



**NATIONAL
YOUTH
TRENDS**

**TAKE THE
TEMPERATURE:
DIG THE DATA
WEST MIDLANDS**



DIG THE DATA: WEST MIDLANDS

On 10th September 2020, Beatfreaks delivered a workshop for BMet, Youth Focus West Midlands and partners, which extracted the West Midlands data from the national dataset of 14-25 year olds, collected as part of their Take the Temperature research project. What follows is a summary of the content presented by Beatfreaks in the workshop.

INTRO AND THE BIG PICTURE

The Big Picture

We're still very much in the midst of coronavirus and the daily situation is often still changing. As a result, it's really difficult to draw back from the present, think about how we got here and see the bigger picture.

So to start, it's worth having a look back at the last six months in dates:

This equates to five months where many young people have been without the crucial structure that institutions often support them with. It's also often hard to think back and appreciate how long 5 months feels in the lives of many young people. During these months of lockdown, many will have missed the exams they had been preparing for for the last two years. Lots of young people were also in the earlier stages of jobs or placements, where development and learning is crucial to progression. Many have received exam results which they are not happy with, many have had the next steps of their lives stripped from under their feet, many have been unable to attend practical training that working from home simply cannot facilitate, rendering them unable to progress their career at all.

29TH JANUARY -
First UK Case

28TH FEBRUARY -
First person to catch covid-19 in the UK

20TH MARCH -
Last Day in School,
University,
In-office Work

23RD MARCH -
Full UK lockdown

3RD JULY -
Businesses reopen

13TH/20TH AUGUST -
A Level/GCSE
Results Days

17TH AUGUST -
U-Turn on Results

3RD SEPTEMBER -
Schools Reopen

PARENTS OF TEENAGERS WHO FLOUT CORONAVIRUS LOCKDOWN RULES SHOULD BE FINED, POLICE TOLD

LOWER COMPLIANCE TO LOCKDOWN AMONG YOUNG, WARNS MICHAEL GOVE

A LEVEL RESULTS: ALMOST 40% OF TEACHER ASSESSMENTS IN ENGLAND DOWNGRADED

GOVERNMENT U-TURN OVER A-LEVEL STUDENTS RESULT

At the start of lockdown, as these issues started to take hold, young people were faced with the following headlines:

Then close to crunch time for many, they faced this:

THE GOVERNMENT STRIPPED YOUNG PEOPLE OR HOPE - THEN BLAMED THEM FOR SECOND WAVE

PARTYING YOUNG PEOPLE 'TO BLAME' FOR STOKE-ON-TRENT'S NEW SURGE IN COVID-19 CASES

And most recently, as we begin to ease from lockdown:



The reason for going back and looking at the past 6 months, in dates and in headlines, is that it is increasingly difficult to understand how monumental this has been, affecting some of the stepping stones of growing up, which - for a number of young people - are the biggest moments in their lives so far: first serious exams, first moves away from home, first jobs.

West Midlands

Whilst it's good to step back and look at the bigger picture across the UK, it's also worth briefly drawing back to understand the background for the West Midlands, which we all know so well, and how this relates to the headlines about covid and young people.

In short:

- ▲ Young people hit hardest during the pandemic
- ▲ In the region that houses the youngest city in Europe (Birmingham)

- ▲ Young people worst affected financially and in terms of careers
- ▲ In the region where youth unemployment is above average and where poorer children are twice as likely to end up jobless

- ▲ People from BAME backgrounds disproportionately affected
- ▲ In the region with the highest number of residents from BAME backgrounds outside of London

SAY IT IN ONE WORD

As such, it is no surprise that when we asked young people to give us one word to sum up their experiences of Covid, this is how people from the West Midlands responded:

Surreal stressful Lonely Grim Scary Grateful Unusual Worrying Stress
Threatening surreal Tiring Exhausting Home Destruction Revealing Frustrating
Uncertain Discombobulating Life changing Team effort Meh CHANGE
Rollercoaster Dramatised Strange Worry whirlwind Terrifying Depressing
Disappointment Eye-opening hectic Eyeopening Overwhelming Irritating Strange
Rubbish Stressful. lonely Poggers Unexpected Lost Boring do good for the world
Loss Exhausting Horrifying Online Lynchian Uncertainty Scary Isolating Uncertain
Life Changing Terrible Unimaginable Disorientating It has been a mixture of
positive and negative I'm more anxious about money and finding a job than ever
before But I feel more supported by family and friends and it is nice to spend
time with the people I love the most. Life-changing Unpredictable Okay-ish Fear
Chaos Worrying Boring anxiety Humbling Like nothing we have ever experienced
before Grounding Disgusting Uncertainty Stressful Na Dramatic lonely Terrible
Strange Long Solitude Eye-opening It's shit I want to go to the gym Tired and
broke Anxiety Scary Overwhelming Impacting Tense ok Stressful Mother Nature
takes what's hers back Hope Scary wild Crazy Uncertainty Scary Hell Historic
Draining stressful Stressful chaotic Circle-of-Life difficult Frustrating Awful
Terrifying Unknown Coronalicious Panic Bad uncertain Disbelief Awakening
Lockdown Uncertain Over exaggerated Scary lonely Disorientating Re-orienting
Shocked Scary Change Healing Uncertain Stressful Crap Suffocating Surreal
Terrifying uncertain Hectic peace Priorities Dangerous Fascinating Stressful
Scary Long Lost continuation Suspicious Impacting Stressful Unknown Different
Annoying Humbling Sad Uncertain Enriching Draining Challenging Fortunate ?
Tumultuous Exhausting Annoying Scary challenging Confused Busy Annoying
Confusing Stressfull It highlights how unprepared and unorganised we are as a
nation uncertain Scary Deadly Complicated tired TESTING Revolutionary Disaster
Creative Proactive.

In statistics:

70% of young people from the West Midlands expressed negative emotions.

(Some common words: 'lonely', 'stressful', 'scary')

12% of young people from the West Midlands expressed positive emotions.

(some common words: 'grateful', 'proactive', 'team effort')

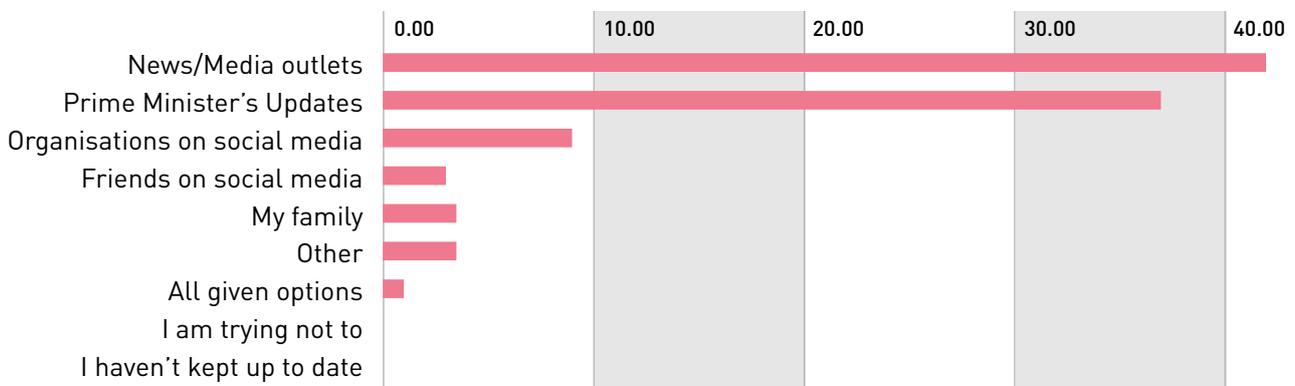
TRENDS

As part of the national Take the Temperature research, we established five key trends, drawing together data from our qualitative and quantitative survey submissions, as well as further qualitative data submitted to us. This workshop will explore how the data from respondents in the West Midlands related specifically to these trends.

#1

INFORMATION, NEWS CONSUMPTION, SOCIAL MEDIA

Against popular rhetoric that young people get the majority of their information from social media, we found that in the context of the coronavirus pandemic, many young people are turning to traditional sources of news and information.



As shown in the above graph, when we asked young people in the West Midlands what was the main way they were staying up to date with information about the pandemic, 80% said they're getting it from traditional sources such as the BBC, the NHS online app, and even the Prime Minister's 5pm updates.

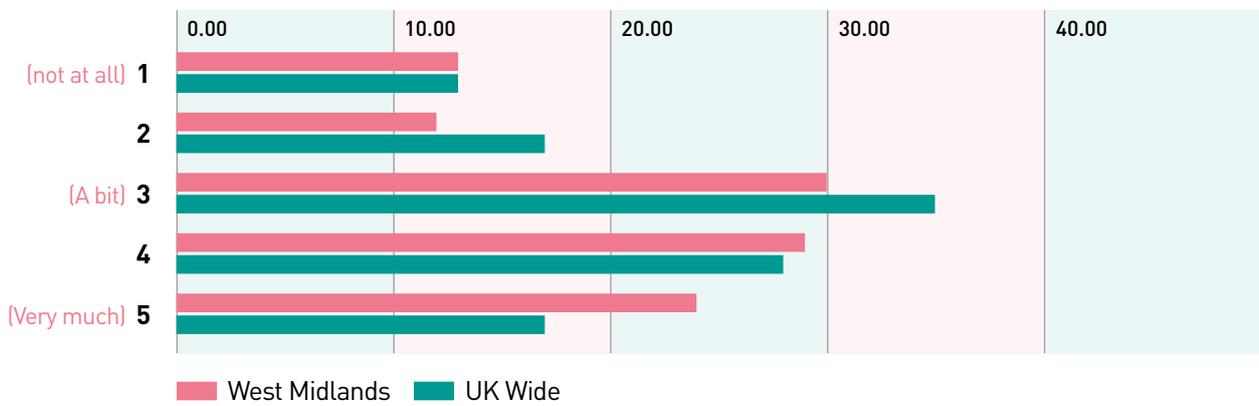
We see young people attributing value to 'trusted' sources and this could perhaps be why they turn to names they recognise. Part of the reason for this, may be with widening consciousness young people have of fake news. More and more young people seem acutely aware of the problems of trusting everything they read on the internet. This came to the surface when we asked young people what they would like to see more of online.

**“ MORE CONTROL
OVER FAKE STORIES
AND FALSE
INFORMATION ”**

20 year old female from Dudley

Further than this, young people in the West Midlands see the clear value in staying up to date with the latest information. When asked to finish the sentence 'the news is...' 42% said they thought it was 'informing or necessary'. However, 39.5% stated that the news was dramatising things and causing more panic

[WM/NYT] Is news coverage and social media hype increasing pressure to be online all time?



“ MORE ENFORCEMENT OF FAKE NEWS ”

17 year old male in Kingswinford

What do you want to see more of online?

“ SAFETY NOTICES AGAINST TOO MUCH SCREEN TIME ”

24 year old male in Walsall

In addition, 74% of young people in the West Midlands (the above graph) said that news and social media hype is increasing pressure to be online. We see therefore that young people simultaneously see the value in staying up to date and in the loop, whilst also noticing the negative effect it is having on their mental health. What is worth note is that - in line with national findings - young people in the West Midlands are astutely aware of the impact of such news consumption on their mental health, and are thinking about the ways to deal with it.

We see above that young people are very marginally more likely to feel pressure to be online, than compared to the rest of the UK.

#2 MENTAL HEALTH

Young people in the region understand the news' simultaneously positive and negative effect. They feel more pressure to be online, but understand how this has a negative impact on their mental health. This is then complicated when we take into account the main thing which is helping their mental health during lockdown.

When asked what is the main way they are helping their mental health, the most popular answer in the region - with 43.5% - was 'communicating with friends'. At the time this research was conducted, one of the principle ways young people could talk to each other was via digital space.

Therefore, we see the internet become slightly problematic and difficult to negotiate at this time. They feel increasing amounts of pressure to be online, and understand the negative impact of this on their mental health, and at the same time, the main way they help their mental health is also through digital space. The above findings, related to young people in the West Midlands, mirrored our national findings.

Overall, 85% of young people in the West Midlands said they felt more worried than they normally would be during the pandemic.

The top three things which young people were worried about in the region were:

- ▲ people are close to them who are at risk;
- ▲ the strain the pandemic is putting on the NHS;
- ▲ and the impending economic crisis.

There are two principal deviations in the West Midlands data: 28.5% of young people in the West Midlands were worried about access to supplies (compared to 18.3% nationally) and 27% are worried about getting ill themselves (compared to 19.9% nationally).

When thinking about mental health, other questions implied how we could work to make young people feel less worried in the region. When asked What would you like to see more of online? 25% of young people in the West Midlands mentioned positivity. Whilst they understand the value in staying up to date, young people also feel that the internet can be a space to circulate moments of positivity, or positive news.

What do you want to see more of online?

“ SAFETY NOTICES AGAINST TOO MUCH SCREEN TIME ”

24 year old male in Walsall

A portion - 56.6% in the West Midlands - have experienced moments of positivity in the pandemic. Many quotes included details of more time, closer proximity to family, nature being able to heal, or it being a positive release from social anxieties.

What do you want to see more of online?

“ MORE POSITIVE STUFF, LESS OF THE C-WORD, UPLIFTING STORIES, MENTAL HELP SUPPORT. ”

24 year old male in Walsall

Have you experienced moments of positivity in the pandemic?

“ TO THINK ABOUT THE BIGGER PICTURE, THINK WHAT I WOULD DO WHEN THE DUST SETTLES. ”

23 year old male in Saltley

Have you experienced moments of positivity in the pandemic?

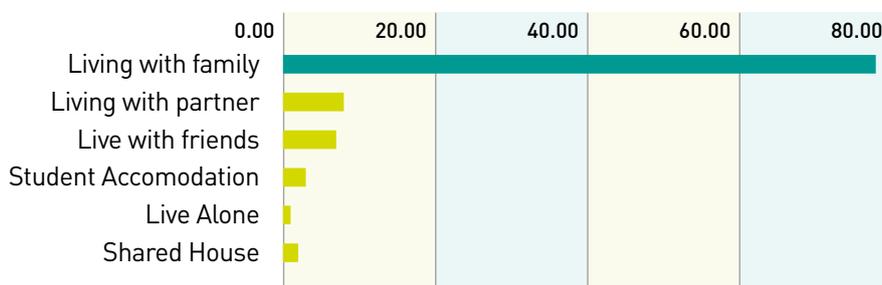
“ THE PLANET IS HEALING! I GET TO BE CLOSER TO FAMILY! I HAVE BAD SOCIAL ANXIETY SO IT'S EASIER TALKING TO FRIENDS ONLINE :) ”

21 year old non-binary person in Birmingham

#3 RELATIONSHIPS

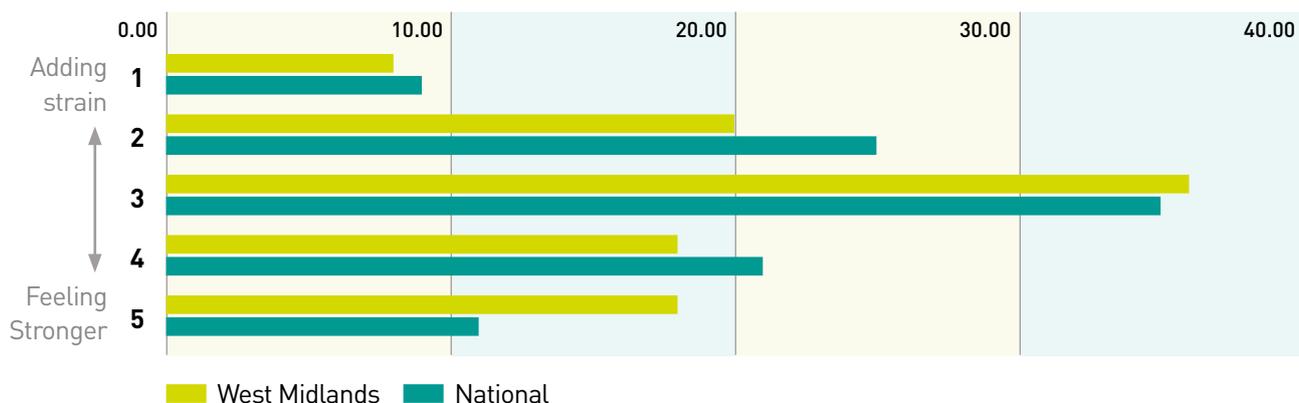
Nationally, 1 in 3 young people are experiencing strain on their family relationships. According to the national data we collected, if you experience this strain, you are less likely to have experienced positive moments, less likely to have access to the things you need during lockdown, less likely to feel positive about the future.

In the West Midlands, 39% - marginally higher than nationally - experience strain on their family relationships. As the below graph shows, the majority of those young people experiencing family strain also live with their family.



Whilst this does show a correlation between living with family and experiencing increased strain, the majority of young people in the West Midlands sample lived with their family, and there are still a number of people who are experiencing family strain who live with friends and partners.

Whilst we can see clear strain on some people's family relationships, a large number of young people report that their friendships have become stronger during the pandemic. This is no different in the West Midlands, with a slightly higher number of young people than nationally saying their friendships had become stronger.



#4 SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY, YOUTH ACTION, VOLUNTEERING

The trend of social action has come to the forefront of conversations about and amongst young people over the past five to ten years. Young people, generally Gen Z, are increasingly being referred to as generation responsible. They care about each other, societal issues and the world.

During the pandemic, we have seen a continuation of young people's desire to contribute to and play a role within society. When asked if they were making more effort than normal to help those in need, 62% of young people in the West Midlands said they were and a further 12% said they weren't but expressed a desire to.

What is worth stressing is that the question signifies 'more effort than normal'. When we take into account the fact they young people see social responsibility as a normal state, something which they do everyday, we see the true value which they are adding to this pandemic.

Of those who said they are making more effort than normal, their actions range:

- ▲ Volunteering with NHS
- ▲ Donating money to charity
- ▲ Doing food runs for elderly neighbours
- ▲ Reaching out to people who feel lonely
- ▲ Staying more in touch with family and friends
- ▲ Limiting spending to avoid shortages
- ▲ Staying Indoors

Of those who weren't making more effort than normal, this was often because:

- ▲ They are vulnerable themselves
- ▲ They live with vulnerable people
- ▲ They are otherwise committed to work or study

Are you making more effort than normal to help those in need?

“ I'M 18 SO I'VE SIGNED UP TO VOLUNTEER IN THE LOCAL COMMUNITY AND HAVE ALSO DROPPED MY NUMBER THROUGH THE LETTERBOX OF ELDERLY NEIGHBOURS. MY COUSINS AND I HAVE BEEN MAKING SURE WE CALL OUR GRANDPARENTS REGULARLY TO MAKE SURE THEY NEVER FEEL ISOLATED. ”

18 year old female from Stoke

Are you making more effort than normal to help those in need?

“YES, I’VE SIGNED UP TO BE AN NHS RESPONDER AND I’M ALSO HELPING YOUNG PEOPLE STRUGGLING WITH THEIR MENTAL HEALTH WITH A SELF-ISOLATION SURVIVAL GUIDE THROUGH MY JOB WITH THE NHS. I’M A FOODBANK VOLUNTEER TO, SO WE’RE COMING UP WITH WAYS OF REACHING THOSE IN NEED.”

18 year old Female from Tamworth

Are you making more effort than normal to help those in need?

“I HAVE BEEN DOING SHOPPING AND RUNNING ERRANDS FOR ELDERLY/AT RISK RELATIVES. I AM ALSO MAKING A CONSCIOUS EFFORT TO STAY AWAY FROM OTHERS.”

19 year old Female from Tipton

Are you making more effort than normal to help those in need?

“I LIVE AND HELP CARE FOR MY ELDERLY NAN SO I GUESS I’M PUTTING MORE EFFORT INTO MAKING SURE HER NEEDS ARE MET.”

23 year old male from Wednesbury

Are you making more effort than normal to help those in need?

“I MEAN, I’VE JOINED A HACKATHON TO PRODUCE TECH SOLUTIONS, BUT I HAVEN’T REALLY DONE ANYTHING FOR IT YET.”

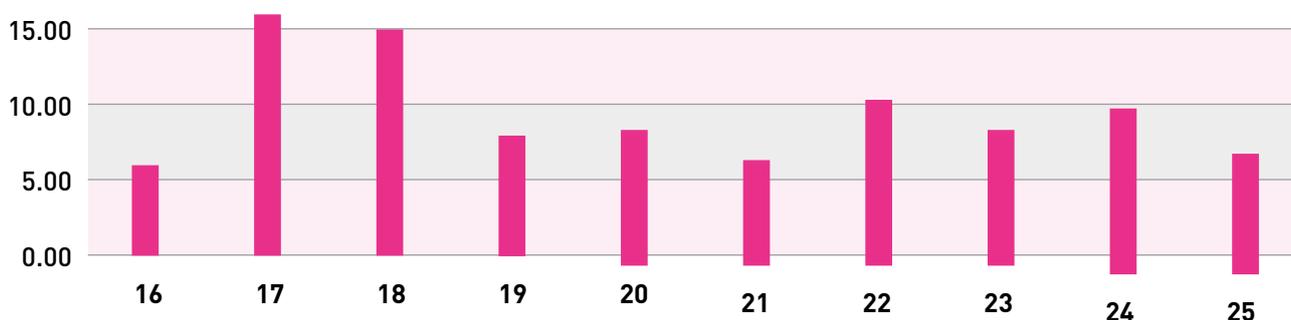
21 year old female from Coventry



#5 TIMES OF TRANSITION

The below graph outlines an age breakdown of those who were more worried than they normally would be in the pandemic. We see two general peaks in the West Midlands data - an increased level of worry for those ages 17 - 18 and those at 22 and 24.

[WM] Age break down of those feel more worried than they normally would be



The below graph outlines an age breakdown of those who were more worried than they normally would be in the pandemic. We see two general peaks in the West Midlands data - an increased level of worry for those ages 17 - 18 and those at 22 and 24.

Whilst our national sample included a higher number of 16 and 17 year olds, we can clearly understand how the pandemic has disproportionately affected those at a time of transition in their lives more than most.

Whilst these times of transition can be mapped onto those young people aged 16, 18, and 21 years old, we can see that not all young people go through transitions at the same time.

Times of transition are difficult for young people at the best of times and the pandemic has further exacerbated these stresses. It has left young people without certainty over the next steps they can take. Nearly 50% of the young people in the region responded to 'Because of covid-19...' with 'I feel worried about my future'.

Returning back to the opening statements made about careers and youth unemployment in the region, helping young people back into work and education is of paramount importance.

Our final question of the survey asked young people if they had any questions that needed answering at the time. These young people later put them to Dr Justin Varney - Director of Public Health at Birmingham City Council - through a digital event held by Beatfreeks. In the questions, you can see the overriding concerns of young people in our region.

**What are you unsure about?
Do you have any questions which
need answering?**

**“ ARE THE GOVERNMENT
GOING TO SUPPORT PEOPLE WHO
RENT DURING THIS TIME? ”**

19 year old Female from Tipton

What are you unsure about?
Do you have any questions
which need answering?

“ UNSURE ABOUT UNIVERSITY
AND IF I WOULD STILL BE GOING
IN SEPTEMBER. WHAT HAPPENS
IF WE HAVE BEEN IN LOCKDOWN
FOR MONTHS AND NOTHING
CHANGES, WHAT HAPPENS
THEN? ”

17 year old female from Birmingham

What are you unsure about?
Do you have any questions
which need answering?

“ I'M UNSURE WHERE MY
CAREER IS HEADED AS A LOT
OF RECRUITMENT HAS BEEN
HALTED. I'M UNSURE OF WHEN
I'LL BE ABLE TO SEE FRIENDS
AND FAMILY AGAIN AS THERE
IS NO CLEAR ANSWER OF WHEN
THIS WILL BE OVER. THIS ISN'T
ANYONE'S FAULT BUT THE
UNCERTAINTY IS VERY HARD TO
ACCEPT. ”

23 year old female from Birmingham

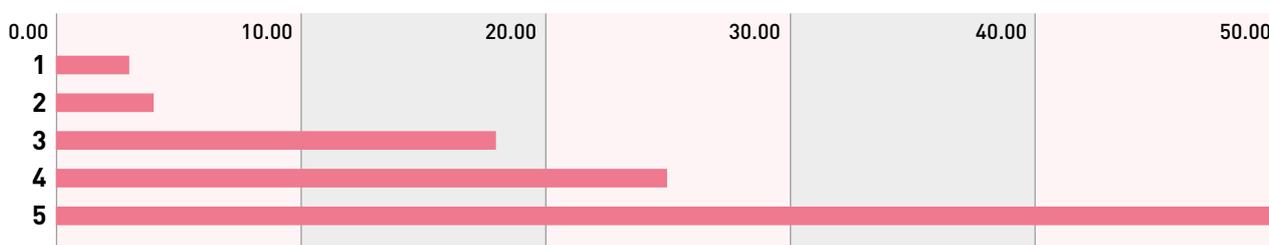


CO-CREATING THE NEW NORMAL

Despite increasing mental health pressures and a lack of clarity about their futures young people have shown that they are willing and able to play a positive role in this pandemic.

The final question of the survey, asked young people if they thought this could be a moment to make a positive change in society. This is how they responded:

[WM] Do you think the pandemic could be a moment to make a positive change in society?



AN OVERWHELMING MAJORITY OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE WEST MIDLANDS THINK THAT NOW IS THE TIME TO ACT, NOW IS THE TIME TO MAKE A POSITIVE CHANGE WITHIN SOCIETY.

ABOUT BEATFREEKS



Beatfrees is an engagement and insight agency with a growing community of young creatives.

We work with brands, government and funders who see value in sharing power with young people.

Our model is simple: the more young people exercise their influence through their creativity, the more relevant institutions become and the more they can shape the world together.



National Youth Trends is a project co-created with young people to collect their stories, data and ideas. Beatfrees platforms these insights to brands, businesses and government so that institutions can innovate, become more relevant to young people and be better prepared for the future.

METHODOLOGY

For the West Midlands Dig the Data workshop we took the dataset collect as part of our Take the Temperature project and used all responses from young people who listed their postcodes as within the West Midlands. There were a total of 200 participants from the West Midlands and data presented above is drawn from their answers.

The geographical area was defined by any postcode which was included in the following Local Authority areas:

- ▲ Birmingham
- ▲ Herefordshire
- ▲ Solihull
- ▲ Telford & Wrekin
- ▲ Wolverhampton
- ▲ Coventry
- ▲ Sandwell
- ▲ Staffordshire
- ▲ Walsall
- ▲ Worcestershire
- ▲ Dudley
- ▲ Shropshire
- ▲ Stoke
- ▲ Warwickshire

In order to conduct data analysis, we followed the original methodology for the national project, which is outlined below.

In order to design the research framework for Take the Temperature, we built on three years of conducting Brum Youth Trends (our research with young people in Birmingham) and nearly a decade of working with young people as an organisation.

The research focus was conceived in response to a media portrayal of young people, which we didn't feel was wholly accurate. We felt that few had stopped to ask what young people thought of the situation and how they were dealing with the pandemic.

Our methods of data collection - from question-wording to the platforms and software we used - were co-designed with young people in order to make the experience as accessible and thorough as possible. Safeguarding and wellbeing were built into all elements of data collection.

We also took on advice from the private, public and third sectors on what they would like to find out

from young people, what would best inform their practices, and help them respond to young people's needs most effectively. Our recommendations were co-designed with a roundtable and panel made up of representatives from these three sectors.

Following research co-design, we established three strands of data collection:

- ▲ **Take the Temperature survey:** An online survey made up of 34 questions (including demographic information) (6 qualitative, 28 quantitative)
- ▲ **The Isolation Diaries:** A diary entry programme, where 11 young people from across the UK submitted diary entries to us every other day for a two week period, based on prompts we sent to them
- ▲ **Drop Your Thoughts:** A space where young people could send us anything they wanted to, in any form about their experience of the pandemic

Take the Temperature Survey

The survey was open for a two week period from March 25th - April 5th 2020. Over the course of two weeks, we collected a total of 1880 responses. Survey participants were self-selecting. Links to the survey were distributed through two main methods - paid advertising on Instagram and circulation through a nationwide network of organisations working with young people.

Isolation Diaries

In order to recruit participants for the Isolation Diaries, we put out an open call via social media and through the above network of youth organisations. We received 101 applications and selected and then contacted participants according to obtaining a representative dataset. The 11 final participants were selected based on diversity according to the criteria, in the following order: regions, ages, ethnicities, genders. Participants were then sent an agreement outlining the process and detailing the content. Every other day the participants were sent a prompt to respond to in the following 24 hours. 6 / 7 prompts were universal, with one prompt picking up on previous themes and ideas the participants had mentioned. Participants received a £100 bursary for the time they spent completing their diaries. Here are our final 11 participants. Some elected to be made anonymous for reporting, and some were happy to have their first name included. All participants have reviewed the final draft of this report and are happy with all representations.

Drop Your Thoughts

There was an open call for people to send anything to directly to us through Whatsapp. Once they had done so, we would then respond to their message obtaining consent, their age and their name.

Data Analysis

There were four main types of question which survey participants answered:

Scale - participants were posed with a question and then positioned themselves on a scale of 1 to 5 according to how far they agreed. Points 1, 3 and 5 with marked with answers, so that it was clear if the midpoint represents a positive, neutral or negative stance.

Open Ended - some questions were qualitative to allow for self-directed answers. These were then coded in common themes.

Multiple Choice - participants were encouraged to pick one answer from a list we had provided. There was also the option for participants to add their own answer.

Multiple Response - participants were encouraged to pick up to three answers, or as many as applied, from a list we had provided. There was also the option for participants to add their own answer

Qualitative data collected through the Isolation Diaries has been analysed by narrative and content. Data has then been used to support quantitative findings as well as provoke further investigation and analysis in the quantitative dataset.

Of the 1880 survey responses we received, 1535 surveys which were used in the final dataset. Of the 345 responses which were removed from the dataset, approximately a third were from people aged over 25, or under 14. Two thirds of the removed respondents. were aged 14 and 15. They were removed due to difficulties obtaining parental consent.

In a number of our 'Multiple Choice' and 'Multiple Response' questions, participants had the option to select 'other' and add their own answer. These options were then coded into groups, to allow for statistical analysis.

When a significant number of participants selected 'other', all possible answers for that question were re-coded. In some instances, participants used the other option to record multiple responses'. In this case, all answers were included in the re-coding exercise.

In line with the GDPR and Beatfreaks' data policies, all personal data has been stored in a secure way. When data has been shared with partners, for data analysis purposes, all information has been anonymised.

Sample and Demographic

All demographic information, excluding living information, education and work information was collected in open ended format and then coded. In most instances, responses could be easily coded into standard demographic groups, with the exception of ethnicity. As a term which implies a shared culture, participants responded with a range of religious, racial and national identities.

In the spirit of empowerment and accountability, we have listed all of the respondent's answers to ethnicity. Moreover, as the pandemic, and media narrative around it, has largely concerned the BAME communities, we wanted to run correlation analysis exploring the attitudes of BAME groups. Therefore, we have coded all ethnicities into 'White - British', 'White non-specific', 'White non-British', and 'Person of Colour'.

Our sample was generally well spread and reflects the diversity of young people in the UK reasonably well, despite a key anomaly in terms of gender. Here we had 71.9% women, 22.1% men and 2.2% not ascribing to gender binaries. Moreover, due to difficulties obtaining parental consent our sample is predominantly aged between 16 - 25. There is a fairly equal spread of ages within this group. In terms of ethnicity, based on the above coding, 13.6% of our respondents were People of Colour.

Further detailed demographic breakdown of the participants can be seen in the graphs below. For any further questions please contact Fabio on fabio@beatfreaks.com

