

Mental Health and Wellbeing

What are the challenges young people are facing?

According to the consultation, for many young people **the media** serves images of **perfect lives** and standards of happiness or perfection which make them feel **unsuccessful in comparison**. Social media can present unobtainable lifestyles as simple, attainable and even essential. In addition, many young people feel **formal education** focuses on performance and competition between students, creating a **high pressure environment** and very high **expectations of career success**. However, by contrast they find it **hard to secure work and careers** that meet these expectations, feel insecure in the current economic climate and find it difficult to transition independence from reliance on family.

Consultation reports described how this situation can leave some with a **sense of failure** that their lives do not meet the standards expected of them by others and themselves. Whilst it is hard to define what is a realistic or unrealistic life expectations, there was a feeling of a **continued failure to achieve unattainable goals**. This was said to impact on young people's mental health showing as increased stress, depression or anxiety.

Despite this, when facing a crisis, many young people said the **stigma associated with mental health** prevents them from feeling they can access help, be that informal support from friends and family, or professional support.

What is young people's vision for the future?

Young people in the consultation, hoped for **reduced pressure to perform within education**, with a greater focus on self development over performance and competition. Linked to this was a desire for **simplified job orientation and better careers guidance**. This was seen to help prevent mismatches between expectations and labour market opportunities. (This issue is also discussed in the report on Employment)

Young people want to be able to **increase their own ability to deal with mental health issues**. This means learning skills ranging from **emotional intelligence and self awareness**, to time management and coping under pressure. It can also mean increasing **media literacy** to deal with media messages.

A **reduction in stigma** around mental health was called for, to enable young people to speak about issues they face with others - this also requires **access to supportive networks**. Friends and family is particularly important as a source of support and many consultation reports

stressed the role of **parents**. In addition, networks can also include **youth workers, teachers**, and mental health specialists such as **psychologists**.

Finally, young people wanted access to **leisure time opportunities and spaces**, such as youth centres, sports, or the arts. This was an important source of relaxation and removing stress.

What solutions did young people propose in the consultation?

Suggestions from the consultation included;

- Measures to provide **greater information on mental health to young people and their families**, so that people are aware of who to turn to in a crisis and how to approach mental health issues.
- Increasing the support that **youth workers**, teachers or other **non mental health professionals** can provide, for example by providing training on mental health issues.
- Making **mental health specialists** such as psychologists more accessible - for example by linking them to youth clubs or schools.
- Improving **careers advice and guidance**, and the transition to employment from education. For instance, providing mentors to help with developing goals, or dealing with setbacks.
- Increasing **access to leisure time and leisure activities** such as sports and arts
- Increasing access to volunteering opportunities and youth organisations. This included **promoting the role of youth centres** as a space to access dedicated support around mental health.
- Providing **education that builds emotional skills** and the ability to manage your mental health.
- **Changes to formal education** to be less focused on performance and competition.

In many of these solutions, the role of the family, parents and friends was stressed. There was a sense that support for young people must take into account the networks they have, or may need to develop around them.

The Survey Data

How important is this issue to young people?

This issue ranks third and seventh among the priorities, as rated by the young people. It has been measured by two separate items: item focusing on setting realistic goals ranked seventh among priorities of the young people; and item focusing on coping with stressful situations ranked third as rated by young people.

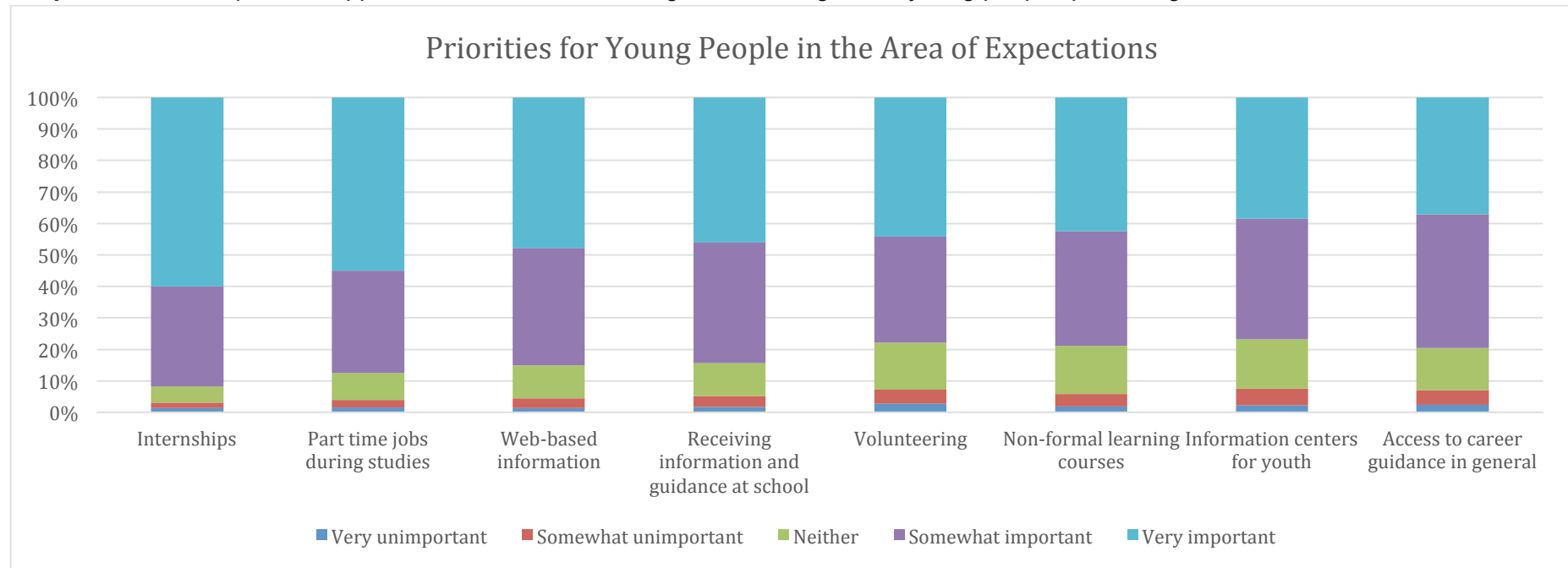
What are the priorities for young people?

Young people would, appreciate a wide variety of supporting mechanisms¹ in setting their life goals, but it seems that the most valuable to them are the ones which are helping them to come in touch with the everyday reality of the working life they are about to enter in later stages of their lives, such as internships, or part time jobs. Among other important supporting mechanisms, there are generally accessible information, and support from the systems the young people get in touch with the most, such as schools.

The graph below shows, that the young people demonstrate a rather wide support for the whole variety of mechanisms listed in the survey.

¹ The item read: “How important are the following options to you when you are trying to set your life goals (e.g. in planning family, career, traveling, housing, etc.)?”

Graph: The most important support mechanisms for creating realistic life goals in young people; percentages.

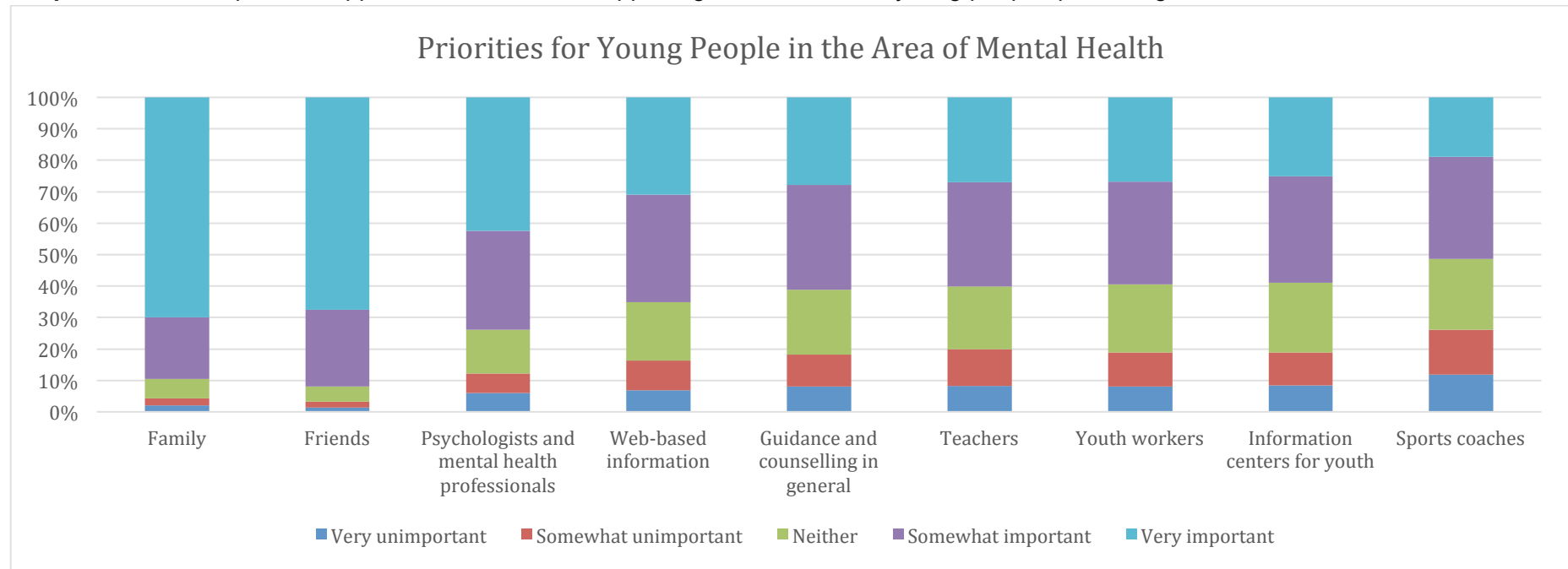


It seems that the whole area of sports, leisure, youth work, and schooling is not on young people’s minds when they face difficulties in their lives². On the contrary, their peers and families are by far the most important anchors in such situations. Future initiatives in this area should take this into account, focusing more on providing the young people themselves with mental hygiene routines, creating courses and learning opportunities for young parents, in order to help them create a supportive environment for their children, etc.

The graph below well illustrates the aforementioned fact that there is a large difference for young people in talking to a friend or a family member about their trouble, and in talking to people outside of this inner circle.

² The item read: “How important are the following sources of support to you when you are trying to overcome stressful situations (e.g. having relationship trouble, feeling stressed or depressed)?”

Graph: The most important support mechanisms for supporting mental health in young people; percentages.



Where does this report come from?

This report is based on responses to consultation question *‘What would enable young people to form realistic life goals and expectations?’* and *‘What can enable young people to cope with stressful situations and times of crisis?’*. These questions were developed from harvesting tools submitted at the first conference. It also takes into account some of the topics discussed in the Employment report.