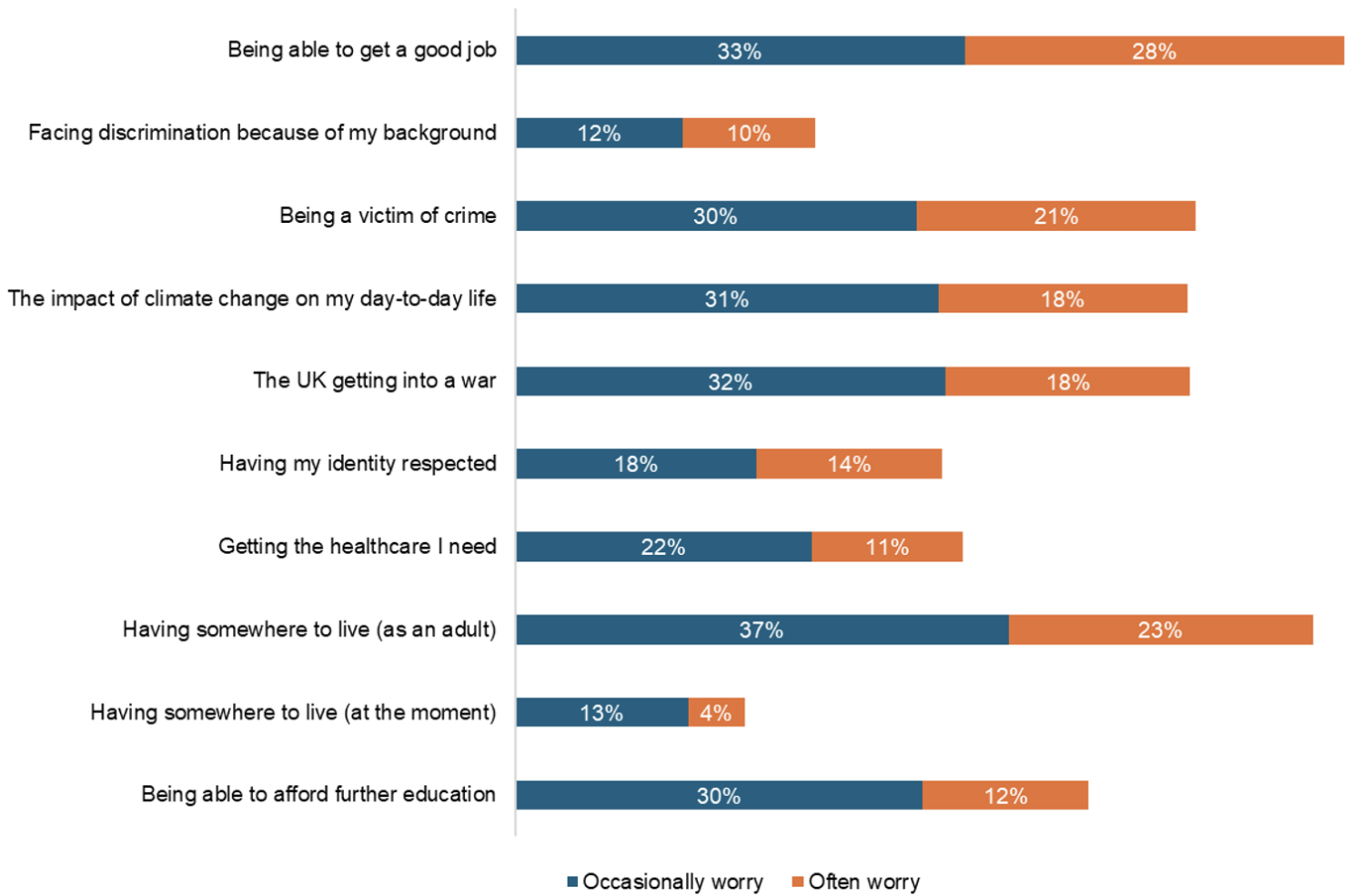


Generally, respondents were overwhelmingly confident about the value of voting and still significantly supportive of young people being politically engaged.

However, only a minority believe that people who run the country care about young people or have their best interests at heart. This suggests significant work is needed to more positively engage and meet the needs of this generation.

Interestingly responses from Southeast Asian young people showed significantly higher levels of trust in authority figures than their peers.

## 4 What do I worry about?



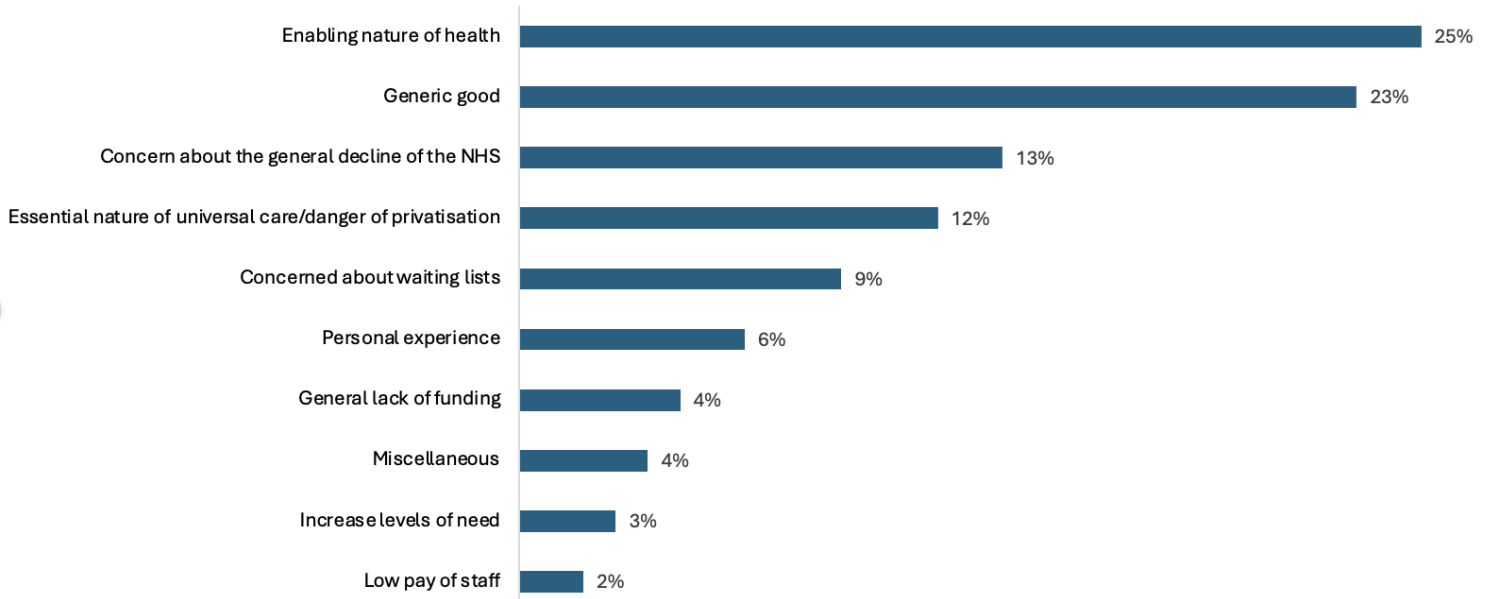
By a significant margin, the most common worry for young people was about being able to get a good job followed by being a victim of crime or having somewhere to live (as an adult). The fact that 17% of respondents were worried about having somewhere to live at the moment is concerning. Whilst a minority it is still a significant population of under 18's.

## 5 Key areas

This section will examine each of the top four issues looking at why young people pick them, and the types of solutions they outline.

### 5.1 Health

#### Reasons health is seen as a priority



Those who selected health as their most important issue generally highlighted the enabling nature of health as its key feature. The way that having good health enables individuals to do other things ranging from getting a job to forming relationships.

“We need to keep healthy for our overall life to continue. if you are unwell you will not be able to do the other tasks like going for your education which will have a massive effect on the outcome of your future.”

**Response from Solihull West and Shirley constituency**

“If the UK was in good health overall, then all other bad aspects of the country such as a struggling economy might be easier to tackle.”

**Response from Helensburgh constituency**

Excluding responses that were just generically positive (e.g. health is important), the next most common concerns were a view of a general decline in the NHS in the last few years or a risk of erosion of the universal nature of NHS care, including a danger of privatisation.

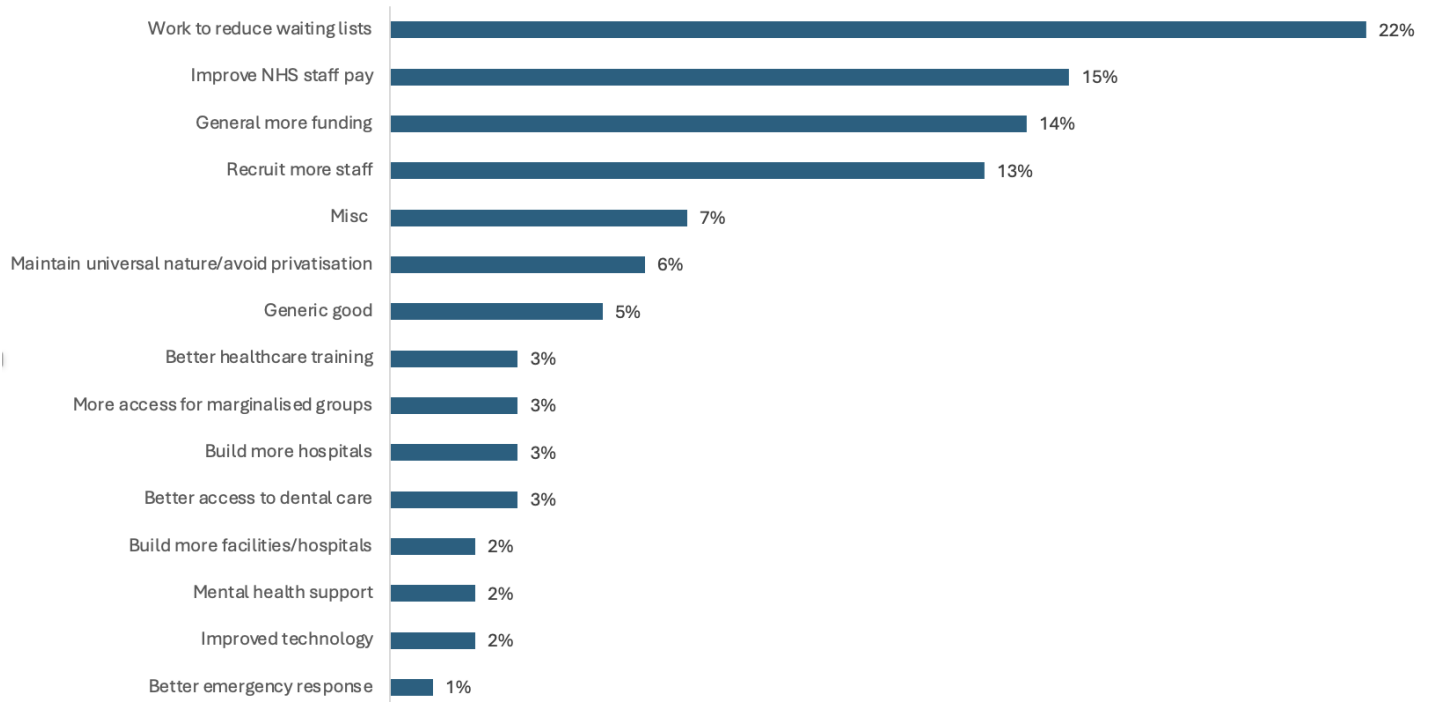
“The Government should make sure it protects the NHS so we don’t end up like America. Without health all the other things are not important.”

**Response from North West Leicestershire constituency**

“NHS is dying”

**Response from Stratford on Avon constituency**

## Turning to solutions



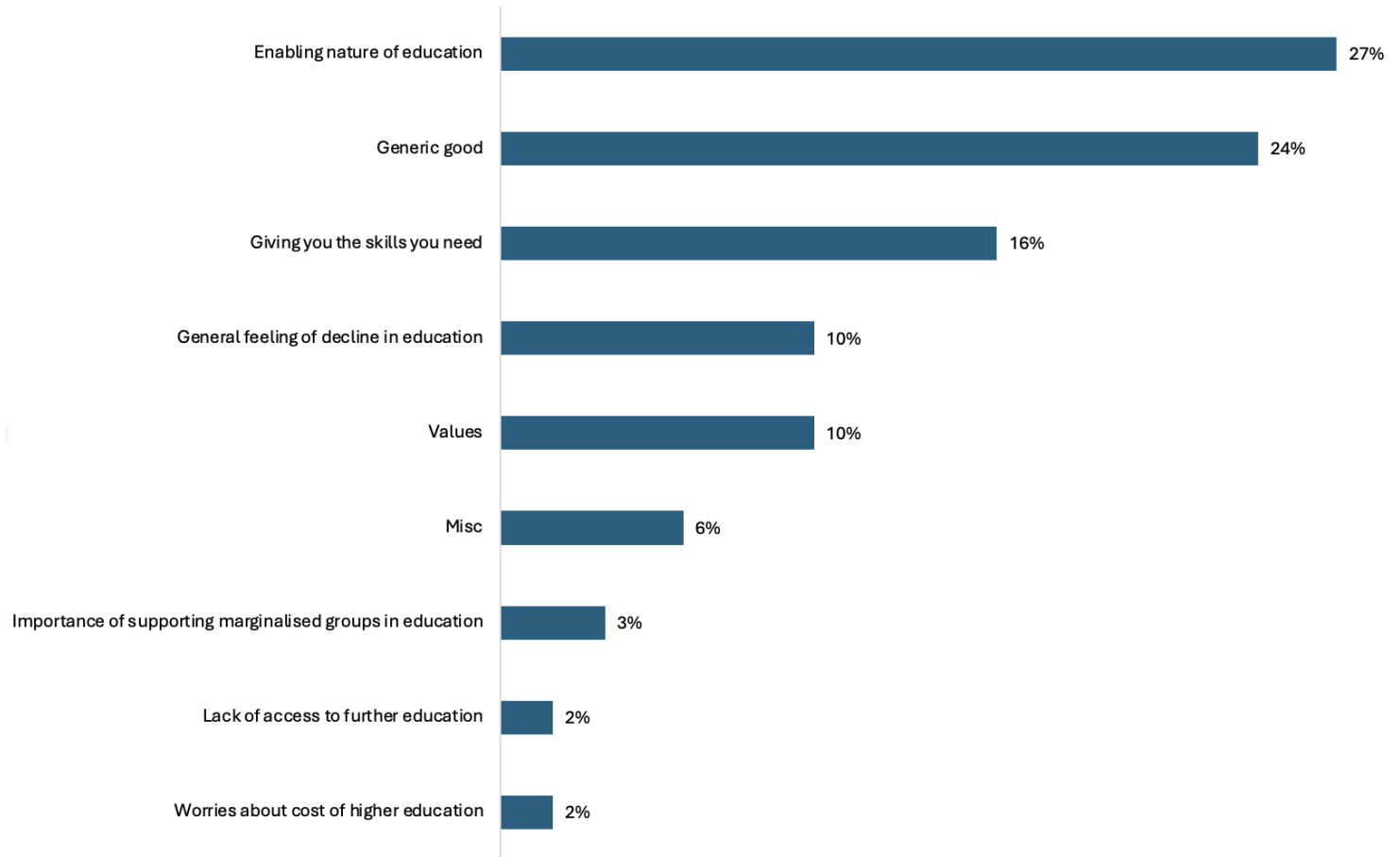
Young people saw NHS staff as a key area to resolve, both in respect of recruiting more staff and improving staff pay. These solutions were also linked to ideas about how to reduce waiting lists.

“The employment of more staff on wards to ease nurses, and to give patients a quicker and more efficient treatment pathway.”

### Response from Inverness constituency

Interestingly while present in the survey, issues such as mental health, that are generally viewed as currently particularly relevant to young people, were not a significant area of focus in the health concerns raised in the survey. This suggests that the young people looked wider to the health of the nation and the strategic solutions for supporting this rather than their own personal health concerns.

## 5.2 Education



As with health, young people predominantly saw education as an enabler putting individuals in the position to positively contribute to delivery of the economy. Related to this was the focus on gaining the skills they need. Interestingly this tended to focus on practical skills directly tied to employment.

“Good education leads to better paying jobs and will eventually lead to a better economy and money can be spent on improving the country.”

**Socio-economically disadvantaged respondent  
Leicester West constituency**

“If you don’t have education how can you get the doctors for the hospitals which treat sick people, how do you get the police officers to prevent crime, how do you get people to keep the country safe, how do you get people to calculate tax and most importantly without education people would not know what to do with their lives

and also the beneficial factors of getting a job and providing for their families.”

**Response Macclesfield constituency**

A significant minority also stressed the development of appropriate values or a concern around a general decline in educational standards.

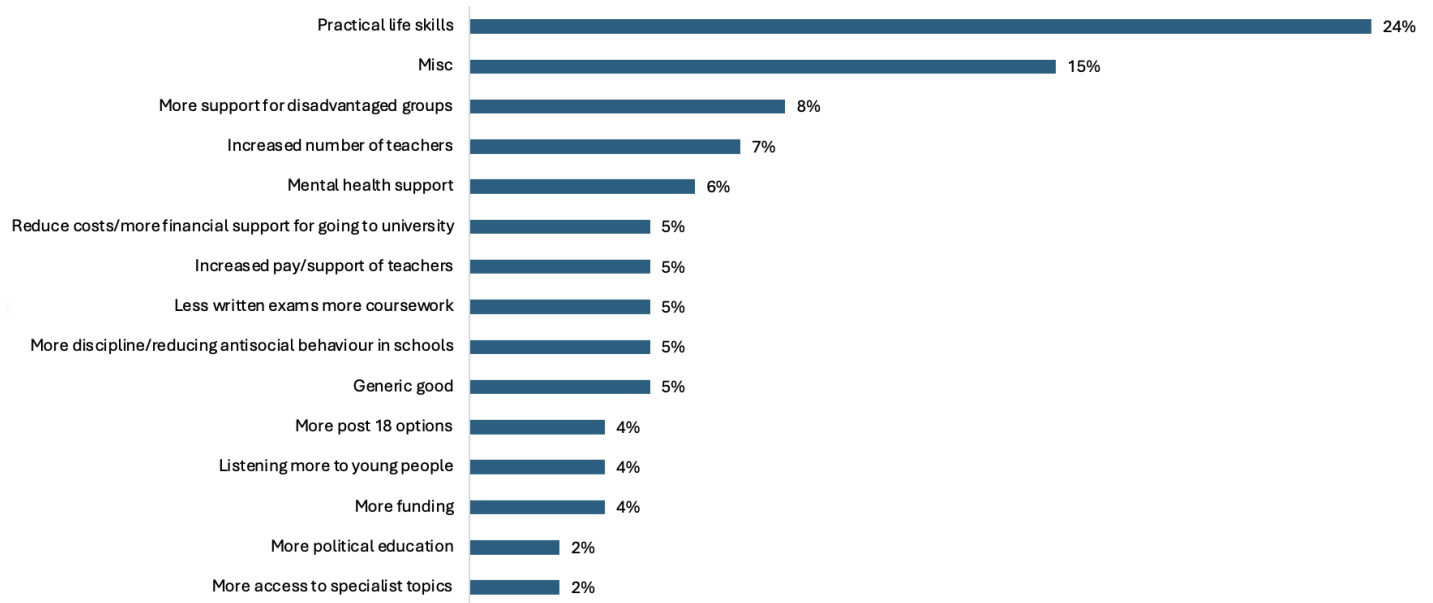
“By educating people of all ages on some of the other issues that face us as a society we can help to improve them.”

**Socio-economically disadvantaged respondent  
Glastonbury and Somerton constituency**

“Education is what builds and encourages the next great minds of the generation, and at the minute, schools are extremely underfunded and teachers are underpaid. the education system needs to be completely reformed.” [sic]

**Socio-economically disadvantaged respondent  
Altrincham and Sale West constituency**

## Turning to their solutions



This area was overwhelmingly dominated by a greater focus on education on practical life skills. This tended to be a mixture of either skills that would directly apply in the world of work, or skills that would help with day-to-day life such as financial management.

“I feel like there should be more hands on approach besides then the ordinary lectures. A more apprenticeship style to be incorporated in education to help young people decide and find what they like best.” [sic]

**Response from Newport East constituency**

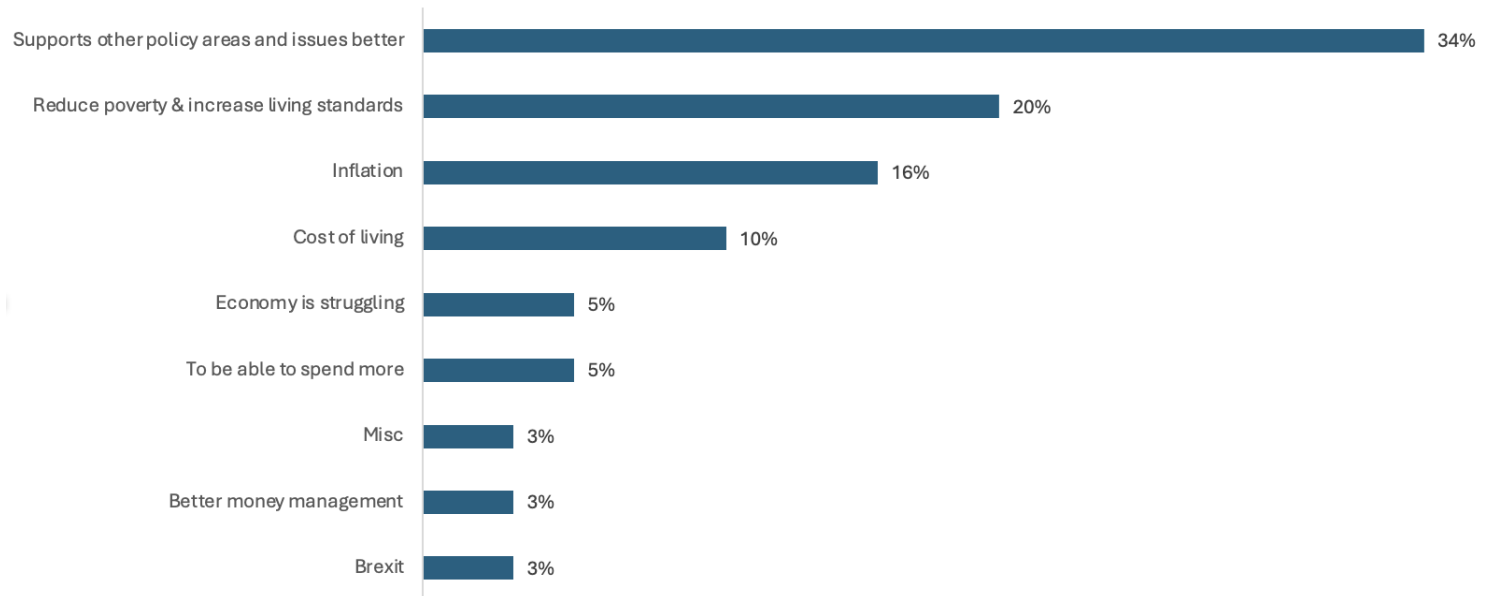
“More in school focus on careers and in real life skills.”

**Socio-economically disadvantaged respondent from Blyth and Ashington**

It was not apparent what drove this recognition of the importance of non-formal education, but it is noted that the value of learning these critical soft skills will be very apparent, since development of life skills is at the heart of the Sea Cadet Experience, which all of the survey participants will have benefitted from.

## 5.3 Economy

### Reasons the economy is a high priority



In a similar trend to health, young people identified economy as an important issue. Again this supports other policy areas and issues and was seen as an enabler for other aspects where the respondents saw a need for change.

“By aiding the economy, you get to the root problem of many of these other issues as a consequence.”

**Socio-economically disadvantaged respondent from Doncaster Central constituency**

“Boosting the economy will cause an increase in the other services such as increasing the quality of healthcare and providing affordable housing”

**Response from Surrey Heath constituency**

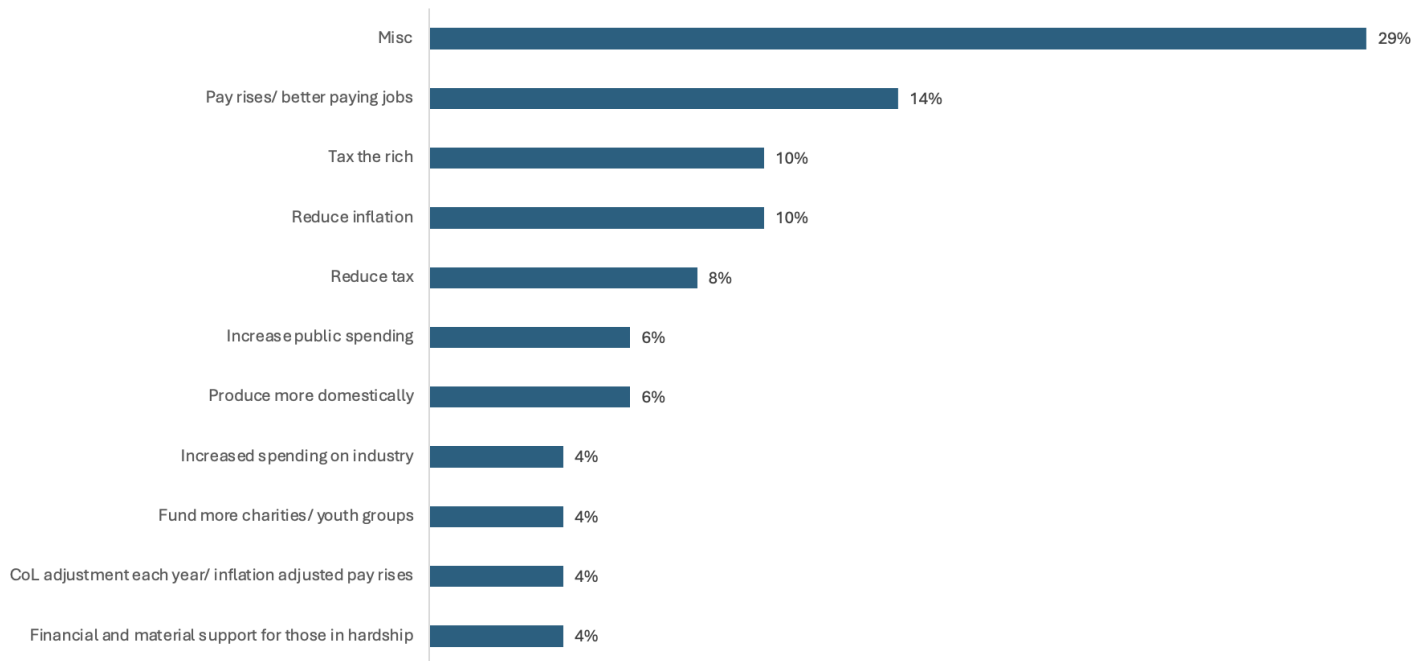
It was clear in many cases young people had experienced tangible impacts from a decline in living standards and this drove their prioritisation.

“My pocket money has lost value and I can’t do as much with my friends. I think the current cost of living crisis is really bad and everyone is struggling. My life also used to be better because we could afford holidays more and petrol to go places closer like Blackpool, Morcombe etc. We get told to make friends on camps but we can’t go see them as they are often far away.”

**Socio-economically disadvantaged & young carer respondent from Barrow and Furness constituency**



## Turning to their solutions



While the economy was a highly rated area of concern for young people, there was less consensus on the solutions to this than in other priority issues. In many cases (brought together in the miscellaneous category) a young person proposed an individual area of concern that they wished to stress as relevant to solving the economy, but this would not then be raised by other respondents. This ranged from encouraging immigration, to building more homes, or encouraging development of overseas territories.

There was however some consensus on the need for pay rises, better paying jobs, to tax the rich and to reduce inflation.

In relation to pay rises and reducing inflation there was generally a greater perception of the capacity of government to intervene than is necessarily the case. For instance, in many cases respondents mistakenly presumed that the government directly sets the level of inflation in a similar way to interest rates.

## “Cap inflation at the lower quartile rate of the EU”

### Response from Rother Valley constituency

#### Case study policy workshop

While the high rate of miscellaneous responses to solutions to address the economy meant consensus was less clear, workshops with a group of cadets were used to help better inform the views of young

people. These were led by members of the cadet voice team and held with cadets attending a summer camp.

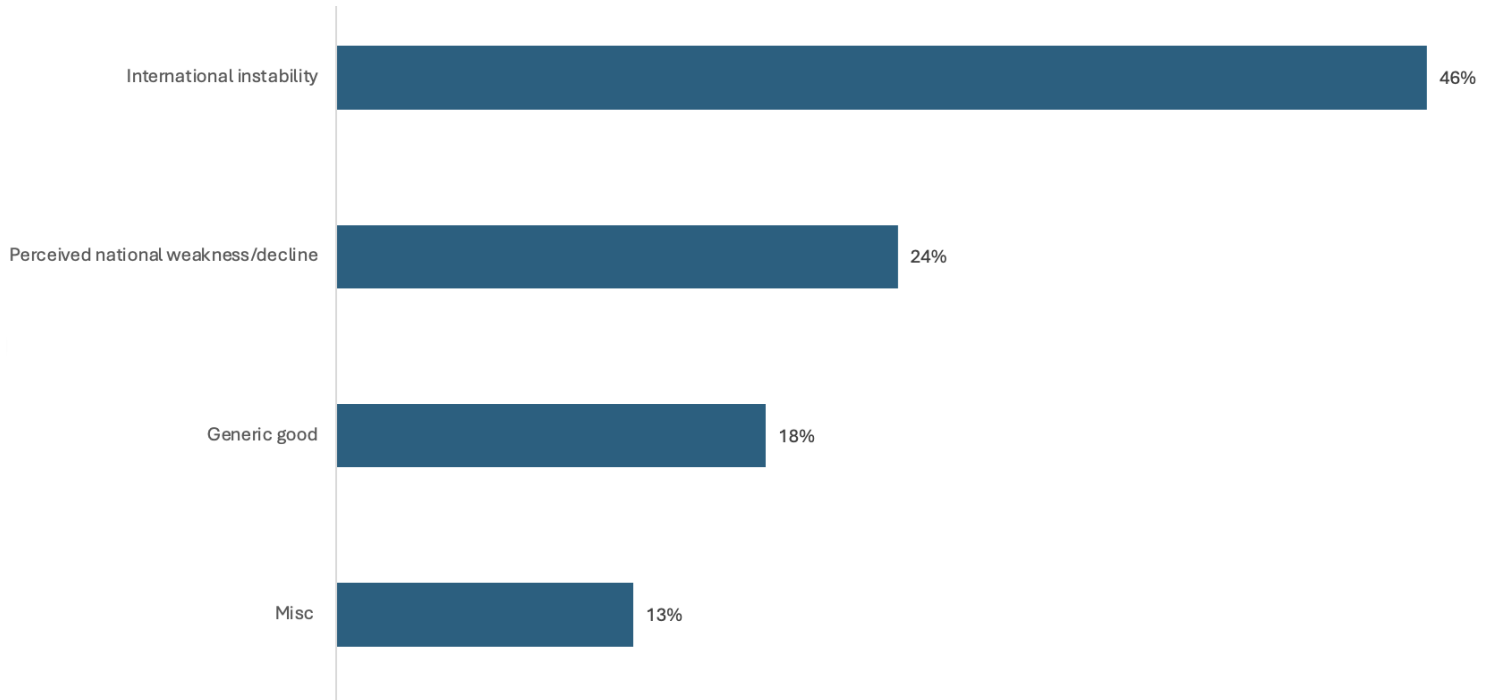
Here the young people started from an initial similar position to the survey with a wide range of different views. However, they quickly recognised the common links between the problems and from this were able to identify what they saw as five practical solutions to help realign the economy and in turn enable other positive change. They outlined the five following steps:

- Investment in the U.K.’s ability to produce more goods that can be sold abroad (e.g. food and industry)
- Government intervention to purchase essential resources for all members of society
- Re-evaluate the current state of the country and develop the areas where it is severely struggling
- Changes to taxation of individuals- increased taxation on extremely high earners (millionaires and billionaires) and reduce over taxing the poorer workers
- More collectivist/left-wing approach to government

We would not suggest that this is a universal set of recommendations for all young people, but it does show how youth groups can bring young people together to help develop policy platforms, and help define next steps that will better engage this generation.

## 5.4 Defence

### Reasons defence is seen as a high priority



Defence was consistently seen as a key issue by survey participants, with the dangers of the increasing international instability the top concern.

“There’s lots of nearby problems and I think that focusing on how we should protect ourselves but also help protect other countries.”

**Response from Bexhill and Battle constituency**

“Got to defend the people of this nation from likes of Russia or North Korea.”

**Response from East Renfreshire constituency**

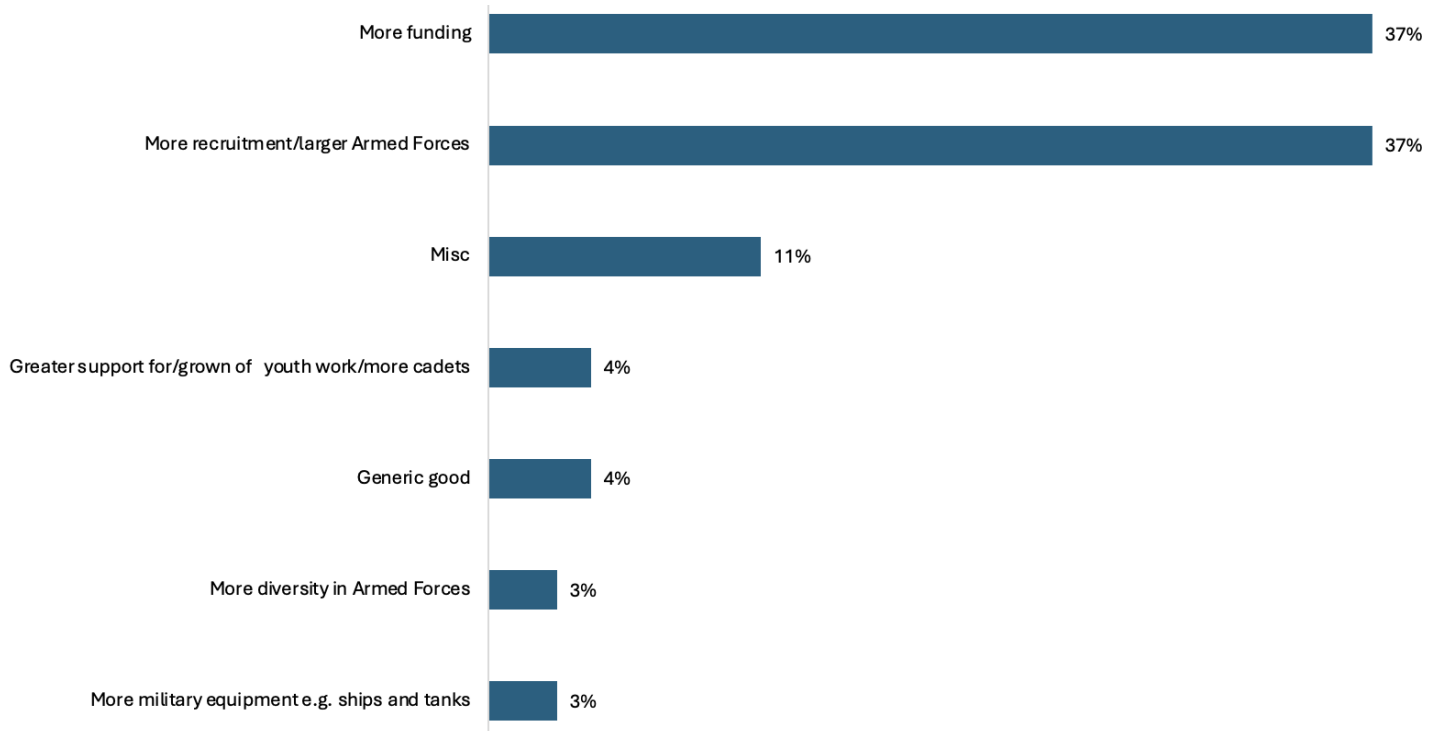
The second most common response was a perceived national weakness/decline within the context of a more dangerous world.

“The UK military has become noticeably weaker in recent years.”

**Anonymous response**

This demonstrates a significant concern by the young people we engaged with over the instability in the world and a feeling that the UK is currently unable to fully meet this threat.

## Turning to solutions



There were two major areas of focus when it came to solutions to challenges in relation to defence according to respondents. These were to increase funding to defence (with the implication the Armed Forces will then know what to do with it) and increase numbers of service personnel.

**“An increase into military media and advertising to increase recruitment rates and a small increase in spendings to support the increase.”**

**Respondent Chester North and Neston constituency**

**“More money being put into the MOD and further drives for recruitment.”**

**Respondent Torfaen constituency**

Given the recent high-profile discussions about conscription or national service it is important to note that there was just one respondent whose comments endorsed a conscription based model of recruitment, with the rest, clearly implying a focus on attempting to hire more people/advertise for recruitment.

**“Conscription.”**

**Respondent Bristol Central constituency**

It is important that we note that this is a cohort made up of sea cadets who are likely to have a greater awareness of issues related to the Armed Forces than is generally the case across their generation. This is confirmed by our most recent impact surveys which showed a very high level of trust 7.7 out of 10<sup>1</sup> by cadets in the Royal Navy, higher than they rate their teachers at school (6.2) and similar to their trust in fellow cadets (7.5). This may help to explain both why Armed Forces issues rank so highly and why cadets seem quite willing to simply trust that if funds are provided it will be spent appropriately.

## 6 Sub-community deep dives

The report above outlines key findings in relation to the responses as a whole, but in some cases there are specific sub-communities whose responses are worth looking at in more detail. This section briefly summarises some of these areas.

LGBTQ+ young people were significantly more likely to rate equity diversity and inclusion as a key issue (third choice), perhaps unsurprisingly given the lived experience. However, of particular interest, one of their biggest concerns was not just about day-to-day inequalities, but feeling they currently live in a hostile (and increasingly so) legal environment.

“As someone who is part of a minority group which is often not equal or included (LGBTQIA+) I often feel worried about my future as the politicians running this country have either shown that they don’t like us or the other main option (conservatives) have attempted to make laws criminalising us for simply existing. My brother is also part of this minority group and we just want to live without having to worry about going back into the closet.”

**Non-binary respondent, Sheffield Brightside and Hillsborough constituency**

While defence and security was the third overall scoring topic, this was predominantly driven by responses from White cadets with it not being in the top four for other ethnic groups (8th for Asian Cadets, 5th for Black cadets, 9th for Mixed cadets).

## 7 Where youth work can make a difference

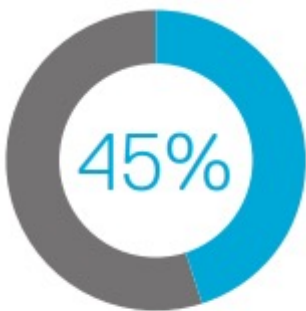
Looking at the priorities of young people we think youth activities that provide non-formal education can make a real difference to three of the survey target areas (health, education, and the economy) and specifically cadet forces (such as ourselves) can also support in the area of defence.

### Taking a big picture view we see MSSC's impact as:

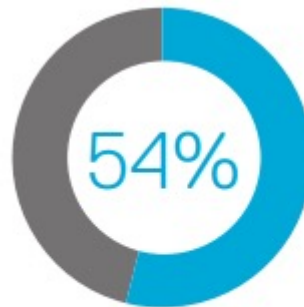
Launching young people for life with the skills and drive to actively contribute to positive change. This includes becoming adults that are motivated to build careers to grow industry, the economy and the armed forces, while being highly effective ambassadors for veterans and defence.

### Which means

- A key part of those skills and drive is keeping young people fit and active as we build their physical and mental well-being through the Sea Cadet Experience we offer. This should assist throughout their lives in helping to contribute to their health.<sup>1</sup>
- By motivating them to build careers to grow industry and the economy, we enhance both their own economic prospects and provide the skills to support the economy as a whole.<sup>3</sup>



**confirmed Sea Cadets contributed to their long-term wellbeing**



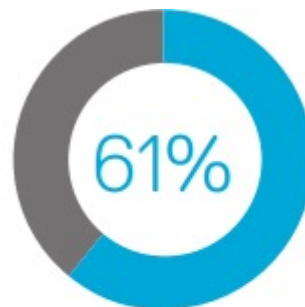
**said Sea Cadets helped them with their careers in the longer term**



**reported that Sea Cadets had increased their independence and skills in the longer term**

- Through providing non-formal education we give them opportunities to expand their learning and expertise contributing to making an impact in relation to education.<sup>2</sup>

- Specifically in the case of cadet forces by helping them to understand in our case the customs and traditions of today's Royal Navy, and its part within the Armed Forces generally we both build awareness of the importance of defence and also create effective ambassadors for veterans and defence contributing to this key area.<sup>4</sup>



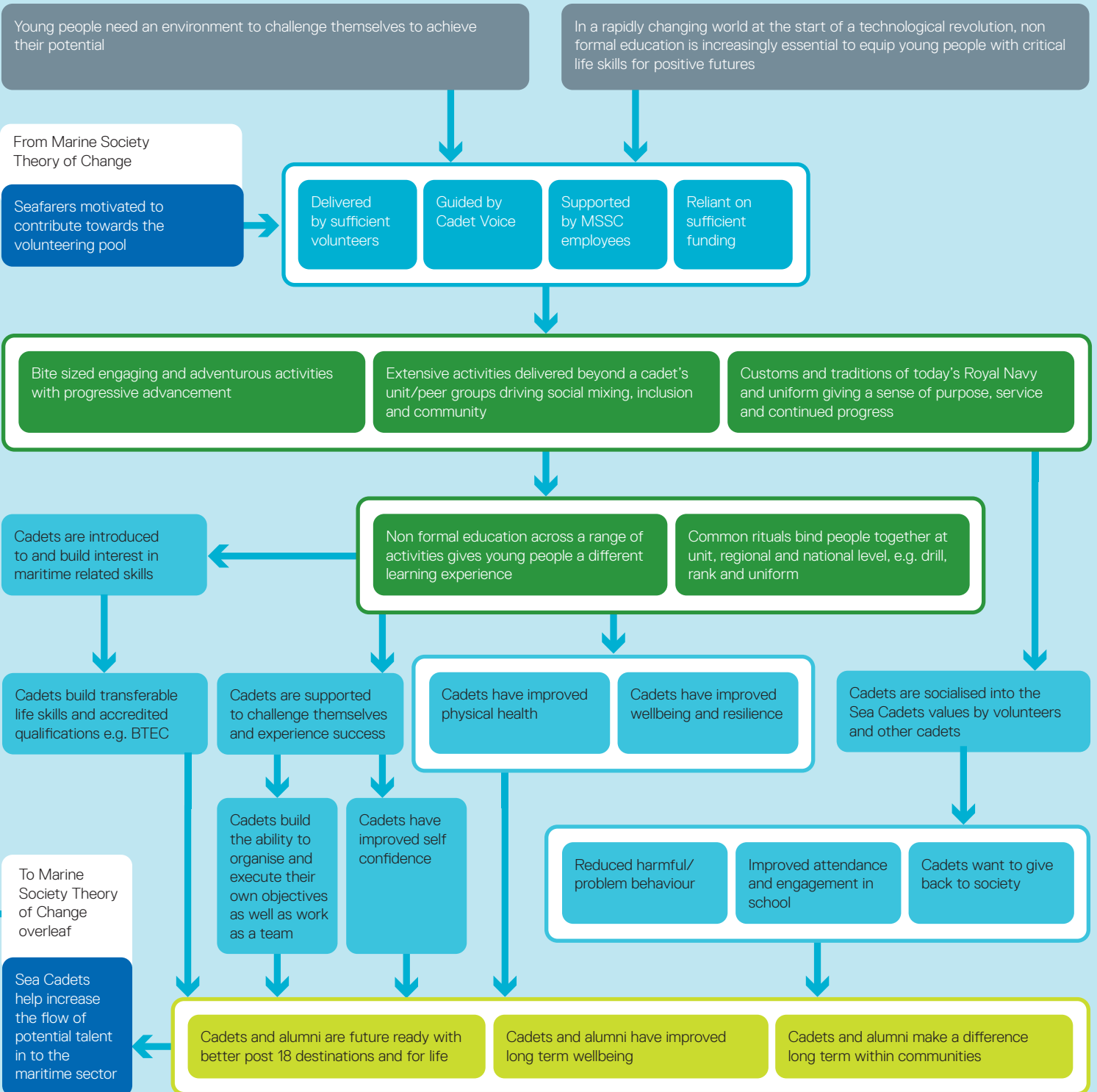
**credited Sea Cadets with inspiring them to seriously consider a Royal Navy or maritime career**

1. 45% of the nine generations of former cadets who participated in the 2021 My LegaSea survey, confirmed Sea Cadets contributed to their long term wellbeing ([www.sea-cadets.org/my-legasea](http://www.sea-cadets.org/my-legasea))  
2. 80% of the nine generations of former cadets who participated in the 2021 My LegaSea survey, reported that Sea Cadets had increased their independence and skills in the longer term ([www.sea-cadets.org/my-legasea](http://www.sea-cadets.org/my-legasea))

3. 54% of the nine generations of former cadets who participated in the 2021 My LegaSea survey, said Sea Cadets helped them with their careers in the longer term ([www.sea-cadets.org/my-legasea](http://www.sea-cadets.org/my-legasea))  
4. 61% of the nine generations of former cadets who participated in the 2021 My LegaSea survey, credited Sea Cadets with inspiring them to seriously consider a Royal Navy or maritime career ([www.sea-cadets.org/my-legasea](http://www.sea-cadets.org/my-legasea))

# 7.1 Our Theory of Change

To help articulate how our immediate work leads to long-term goals we have developed a theory of change. The chart below helps to show how we deliver impact for young people through the Sea Cadets Experience. It means we can explain more clearly why we offer what we do, and how we achieve positive outcomes for young people.



- **Need:** The demand the charity is trying to meet
- **Enablers:** Things an organisation does not directly control that help deliver the Theory of Change
- **Activities:** Services delivered to achieve outcomes, e.g. providing training
- **Outcomes:** Differences made to beneficiaries' lives, or the impact of a piece of work
- **Final goal/s:** The end result of a chain of different outcomes
- **Linked component:** Things that link the Sea Cadets to the Marine Society Theory of Change

## 8 What you can do to help

The biggest enabler of our work is not cash, it is volunteers. Without volunteers we can't deliver our effective youth work at scale.

If you personally are interested in volunteering with Sea Cadets you can find out more at [sea-cadets.org/volunteer](https://sea-cadets.org/volunteer).

However, we also think there is an easy cost-effective public policy option that will unlock volunteering on a massive scale.

We are aware people often need that initial jumpstart to be able to engage in volunteering and a fantastic way of doing that would be to introduce 5 days a year of statutory volunteering leave for all employees. This is a policy which when previously costed, showed very low cost to the public purse, and due to the integration of it into the standard process around minimum leave would also have a low burden on the civil service and the wider public sector to implement and oversee. We believe this policy could massively transform the scale of available volunteering allowing for a significant boost to delivery and impact achieved across the charity sector.

If you would like to know more, or see wider opportunities to work together to support and empower young people please contact Andrew Weston our Head of Policy and Insight: [aweston@ms-sc.org](mailto:aweston@ms-sc.org)

