

Reading Activists Network – Youth Policy Briefing

March 2015

Society and social action

Step Up To Serve launched on 21 November 2013 at Buckingham Palace with HRH The Prince of Wales. It aims to double the number of young people aged 10 to 20 participating in social action by 2020. They have worked in partnership with the Cabinet Office, Ipsos MORI, NCVO and others to create campaign resources. See [Link](#) for more information.

State of Children’s Rights in England report by the Children’s Rights Alliance for England shows that cuts to local authority budgets are leaving children and their families without access to vital support services. The report was published on the 25th anniversary of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. See [link](#).

Social Attitudes of young people [report](#) published by the Cabinet Office government assessed how social attitudes of young people in the UK today differ from previous generations, and how they might evolve in the future. Some findings include:

- Importance of personal autonomy. Young people attach as much value to the welfare of others as older generations;
- Gradual shift towards increasingly liberal social attitudes towards ethnicity, gender roles and sexuality. Younger generations are more ethnically diverse than older generations and increasingly mix regularly with people from other ethnic backgrounds;
- Having good friends, health, being independent and having good partnerships are the most important for under 25s;
- Young people have higher levels of optimism than older people about their own futures but have broadly pessimistic views about the future of society;
- Participation in mainstream politics is far lower in today’s young people but trust in traditional institutions and authority figures does not vary significantly across generations;
- Very little evidence of a culture of low aspirations amongst young people.

DfE Longitudinal Study of secondary age young people in England [reveals](#):

- 40% of young people report being bullied in the previous 12 months, with 8% experiencing daily bullying;
- 14% of young people receive additional private tuition (increasing to 24% in London);
- 9 out of 10 parents describe their child’s school as good or very good;
- Four out of five young people who don’t plan to stay in full-time education intend to begin an apprenticeship (45%) or work with some education and training (35%);
- 64% of young people report no risky behaviours and 76% report no criminal behaviours;
- 16% of young people have tried smoking and 80% of those no longer smoke;
- 52% say their family has eaten together at least six out of the previous seven evenings;
- Young people socialise less in person with their friends. 42% mainly spend their spare time going out with friends and 13% go round to a friend’s house;
- 47% of girls 30% of boys use social networking and instant messenger throughout the day;
- Young people living in less deprived areas are more likely to participate in sport most days.



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£5.2m grants announced by the Centre for Social Action to support high impact volunteer-led programmes in communities across the country. The Centre has now invested £40 million in 185 projects that encourage active volunteering, including youth projects. It includes the Innovation Fund, a partnership with Nesta, which will support projects to develop digital platforms, mobile apps, and the use of 'big data' to mobilise people to help people. See [Link](#). Grants include 7 accelerated scaling projects to high impact initiatives, including a grant to The Reading Agency to grow [Summer Reading Challenge volunteering](#) in England in 2015.

Monitoring Poverty and Social Exclusion assessment [report](#) published by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation reveals:

- A 6% rise in youth poverty in the past decade has left 34% of young people aged 16-19 and 29% aged 20-24 living in poverty;
- A low minimum wage and high unemployment are the main contributing factors to the rise;
- Household incomes fell in real terms for the third year in a row, with the bottom tenth of households falling the furthest;
- In some English local authorities, three quarters of children eligible for free school meals do not get five good GCSEs.

Education, employment and skills

The Department for Education NEET statistics (for July to September 2014) [indicate](#):

- The 16-18 NEET rate fell to 10.6% in July to September 2014, 1.6% lower than July to September 2013 and the lowest July to September figure since comparable data began in 2000
- The 19-24 NEET rate fell by 2.4% (to 17.6%) in the same period and the overall 16-24 rate fell by 2.2% (to 15.4%)
- For the 19-24 age groups, the main driver was a rise in the employment rate to its highest level since 2008.

Half of all jobs will require higher education qualifications by 2022 according to a new CBI and Accenture [survey](#). The findings reveal employer concerns over the skills gap:

- Low level of skills (63%) is seen as the greatest workforce threat to UK competitiveness. 54% of respondents believe this will still be the case in five years' time.
- Graduate job prospects are improving with +30% of organisations planning to increase graduate in-take in the next 12 months (36% plan to increase and 6% reduce levels, compared to balance of +20% in 2013);
- Openings for apprentices increasing with a balance of +33% looking to recruit more in 2015;
- Of those businesses planning on investing in digital over the coming year, 92% of firms recognise digital literacy and skills as a driver for efficiency.

Apprenticeships and Job-Shops for 16-18s. Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg has announced that a comprehensive national database of post-16 skills and employer-led courses and opportunities in England, similar to the UCAS system, will be in place at the beginning of the next school year in September 2015. Official statistics show that in the 4 years to 2009/10, 928,800 people began an apprenticeship compared to an increase to 1,984,900 over the past 4 years. See [link](#).

The arts, culture and reading:

One boy in three never or rarely picks up a pen outside class. New research from the National Literacy Trust finds children's attitudes to writing are improving, but one boy in three rarely or never picks up a pen outside class. The [Children and Young People's Writing in 2013](#) report outlines survey responses from 30,000 8-16-year-olds, showing boys are much less enthusiastic about writing than girls. Key findings include:

- Boys are twice as likely as girls to say that they don't enjoy writing at all (19.2% vs. 8.2%);
- 32% of girls write daily outside the classroom, compared with only 21% of boys;
- Girls write more widely across a variety of formats - social networking sites (56% vs. 50%), text messages (81% vs 71%), lyrics (38% vs 16%). They also tweet more than boys (28% vs. 25%);
- 1 in 5 boys (19%) admit that "I would be embarrassed if friends saw me write," compared with 1 in 8 girls (12%);
- Fewer boys than girls agree that writing is cool (27% vs 37%);
- More boys than girls recognise the importance of writing for their future job prospects, as 61% agree that if they are good at writing they'll get a better job, compared to 57% of girls.

Reading for pleasure during childhood creates long-term vocabulary benefits, new study shows

A study from the [Institute of Education](#) (IoE) has shown how much reading for pleasure at a young age can impact on the vocabulary of an individual. The study, entitled 'Vocabulary from adolescence to middle-age' collected data from 9,400 British people at the ages of 10, 16 and 42 and used data from the 1970 British Cohort study. Results showed those who read for pleasure regularly at age 10 scored higher in vocabulary tests than those who didn't. Regular readers tended to come from advantaged families and those who continued to read regularly into their adult lives favoured literary fiction and broadsheet newspapers to tabloids.

"We have now shown – for the first time, we believe -- that reading for pleasure, both in childhood and adulthood, has a positive impact on the vocabulary of people in their early forties," said Sullivan. The study concludes that good reading habits formed at a young age meant individuals had better vocabulary later in life. See [link](#) for more information.

DfE announces high-quality and more rigorous arts-based GCSEs and A levels. Education Secretary Nicky Morgan has announced final content for more rigorous and demanding arts GCSEs and A levels. The new content will allow pupils to develop their creativity and self-expression, and broaden their understanding of Britain's cultural heritage, while equipping them with the underlying knowledge and technical skills they will need to compete in the arts. See [link](#).

Children's music and arts initiatives receive £109 million boost. Education Secretary Nicky Morgan has announced £109 million funding to support a range of projects that support children's music, filmmaking, dance and local-heritage activities in 2015/16. The funding will give thousands more pupils the chance to develop their confidence and unique talents in arts disciplines, such as dance and film making, as well as having the opportunity to develop areas of personal interest through visits to museums and learning about local heritage. See [link](#).

The Bookseller launches the first ever Young Adult Book Prize in the UK and Ireland. The judges will look for books that particularly inspire or engage the core audience of teenage and young adult readers. As author Patrick Ness said: “Good YA books, like good adult books, show you the world and all that’s possible in it, and they show you that you are not alone”. The winning title will be announced on 19th March 2015. See [link](#).

Character Awards announced on 8th December 2014, by the Department for Education as part of the £5 million Character Innovation Fund which seeks to support the development of character in schools. As part of the £5 million Character Innovation Fund, the DfE is inviting schools and organisations to apply to be recognised as leaders in character education through the 2015 DfE Character Awards. Applicants must be able to prove their programme develops character traits, attributes and behaviours that underpin success in school and work. The deadline for submission is 30th January 2015. See [link](#). Additionally, the **Character Innovation Fund** made a further £1 million available to the Educational Endowment Foundation (EEF) to fund research projects aimed at what works in building pupil character and GRIT. Applications close on 1st April 2015. See [link](#).

Arts reach almost all children; report finds that almost all children aged 5 to 15 (99%) engaged with the arts last year, with 92% having engaged in the last week – a significant increase on the 2008/09 figure of 86%. According to the Taking Part 2013/14 Annual Child Report, published by the DCMS, more than two-thirds (68%) had visited a heritage site in the past 12 months, a significant increase on the 2008/9 figure. But only 62% had visited a museum or gallery, showing no increase over the past five years. The Child Taking Part Survey started in 2008-9 and is an annual survey of children in England which collects data on their participation, engagement and attitudes towards arts and culture. A key statistic from the Child Taking Part Survey is the proportion of children aged 5-15 who have engaged with the arts at least once in the past 12 months. ‘Engagement in the arts’ is defined as having engaged in at least one of the following activities: dance activities; music activities; theatre and drama activities; reading and writing activities; arts and crafts activities; street arts, circus, festival or carnival events; film or video activities; other media activities. The Taking Part overall engagement figure is only part of the story of arts engagement of children age 5-15, as it:

- combines the engagement of children of Primary school and Secondary school age - we prefer to examine the 5-10 years old and 11-15 years old age groups separately. For children age 11-15, this includes engagement during school time and outside of school time - this is not possible for the 5-10 years age group as information about activity at school is not collected;
- combines different arts activities – high engagement in some of these activities, such as reading and writing, leads to a very high overall figure. To deepen understanding of arts engagement, it is important to examine engagement across the range of different activities.
- does not distinguish between boys and girls. As earlier data has shown higher engagement by girls in certain activities, such as dance, it is useful to examine gender differences.

Read more [here](#).

Creative industries to gain a National College. A National College for the Creative and Cultural Industries is to be established to provide specialist training in the technical skills needed by the creative and cultural sectors. The Government-backed College will be managed by Creative & Cultural Skills on behalf of a consortium of employers and industry organisations including Live Nation, the Royal Opera House, White Light and Association of British Theatre Technicians. [Link](#).

Independent Library Report for England was presented to Government by William Sieghart and an expert panel on 18 December 2014. The report makes recommendations to reinvigorate public libraries in England. It highlights, in the context of an extremely tough financial climate, the reduction in libraries, staff, library opening hours and visits to libraries over the last 5 years. The report recognises the power of libraries to transform lives and communities, and how this only increases in the digital age. Read the main report [here](#). See the response of the Arts Council ([here](#)), Society of Chief Librarians ([here](#)); and Association of Senior Children's and Education Librarians (ASCEL) response in relation to children and young people, [here](#).

Libraries, arts and young people, [this advocacy paper](#) outlines how libraries, arts and culture engage young people. It has been developed by the strategic National Youth Libraries Board, and is endorsed by ASCEL, SCL, the Arts Council and The Reading Agency. You can use this with local authority partners, elected members, schools and other organisations.

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